

SUPPLEMENT TO PROGRESSIO

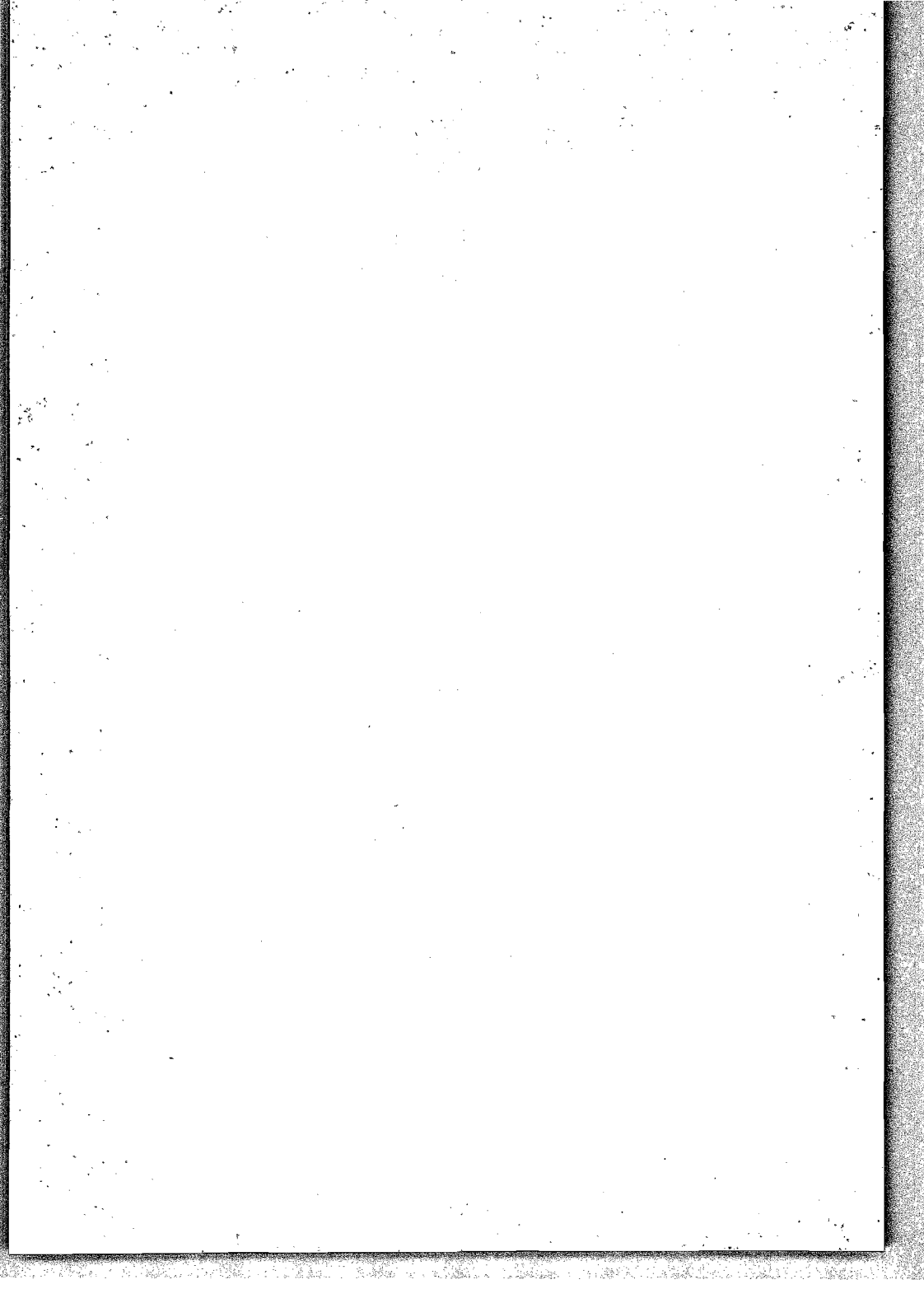
**PUBLICATION OF THE WORLD FEDERATION
OF CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITIES**

Jean Claude DHÔTEL s. j.

DISCERNING COMMUNITY DECISIONS

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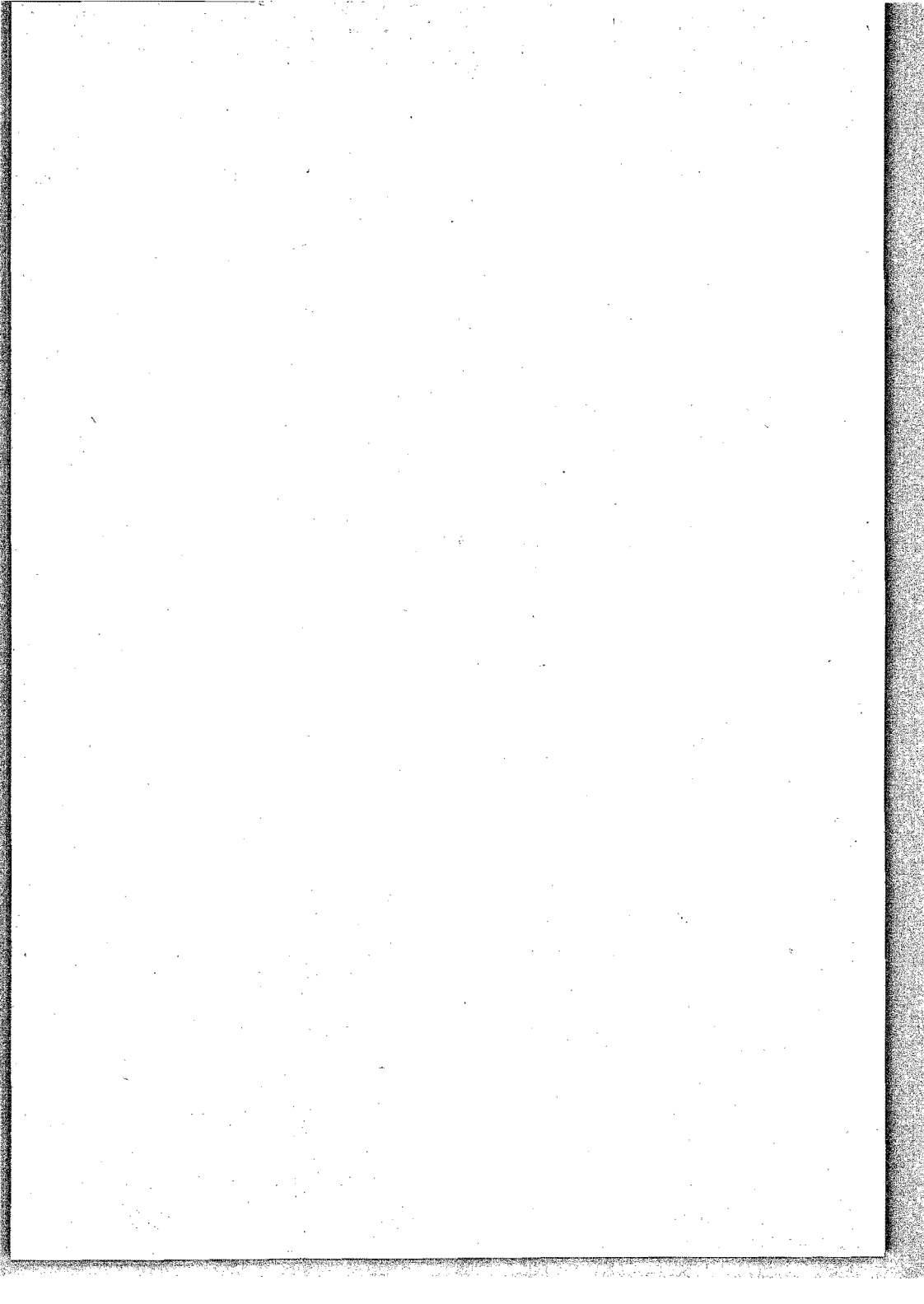
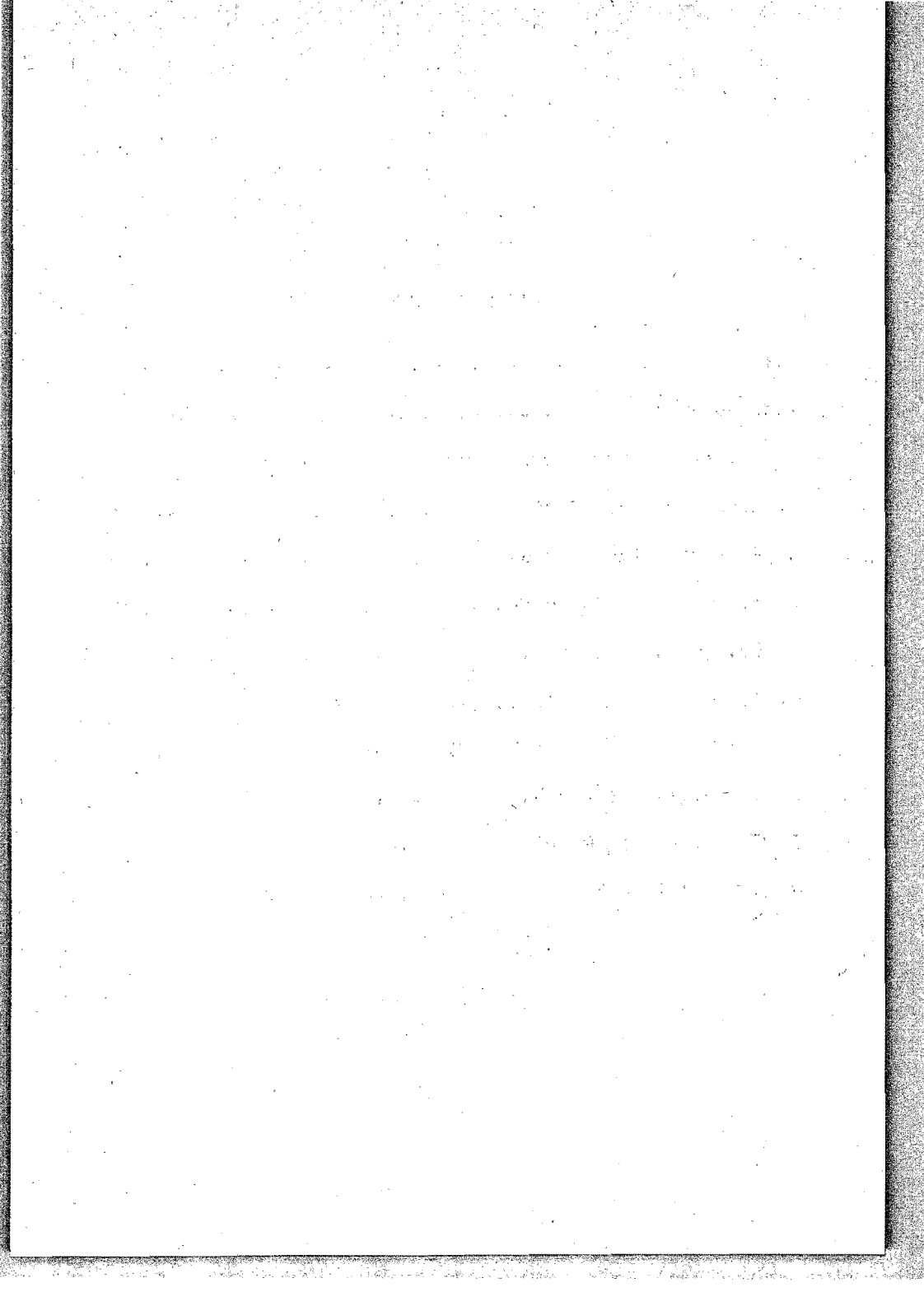


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F O R E W O R D

Progressio and its Supplements take account of and attempt to convey the research and the experiences of Christian Life Communities (CLC). That is to say, they pursue a double objective :
- to provide elements for reflection and points of reference so as to understand better and to deepen the CLC experience that one sees developing in many countries
- to allow this experience of CLC to be confronted with the objective reality of the Ignatian spirituality that gave birth to it.

In doing this, our aim is to help CLC members desirous of achieving an integration of their faith with the multiple activities in which they are deeply involved with their whole being. Our readers tell us they recognize and appreciate this thrust in our review. CLC, in introducing us to the approach of St. Ignatius, initiates us into a way of life that leads to the liberation of man through submission to God's will in all circumstances. In this way we recognize and give witness to the face of Christ in the world of today. This concern to be faithful to our specific spirituality is for us the surest means to a lived solidarity with all men and to collaborating with all in the Church.

The development of CLC in recent years has made evident the importance of their community dimension. It is an essential element in the process of growth during formation and in the dynamic of living of a mature CLC. Our Supplement No. 4 traced the profile of community living in CLC as

it reveals itself today ever more and more clearly. This present Supplement, our sixth, provides an indispensable assistance to Communities in the discerning of community decisions. What are the prerequisites of such a discernment? How does one go about it? These are questions that any Community confronted with the taking of a community decision must ask itself.

Father Jean Claude Dhôtel, S.J., who was during 10 years CLC ecclesiastical assistant of France and editor of the review Vie Chrétienne and its allied publications, shows us how to grasp the process and the conditions for an authentic deliberation, taking as his basis the first Deliberation of 1539. The clarity of the text and the elaboration of the process involved make this Supplement a solid and readable response to the questions often asked about discerning community decisions.

PROGRESSIO

INTRODUCTION

Discernment is a key element in the spirituality of the Christian Life Communities. It allows love, which always seeks "the more", not to lose itself in vague aspirations, but to find its point of application, here and now, in an action that is humble, exact, specific. "Discreta caridad", St. Ignatius called it: a love that discerns. The two words are inseparable in our spirituality.

The aim of these pages is modest: to help CLCs to carry out discernment better, that is to say, with more exactitude and method, so as to more effectively release spiritual freedom. Nonetheless, since the practice of discernment ought in principle to extend to all our activity, it was necessary to limit this treatment to one specific area.

During the Spiritual Exercises, the main thrust of the dialogue between the retreatant and the guide consists in seeking out what is happening and by what spiritual movements the retreatant is being led. We are acquainted with the highly valued "rules for the discernment of spirits", on which commentaries have often been made. There is also the discernment of the group, in which the members attempt to clarify together mutually the quality of their prayer, their life, their commitments. When the group itself is involved in a collective action, the continuing evaluation of the action, tested and corrected in the light of the Gospel, is also a practice that those familiar with the pedagogy of the Christian Life Communities are well acquainted with. Finally, in specific circumstances that occur much less often, the group needs to take a decision. The discernment then takes place in the course of a process which is called a deliberation. It includes at one and the same time the "discernment of spirits", the "ways of making an election" and group pedagogy, but according to a particular method. It is this type of community discernment that these pages focus on. And so they are entitled:

discerning community decisions.

What is the object? To find the right decision. A word rich with overtones. It brings up the image of a scales in perfect equilibrium, an image dear to St. Ignatius, but one we must understand well. What interests Ignatius is not the trays of the scales but the marker, the arrow that points and gives the orientation. It is a matter of orienting one's life in a direction that is right and just. In the Bible, justice means sanctity. To be just is to be oriented towards the holiness of God in order to be holy as he is holy. But the prophets and the Gospel have taught us that our sanctity, like that of Jesus, will be accomplished along human paths by a will to love that will establish the fulness of justice on the earth. Discernment is then the art of finding what is right and just in and through that which conditions us individually and collectively. It is another way of expressing what in past times was termed "ridding oneself of all inordinate attachments in order to find the will of God." (Spiritual Exercises, 1)

Is it necessary to underline the importance of discernment in the time in which we live? In the days of Ignatius, a single retreat could give direction to a whole life in a situation that remained stable. As for decisions, they were in the hands of a small number of persons in charge. Today, we continually have to make decisions and all of us have responsibility for them.

Our world, in effect, has become more complex. One no longer sees clearly the frontiers of good and evil, of better or worse, whether it is a question of procreation, education, profession or money. Political commitment is not a simple affair, no more than commitment within the Church. It no longer suffices to say to Christians that they need to be involved; they have to search out where and how to be involved. It no longer suffices to tell them that they need to show that they are Christians in the world; they have to find a language which will make Jesus Christ known and a kind of action that will give witness to their hope. It no longer suffices to tell them that they need to help the poor; they have to analyze each local, regional and international situation to discover the paths to fuller justice and liberty.

On the other hand, we have become more mobile. The choosing itself of a state of life, a family, a profession, a residence no longer are a guarantee of the future. It is not by chance that we talk so much today about reconversion and continuing formation. Nothing can be held in a definitive fashion. The old proverbial wisdom, the ancestral traditions, no longer work in a world that is in mutation. And, since they have been brought up according to this wisdom and these traditions, Christians often resist change. How many parents understand their grown children? How many Christians are equipped to face up to an economic upset? How many are prepared for a political revolution or, if they have been the ones who led it, to react in circumstances that they had not foreseen? Recent events might serve as examples.

Finally, whether we will it or not, we have become more one, arrived at greater solidarity. The energy crisis has made clear a fact to which we were closing our eyes. The interdependence of humankind has become evident. Such solidarity should not surprise those who believe that Christ is the Head of the Body. It should give more importance to each of their decisions. They can no longer say: "That's my affair!" Every decision contrary to the touch of the Spirit impedes the Kingdom of God in the world. Every decision inspired by the Spirit opens up new hope for all of humanity.

Complexity, mobility, solidarity - these make more necessary than ever community discernment with a view to decisions about action.

The aim of these pages is to present a method for learning how to practice it in the spirit of Ignatius. It is in fact the group of the first companions of Ignatius who invented the method. By chance, we have in our possession the account of their deliberation of 1539; it will be given in the first chapter so that the reader can have it before his eyes and can refer to it constantly. The treatment that follows, in the rest of the chapters, is inspired by a certain number of efforts undertaken on the theory and practice of discernment in recent years: it suf

fices to cite the works of J. C. Putrell, M. Giuliani, E. Pousset, J. Gouvernaire, C. Viard, among others... But above all these pages would like to give the witness of a lived experience : that of several deliberations modelled on that of the Deliberation of 1539 in the Christian Life Communities of France and of Europe, as well as that of the sessions of "apprenticeship in discernment" led by a team of Jesuits over several years at Chantilly (France).

As to the plan of this work, it will follow as faithfully as possible the account of the Deliberation of 1539, from the conditions and requisites for a deliberation to the way to conclude it.

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I

THE DELIBERATION OF THE FIRST COMPANIONS OF IGNATIUS

In 1539 the first companions of Ignatius, having to give up the idea of establishing themselves at Jerusalem, offered themselves to the Pope to be sent no matter where. The result of this resolution is that they are likely soon to be dispersed. Should they, nevertheless, remain united, and if so by what means : such is the object of their deliberation. The account follows.(1)

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

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

(1) The English translation of this Deliberation is that of Jules Toner S.J. in his "The Deliberation that Star^uted the Jesuits : Commentary with Historial Introduction", Vol. VI, No. 4 of Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, St. Louis, June 1974. The short work is excellent. (Editor's Note)

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

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

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

3. At the meeting on the first night, the following question was opened up: given that we had offered and dedicated ourselves and our lives to Christ our Lord and to his true and legitimate vicar on earth so that he might dispose of us and send us wherever he judged it to be more fruitful, whether to the Turks or to the Indies or to heretics or to others of the faithful or pagans - given that,

would it or would it not be more advantageous for our purpose to be so joined and bound together in one body that no physical distance, no matter how great, would separate us? The issue can be made clear by a case. The pope is sending two of us to the city of Siena. Ought we to be (especially) concerned about those who are going to that place or they about us? Or should we have no more concern for them than we have for those who are not in this Company?

In the end we established the affirmative side of the question, that is, that in as much as our most kind and affectionate Lord had deigned to gather us together and unite us, men so spiritually weak and from such diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, we ought not split apart what God has gathered and united; on the contrary, we ought day by day to strengthen and stabilize our union, rendering ourselves one body with special concern for each other, in order to effect the greater spiritual good of our fellow men. For united spiritual strength is more robust and braver in any arduous enterprise than it would be if segmented.

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

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

5. When we had persisted in prayer and thought for many days without hitting upon any satisfactory resolution of

our uncertainty, we put our hope in the Lord and started to cast about for better ways of working out such a resolution.

Our first line of thought went this way. Would it expedite our discernment if we all went away to some hermitage for thirty or forty days, giving ourselves over to meditation, fasting and penance, so that God might listen to our desires and mercifully impress on our minds the answer to our question? Or should three or four undertake this enterprise in the name of all with the same intent? Or would it be better if none of us went to the hermitage but all remained in the city, devoting half of every day to this our one principal occupation and the rest of the day to our customary work of preaching and hearing confessions? The half devoted to our principal concern would be the time less crowded with other concerns, more suitable for meditation, reflection, and prayer.

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

There was a second line of thought which we set in motion for the sake of resolving the impasse regarding obedience. This was to propose the following spiritual preparations for each and every member of the whole group. The first preparation: Each would ready himself beforehand, would take time for prayer, Masses, and meditation in order to strive for joy and peace in the Holy Spirit regarding obedience, laboring as much as he could to have a predilection for obeying rather than commanding, when the consequent glory of God and the praise of his majesty would

be equal. The second preparation; None of the companions would communicate with any other about this matter at issue or inquire about his reasoning on it. The point of this preparation was to prevent anyone from being persuaded by another and, therefore, biased more toward obedience (by vow to one of their own number) or the contrary. This way each would desire as more advantageous only what be derived from his own prayer and meditation. The third preparation : Each one would think of himself as a stranger to our group who would have no expectation of joining it. Thinking this way he would escape being carried by his emotions more to one opinion and judgment; rather, as if a stranger, he would speak his thought to the group about having or not having obedience, would by his judgment confirm and recommend what he believed would be for God's greater service and would more secure the Company's lasting preservation.

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

For example, one said : It seems that, on account of our failures and sins, the words "religious" or "obedience" have unseemly connotations among the Christian people. Another remarked: If we wish to live under obedience, we will perhaps be forced by the supreme pontiff to live under some Rule already drawn up and officially established. So it will eventuate that all our desires which we have judged to be from Our Lord will be frustrated; for there will be no opportunity and freedom to work for the salvation of our fellow men, the one very thing, after concern for our own salvation, which we have had in mind. Another observed: If we promise obedience to someone, not so many men will enter our company to labor faithfully in the Lord's vineyard, where the harvest is very great but few true laborers are found. For men in general have so little strength to labor or endure without breaking under it that many look out more for themselves and their own wishes

than they do for the wishes of Jesus Christ and the complete denial of self for his sake. So also others spoke to the point in other ways, a fourth, a fifth, and so on, explaining the disadvantages which occurred to them as reasons against obedience.

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

Here are some examples. One man's argument took this form of a reductio ad absurdum et impossibile. If without the agreeable yoke of obedience, this Company of ours had to carry on practical undertakings, no one would have any precise charge, since one would pass off the burden onto the other, as we have many times experienced. Again, if this Company were without obedience, it could not long endure and persevere - a turn of events in conflict with our basic intent of keeping our Company alive in perpetuity. Now, any group is kept alive by obedience more than by any thing else. This is especially true for us who have vowed perpetual poverty and are perennially preoccupied with unremitting labors, both spiritual and temporal: for these make it difficult to preserve fellowship.

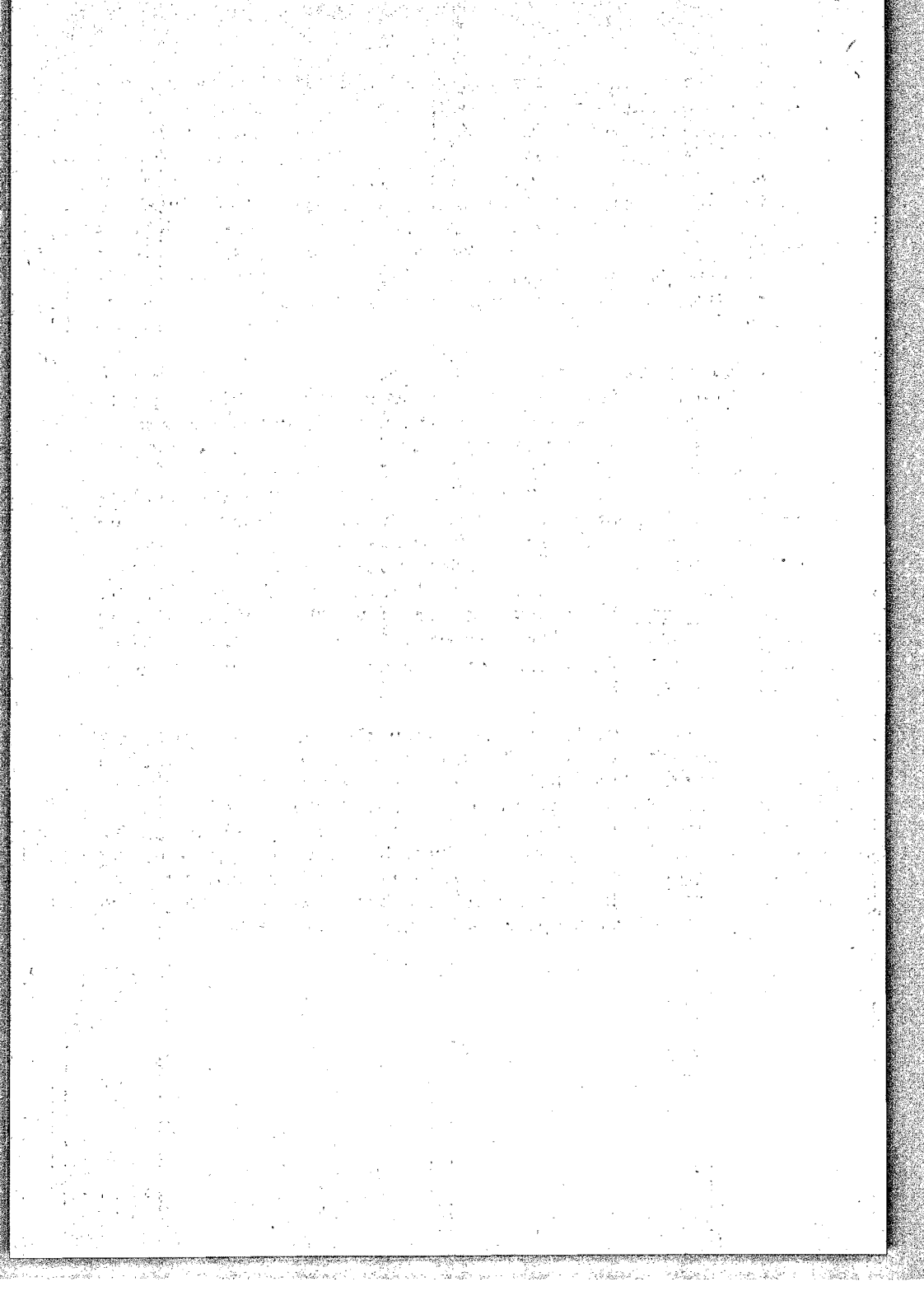
In a positive vein, another spoke this way: Obedience issues in an uninterrupted life of heroic deeds and in heroic virtues. For one who truly lives under obedience is fully disposed to execute instantly and unhesitatingly whatever is enjoined him, no matter to him whether it be very hard to do or engenders embarrassment and ridicule and public humiliation. Such would be the case, for example, if I were bidden to walk through the streets and avenues unclothed or in strange attire. Although such an order may never be given, nevertheless, so long as any one is readied for such acts by denial of his own will and judgment, he is always acting heroically and growing in merit. A like line of reasoning is: Nothing so casts down all pride and arrogance as does obedience; for pride makes a big thing of following one's own judgment and will, giv-

ing way to no one, pursuing grand and extraordinary projects beyond one's reach. Obedience diametrically opposes this attitude: For it always follows the judgment of another and the will of another, gives way to all, and as much as possible is joined with humility, the enemy of pride. A further argument is : Although we have committed ourselves to obey the supreme pontiff and shepherd in general and in particular, nevertheless, he could not possibly take time for the innumerable details and contingencies of our affairs; nor would it be right for him to do so even if he could.

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

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

* * *



II

THREE PRIOR CONDITIONS

In the first paragraph, the account of the Deliberation of 1539 places three prior conditions for any deliberation. They seem obvious. Still, it can be useful to verify that they are present.

1. A Question Is Posed

The year 1539 was a decisive one for the first companions of Ignatius. It corresponds, in the meditation on the Call of the King that opens the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises, to the passage from parable to experience, or from dream to reality. It is the end of the dream to go to Jerusalem, a dream they had long pursued: by force of events, they will not be going to Jerusalem. It is equally the end of a style of companionship in which they discussed together what they were going to do for Christ and in which they felt they were living as a team of friends, sharing roof and bed as well as the spiritual life. From now on, it is the Pope, to whom they have linked their destiny, who will send them there where the need is more urgent, not together but separately. Within a year, Francis Xavier will have parted from the companions for good...

It is events which force the issue and bring up the question to be submitted to deliberation. They do not gather in order to discuss some theme for reflection, but by reason of circumstances more or less unforeseen. The companions had decided, if the plan to go to Jerusalem became impossible, to put themselves at the disposition of the Pope. Making themselves totally available like this was heavy with consequences that they had not yet taken the time to foresee. And here one such consequence presents itself for the immediate future: "The time was approaching for us to be scattered and parted from one another." Their whole idea of companionship was called in ques-

tion. What, in fact, does the companionship of people who are physically separated mean, if there does not exist, besides their common desire, a structure, an institution, an organism that expresses that desire and keeps them united? The question is very concrete.

From this summary historical presentation, there is one first conclusion to draw: there is no community deliberation unless a collective question is posed that calls for a collective response.

2. A Common Objective is Clearly Present

Prodded by events, the companions were to come together to "discuss together their vocation and covenanted way of life." But the discussion supposes a basic agreement that the chronicler strongly underlines: "one mind and heart in seeking God's gracious and perfect will according to the scope of our vocation." The call of God to them is now very clear: it is the service of the Church by means of making themselves available to the Pope for all sorts of missions. They recognize clearly that it is not they who will determine the kind of service to render, but that this will come from another and be accomplished in the name of another. That is at the heart of their vocation: each one receives himself from God and from God too, through this or that legitimate intermediary, receives his mission. It is an availability, a "disponibility", recalled in different words in the same paragraph: "offering ourselves as a holocaust to our God, in whose praise, honor, and glory we would yield our all."

There, then, is a second prior condition: there is no community deliberation unless all the participants are in agreement on the fundamental goal and objective.

This condition is necessary for any deliberation. If people do not agree on goals, it is useless to be searching out means. But when there is question of a spiritual discernment with a view to arriving at a spiritual decision, the fundamental objective must be, it too, of a spiritual order. St. Ignatius goes even further in speaking of "matters of election" in the Exercises: they must, he says, "be either indifferent or good in themselves, and such that they are lawful within our holy Mother, the hier

archical Church, and not bad or opposed to her." (Spir. Exercises, 170)

Because the outcome of the deliberation hinges on it, one should not be afraid to spend the time needed to verify if this agreement exists. We will see how to do this in the next chapter.

3. Opinions Differ as to Means

This condition is obvious, since if all are in accord on everything, objective and means, there is nothing to deliberate about. Still, it is necessary to become aware of what these differences are and to situate them correctly. Certain conflicts that arise regarding means have in reality to do with ends and so will block for the future any progress in the deliberation. The companions had had the time to become aware of what their differences were in the course of their earlier discussions. In March, 1539, there were ten of them, grouped around Ignatius (of the eleventh signer, a certain Caceres, no further mention is made; he was an adventurer who, after being dismissed from the Society, was condemned to death by Francis I for spying!). There were two French (Jean Codure and Paschase Broet), four Spaniards (Ignatius, Francis Xavier, James Lainez, Alphonse Salmeron and Nicholas Bobadilla), two Savoyards (Peter Faber and Claude Lejay) and one Portuguese (Simon Rodriguez). Six of them had made the vows of Montmartre in 1534, the four others had been recruited at Paris after the departure of Ignatius in 1535. But the differences of nationality or of age were without doubt less than those of temperament: men like Bobadilla and Rodriguez were not easy to govern and Ignatius, once he is their superior, will have plenty of difficulties with them, who were among his first companions.

Nevertheless, disagreement is not disunion and, even if it is deep, is not an obstacle to mutual esteem. With justice the chronicler recalls the conflict that opposed to each other the Apostles Peter and Paul, recounted in the Epistle to the Galatians. This is not done just to lessen the scandal there might be at differences. They can be the source of a new creativity in the group, which can be the fruit of a deliberation just as it furnishes the occas

ion for it.

This creativity is shown already in the anxious desire of the companions to "discover some unobstructed way", beyond their diverging views, so as to achieve together, by the most apt means, their common objective.

This is the third prerequisite, which supposes that the members of the group have divergent views of the means to take, but they are determined to find a path that will lead them to the goal. It is as much the disagreement as this common will which will set in motion the deliberation. All the same, it is good to make sure beforehand that these prerequisite conditions are verified.

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III

VERIFYING THE PREREQUISITES

What must be verified, in the group and among the participants, before entering into a deliberation?

1. The Common Vocation

First, that all agree on the basic objective, above and beyond the decision to be taken. This objective will be, in effect, the point of reference and the ultimate criterion. What is this if not adhesion to the universal design of God as expressed in the Gospel : "You will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus...The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father; he will rule over the house of Jacob forever". (Luke 1:31-32) Jesus the saviour of men, who gathers them together, starting from the human conditions that Mary perceived in her canticle. It harks back to the appeals, the aspirations and the prayers of the Old Testament. She sees the world with the eyes of God as he looks out over the little people, the humble, the poor, the hungry, the oppressed. It is with the same vision that Jesus inaugurates his mission in the synagogue of Capharnaum, by applying to himself the prophecy of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and new sight to the blind, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favor." (Luke 4: 18-19) In this way he will live the design of God, starting from the servitudes and oppressions of which men are victims, so as to lead them little by little, through faith, to the acknowledgement of a God who liberates all men from all their slaveries. At the same time, he will labor to group together in the Church this people made up of the humble in whom hope has been awakened. The Saviour, who gathers men together.

One cannot enter into deliberation unless one is in accord with this design and has decided to cooperate in it. Any decision that, in one way or another, would not refer to this design, would have to be excluded. Even if it is true that, for a group of Christians, this perspective is assured beforehand, it is nonetheless necessary, before any deliberation, that it place itself in prayer so as to resituate itself in this common vocation. The texts cited will serve as a supporting basis for this prayer, as also the contemplation on the Incarnation in the Exercises (101-109). The sharing of prayer of the persons can be the verification of agreement between the members of the group on this point.

2. The Vocation of Each One

In the second place, one must make sure that the vocation of each person - in the case of CIC members, obviously, within the framework of their specific vocation - be acknowledged by the group. Each one is called by his or her name, to take part, according to the grace given, in the realization of the universal design of God. If it is question, then, of taking a community decision, this should not, in any case, run contrary to the personal vocation of each one. How make sure that each one finds himself in the joint decision? There is a theoretical answer: that each one, from the beginning, be recognized in the community for what he is, and that the community be considered as responsible for each of its members.

But this ideal is not attained at one stroke! Even in a community whose members claim to know each other well and to live in charity, there are of necessity antagonisms and "blocks" more or less felt. Now the process of a deliberation carried on under the gaze of the Lord, who "searches the heart and the depths", will certainly reveal facets as yet unknown of persons, and stir up affective reactions not as yet manifested. The "movements of the spirits" will be produced, not only in the heart of each one, but between the members of the group. One will perceive more clearly the motivations behind the conduct of each member of the group: why this one maintains his reserve; why this other is expansive in a pleasant friendliness or in an attitude that is authoritarian and sometimes aggressive, etc. Above

and beyond these expressions, one will discover the profound insecurity of each one in the face of the desire to be esteemed and loved, as well as before the fear that love and esteem will be refused. And further beyond these motivations, one will fathom how the Spirit guides this person in a different way than that, and that we must come to recognize this...

By what practical means can one make headway towards this objective? The members of CLC who have taken part in certain "formation courses" are familiar with those exercises in communication which reveal a person in depth. Enough to recall them briefly : the composing of personal "posters", the use of "image-language", presentation of one by another to the rest, the recounting to others of our own "salvation-history", etc; without omitting exchanges in pairs, where one tends to share in greater depth than in the group.

This mutual understanding, although it is preliminary to the deliberation and does not reveal all of a person, takes time. But it is not time lost! It creates the climate of confidence and of esteem that allows each one to enter the deliberation with the conviction that, even if there are heavy sacrifices to make, the community decision will inscribe itself within the context of his personal history.

3. The Requisites for Dialogue

There is a last thing to be checked: that all the members of the group are ready to accept the demands that sharing will impose. What are they?

a. That each has the will and the desire to be honest, that is, not to take refuge behind a mask. This is often more difficult for people who know each other well as a result of having met often. That is why the group must function in such a way that each can find his own identity in it, and give to each the possibility to express himself as he is, in a manner that is relaxed, simple, calm, not tense. That he feels he is listened to, that he has the time to speak that fits his own rhythm, and that the others know how to listen without interrupting him. What, in

our terminology, we call a "listening group" is indispensable in a community deliberation : it creates this climate of freedom and of honesty.

b. Still, a concern for charity, falsely understood, must not lead to an attempt to eliminate all conflict under the pretext of not causing pain to someone. Harmony is what comes from the resolution of a conflict; it is not something prefabricated. If there is an agitation of "spirits" in the heart of each person, it is normal that the same agitation shows up in the group; that is the condition of spiritual progress and of finding the truth, whether there is question of an individual retreat or of a deliberation. Each one, then, must consent to be vulnerable, exposed to the knowledge of others, confronted, challenged, even attacked. And that, without panicking, without taking refuge behind a turtleshell of silence. As to the group, it must, in order to advance, maintain the will not to avoid problems and to bring conflicts into the daylight.

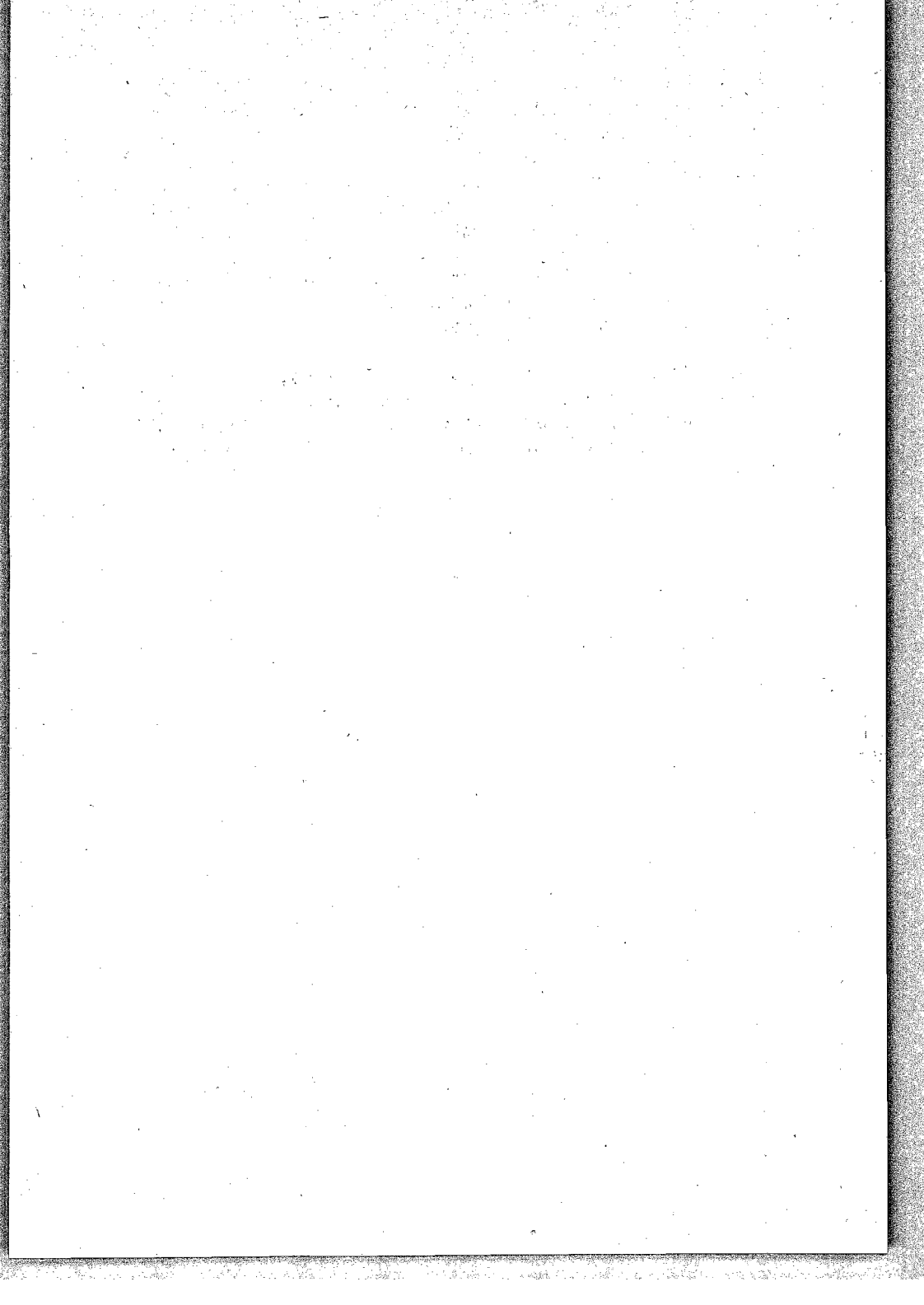
c. These demands take on a new dimension in faith. It is question in fact of a spiritual attitude that is conformed to our adhesion of faith to God's design. One comes to understand little by little that the Spirit is active in a different way in each one, and that the ensemble of the exchanges should permit a progressive spiritual unfolding which could not occur outside dialogue. Now this dialogue needs to be the bringing together in the open of what the Spirit has said to each one, so that it allows the progressive unification of differences in a common project in which all recognize Him who is the unique source of varied charisms.

It is not enough to grasp theoretically the requirements of dialogue. Even when the members of a group know each other well, it would be to their advantage to practice it before beginning the deliberation. For example, the group can divide itself into sub-groups. One part is made up of observers of each member of the other sub-group. After a time, the roles are interchanged. During the discussion by one of the sub-groups, each observer notes the manifestations (and their duration) that he remarks on the part of the one he is observing. By "manifestations" are understood not only oral comments, but also signs, ges-

tures, smiles, attitudes, etc., which are so many ways of either participating or being disinterested. The observations can be classified into four categories : 1) positive reactions, manifestations of solidarity, of calm, of approbation; 2) positive contributions : suggestions, opinions, information given; 3) questions posed with regard to suggestions, opinions or information; 4) negative reactions, manifestations of disapproval, of heightening of tension, of aggressiveness. The report on the observations immediately after will be most helpful to the extent that people take note of it for the future...

In a deliberation that lasts some days, at least one day should be given to verifying that these requisites are present, for the later development of the deliberation will depend in great part on the attitudes taken at the outset.

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IV

THE QUESTION TO BE DECIDED

When a group enters into deliberation, it obviously knows what it is meeting about. But it has not always clearly posed the question which will allow it to resolve its problem. A clear and precise question, the response to which will involve a decision, is not always easy to formulate. Let us look at that of the first companions : "Would it or would it not be more advantageous for our purpose to be so joined and bound together in one body that no physical distance, no matter how great, would separate us?" (De liberation, 3).

From the point of view of form, two things are to be noted :

1. The question is posed in the form of a simple alternative: or this, or that; yes or no. Only a question of this kind, clear and simple, will call forth a clear and simple response, with commitment to a decision; with freedom afterwards, as was the case for the companions, to pose a second question regarding the means to make this decision operative.

2. It is posed in terms of a free choice: "Would it be more advantageous,". It is not a necessary option, one that constrains. It is question of a preference, that is, one will put forward (pre-fero, I bring forward) what will allow one to attain more easily and more effectively the goal that has been fixed. The preference refers as well to the persons who will be set in motion by the decision : what one prefers, that is what one puts forward so as to oneself be carried forward. The response will be a new stimulus toward taking a further step. One will leave the deliberation with new strength for undertaking what is needed. This is certainly the motive involved in the decision

of the companions : "For united spiritual strength is more robust and braver in any arduous enterprise than it would be if segmented." This way of posing the question is definitely, we might note in passing, in the line of the Ignatian magis, as defined at the end of the Meditation on the Foundation in the Exercises: "Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created." (Spir. Exercises, 23)

These two facets of the question—its alternative form and its presentation of a free choice — put us on the road to what is a spiritual decision. It is perhaps useful to consider this briefly before returning to the question which will involve a decision.

A Two-Pronged Possibility

Let us visualize this, which is besides the approach of the Exercises. We take decisions continually, more or less freely. Discernment is the art of taking a decision in freedom. The simplest way of presenting it is that of a two-pronged possibility, a two-forked road (figure 1). (1)

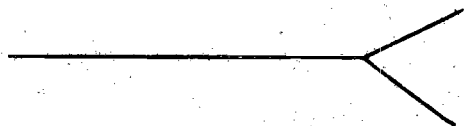


fig. 1

I am on a road which forks in two directions. Will I go to the right or the left? If I am taking a walk with no other goal than that of relaxing, my choice will be in function of the view that is afforded me; I will take the road that more attracts me. But if I have an end in view, I will attempt to find out which road, the one to the right or that to the left, will lead me more rapidly to the goal I have. And in this case there is something at stake, and so one stops, one studies, one consults before taking the decision.

(1) This and subsequent figures are proposed by G. Fessard in La Dialectique des Exercices Spirituels de St. Ignace de Loyola. Paris. Aubier, 1956.

Other considerations than that of arriving at the goal as quickly as possible can arise. For example, the road to the right is shorter, but I am not in a hurry; that to the left is longer, but it is more pleasant and I find I have need to relax... All that is to be weighed according to the advantages and the inconveniences.

These considerations are habitually the object of human decisions: advantages/disadvantages, profits/losses, ease/difficulty, agreement/disagreement. For each side of the alternatives, I have to see what I will gain in choosing this, but also what I will lose in not choosing that other; for every choice is an elimination of what I am not choosing. On the other hand, one must foresee the consequences that will follow from a decision, for it involves the future, and other decisions that will need to be made; one cannot go backwards...

The Crossroads

Nevertheless, the image of a two-forked road must be corrected to the extent that freedom is not reduced to the power of choosing between two roads. More radically, there is the possibility of going forward or not. Ask a prisoner what freedom means for him. He will not answer that it is making use of the several free choices that are afforded him within the walls of his cell, for example that of sleeping or of talking to his neighbor... Freedom for him? It will be the day when the gates of the prison open for him: his liberation!

A decision is a liberating act, stimulated by a proposal external to me; it puts me en route towards a future to be achieved. This perspective leads us to correct the image of two forks in a road by that of a crossroads, where two lines cross (figure 2):

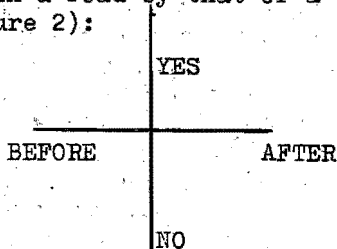


fig .2

Every decision is in effect a moment of our life, which is going to divide our life in two : a before and an after, for the reason that after, my life will not be the same as before. But why this change, if not because my life will have been crossed by another line which is precisely the proposal that faced me : a meeting, an event, a change of circumstances, in the face of which I can determine myself, that is, answer yes or no. There is then a crossroads, represented by these two lines, the one signifying the time, the other the proposal. It is at the center that I decide. And I decide between a yes and a no which will divide my life into a before and an after. And so my decision will be a moment in my history.

The Cross

The diagram of the crossroads is valid for any human decision. But the stakes in a spiritual decision are much more vast. It is question in fact, of searching out and finding what God wills that we do here and now, in conformity with the design of his love. The choice to be made, then, goes beyond ourselves; it is not only a moment in our history but a moment too in the sacred history of the People of God. The time line is not limited by my birth and my death, but it ought to be prolonged in both directions, originating at the creation of the world and finishing at the parousia, the second coming of the Lord. The proposal line, to which I must respond by yes or no with regard to a contingent decision should, it too, be prolonged in both directions and rejoin, at one of its extremities, the absolute Yes of the Son to the Father who sends him "to work the redemption of the human race", while at the other extremity it reaches the absolute no of Lucifer who proclaimed, "I will not serve!"

It is true that no human decision is taken in function of an absolute before and after, nor of an absolute yes or no, for the simple reason that we never possess the elements of such a decision. That is why every decision is historical and contingent. But it is true too that, if we seek what God wills here and now, our decision is a moment of the eternal will of God which is expressed in time. It will be taken then in a moment of the time that stretches from the creation of the world until it is completed with the return of the Lord. It is taken also in reference

to that moment when the Eternal penetrates into time and judges the world according to the yes or no given to the salvation proposed by the Cross.

That is why it is crucial, in spiritual discernment as in the Exercises, to have always in view the universality of the design of God and to keep the object of the deliberation within this context, so as to have the strength "with all the saints, to grasp the length, the breadth, the height, the depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses all understanding" (Ephesians, 3:18). God, in fact, is demanding, not only in the renunciations that he imposes, but above all in the breadth of outlook that he lays out before our eyes. It is the whole world that he opens before the eyes of Mary when she chants her Magnificat; it is his design that fills space and time when the angel announces to her that she will be the mother of Christ. A spiritual decision will have then the result of making us go out of ourselves, out of "our own self-love, self-will and interests" (Spir. Ex., 189), and to make us stretch our limits.

In this perspective, the moment of the decision will be an encounter of the will of God expressed in Jesus Christ, and our own liberated will, that is, our will now become capable, not of doing this or that thing that appeared to us impossible, but of saying yes to Him who challenges us in the core of our history to cooperate with him to change the history of the world. For "in the tiniest act of freedom, all of the Spirit is present" (1)

Posing the Question Correctly

If those are the stakes, time must be taken to pose the question correctly, and for that, a certain number of conditions must all be fulfilled.

1. A Specific Question. If many discussions get bogged down, most of the time it is because the question is too vast or too vague. In place of the question getting explored in depth, the subject matter expands and gets lost in the clouds of endless ideological debate, or else in a

(1) G. Fessard, op. cit., p. 25

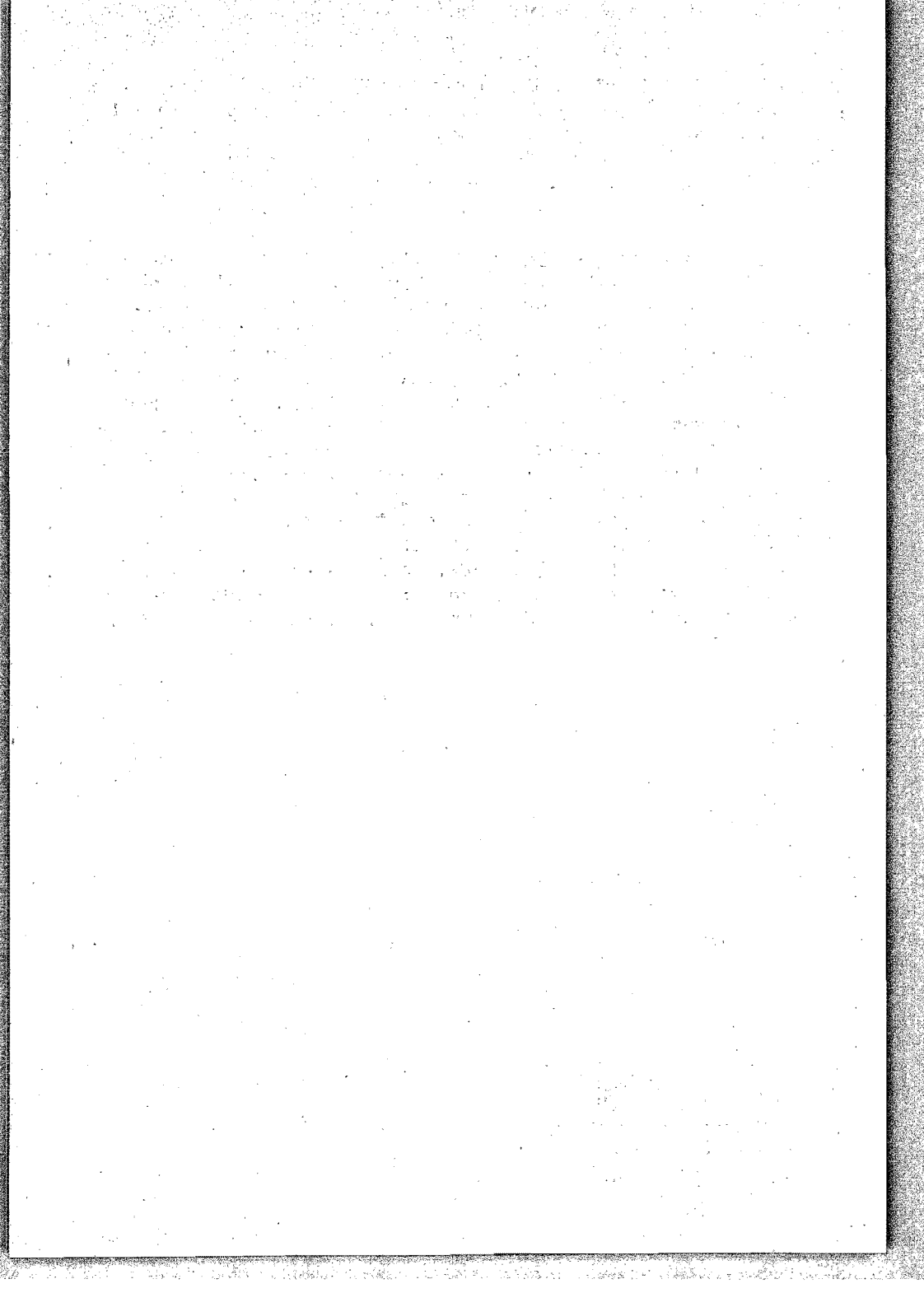
listing of "means" of which one has the presentiment that they are too numerous to have the least chance of being afterwards realized. Let us avoid then the type of question that says: "How to bring it about that...?", which will only lead to a deluge of ideas of which not one will be able to be pursued. This work ought to be done before the deliberation. When one begins, one ought to find oneself faced with a question which proposes a simple choice. For example, one will not ask: "How to make the CLCs become more aware of the struggle for the liberation of humankind?", but: "In order that CLCs become sensitized to the struggle for liberation, is it preferable to promote political involvement, or ought we to search for another means?". The answer can, in the end, involve a second question, but this will not be posed except in second place, afterwards, as did the companions of 1539. After having replied positively to the plan of remaining united and linked "in one body", they sought the specific means to do this: should they, or not, obey one of themselves? In both cases, they were in the presence of a simple alternative, which led them to choose this or that, or else to reply by yes or no. It is too simple, one may say, for the problems of life are always more complex. That is true, but it is the deliberation itself which will make the complexity appear. If the response is not simple, the question itself must be simple and precise. It is, furthermore, only a point of departure.

2. A Question Understood by All. Words are traps. One sees it easily in international gatherings (for example, compromiso, which has the meaning of commitment in Spanish, would not be translated by compromise in English, whose meaning is almost the opposite!). But also between people who speak the same language, the discussions often get bogged down because people are not giving the same meaning to words. This is the time to remember the "presupposition" of the Spiritual Exercises: "If an orthodox construction cannot be put on a proposition, the one who made it should be asked how he understands it" (no. 22). It is then necessary to question each other until agreement is reached, not on the answer to be given, but on the meaning of the words in the question. This exchange will offer another advantage, not small. Not only will the question be understood by all, but each one will take more interest in

it. By the fact of having tried to understand it and to understand each other, the question, which might seem too general to one or other person, will become a personal question. Each one will be motivated to deliberate with the others, while being ready to make the needed sacrifices with reference to the goal that he pursues personally.

3. A Question Apt for Spiritual Discernment. This means, to start with, that the answer should not be contained in the question, which should be open - otherwise there is no place for discernment! It means too that the question cannot propose as alternatives something that is already clearly perceived as a good by one side, and as an evil by the other. Finally, if the Holy Spirit is to have something to say to us in the matter, the question cannot be indifferent to the work of God in the world, in which we are called to collaborate. This does not exclude a deliberation in the political order, for it is not indifferent whether the Kingdom of God be built by means of this or that political structure. But it does exclude deliberations of an ideological nature, since every ideology is a closed system. And God did not become incarnate in an idea, but in the womb of a woman, in order to achieve a task.

* * *



V

FROM HEAD TO HEART

We have then a specific question, understood by all, presenting an interest to each one, apt for spiritual discernment with a view to a decision for action. What are we going to do with this question?

The first decision about the method is formulated this way in the Deliberation of 1539 : "At last we made a decision. In full agreement we settled on this, that we would give ourselves to prayer, Masses and meditations more fervently than usual and, after doing our very best we would for the rest cast all our concerns on the Lord, hoping in him." The problems were then at once situated in the realm of the Spirit. At the same time, they occupied the whole person, the rest being abandoned to the Lord. The companions were, in effect, convinced that "in no way, then, would he who is kindness itself desert us; rather, he would be with us more generously than we asked or imagined." (Deliberation, no. 1) The reporter at once goes on: "We began, therefore, to expend every human effort. We proposed to ourselves some questions worthy of careful consideration and forethought at this opportune time. Throughout the day, we were accustomed to ponder and meditate on these and to prayerfully search into them. At night each one shared with the group what he judged to be more appropriate and helpful, with the intention that all with one mind would embrace the truer way of thinking, tested and commended by the more powerful reasons and by majority vote." (Deliberation, no. 2) On the one hand, then, they entrusted themselves totally to the Spirit; on the other, they mobilized all their human energies and put them together in order to resolve their problems: feelings, imagination, mem

ory, understanding and will.... All discernment is a human activity; spiritual discernment is a human activity carried on with the light of, and under the motion of, the Spirit.

Exactly where this discernment takes place, and what happens when it does - these are important questions for the success of a community deliberation. We proceed, then, to take them up now.

Where Discernment Takes Place

The danger that threatens men of action is that of taking decisions simply on the basis of the reasons for and against. The advantages on one side, the disadvantages on the other. They decide according to the weight of the advantages. Is not that the way one proceeds in the world of affairs: in business, in industry, in politics...? One draws up the balance sheet with a view to making a rational decision. One seeks what is useful, and this way of acting very often shows up too in the spiritual life: one treats the Gospel as a tool of perfection, one looks for practical applications of it, that which will result in the greatest number of spiritual "advantages", considered spiritual by reason of their source, the Gospel. St. Paul thought in this way before his conversion: the source of his spiritual life was the Law, evidently inspired by God. He could draw advantages from it: "a Hebrew, born of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the Church; as far as the Law can make you perfect, I was faultless." But we see how his conversion had the result of making him transfer these prerogatives from the column of "profit" to that of "loss": "But because of Christ, I have come to consider all these advantages that I had as disadvantages" (Philippians 3:4-8). What we consider as advantages, according to the intellectual criterion of efficiency, can reveal themselves to be disadvantages when one uses other criteria as a basis. One cannot then take a spiritual decision only with one's head, because the place of spiritual discernment is not the head but the heart.

In fact, when I express an opinion, a judgment, a sentiment, a response to a word, a gesture, an appeal, an inspiration, there has taken place a series of operations

that I am not always conscious of. First, the word or the sign was perceived or not. There are things that I see or hear, but which I either receive or do not receive. Where does this filtering take place? Then, this word I hear or sign I perceive are submitted to an interpretative treatment. How does it happen that what was friendly on the part of the person I am speaking to is felt by me as hostile? How does it happen that a word of salvation, heard in the Gospel, is judged by such a person to be rather a sign of death? Where does this interpretation, which often distorts the meaning of what another had wanted to communicate, take place? Finally, I give my response in the form of an opinion, a judgement, a sentiment, which involve either acceptance or refusal. Of that I am aware because I express it clearly. I know my thoughts, my sentiments, my reasons, my judgments, my decisions, because all that, once elaborated, emerges into a clear zone of consciousness. But I do not always know what took place beforehand, while I am elaborating my response, because this activity is produced in a zone that is less clear, that of my deeper activity. (1)

Let us take an example. Before beginning to pray, I have read in the Gospel the story of the rich young man, and I paused on the word of the Lord: "Go, sell all you have, give it to the poor, and follow me." I begin to pray about this phrase. At the end of my prayer, I feel myself filled with joy and ready to undertake things, like those of St. Matthew or St. Francis of Assisi; or on the other hand, I am sad, as was the rich young man. From where do these diverse feelings come? They do not come from the word of God for, as the saying goes, the same cause produces the same effects. They do not come either from that deepest zone of my being where God dwells within me, for, even when I am sad, I am certain by faith that God has not withdrawn from me. They do not come from the zone of my conscious understanding, since I merely recognize that this sentiment has emerged. I have left this word drop within me as a seed in the earth, and it has come out as a feeling of joy or sadness. It is this intermediate zone that spiritual discernment must explore.

(1) Cf. E. Pousset, La Vie dans la Foi et la Liberté (C.E. R., 35 rue de Sèvres, 75006, Paris), pp. 157-159

In fact, starting from an acceptance or a refusal that springs from the depths of my being, I can fabricate, a posteriori, all sorts of reasons to justify this acceptance or this refusal. One always finds good reasons, they say quite truly, and I can pretend that these are the objective reasons. It is true that they each have their value, but they spring from a source that, it, has never really been called in question, from a presupposition that is situated deep beyond my ideas and judgments clearly expressed in my clearly conscious mind. Until this presupposition is dislodged and brought to light, there is no spiritual discernment.

Now, this presupposition is a fiber of the tissue that constitutes the natural "me". It forms part of all that has fashioned me as I am since my earliest childhood and beyond: my parents, my education, the principles according to which I was reared, the fears and the taboos that were inculcated into me, the reflexes that I acquired or refused, the milieu in which I have lived, the social class into which I was born, the persons with whom I deal, as also my qualities and my faults, my gifts and my deficiencies, my complexes and my inhibitions... But above all, as St. Ignatius says, "my self-love, my self-will and my own interests" (Spir. Ex., 189). That is what is in the heart of man (cf. Matthew 15:10-20).

But there is also in the heart of man the presence of the Trinity, according to the promise of Jesus: "We will come to him and we will make our dwelling within him" (John 14:23). A living and creative presence which stirs up in us faith, hope and love. A presence "closer to us than we are to ourselves" (St. Augustine), in a zone still deeper, if one may so put it, than that of our affectivity. This is why we are not always aware of it, but it causes us to be penetrable, as a sponge is penetrated by a drop of water, by the Word which is addressed to us through the Bible, the Church, our brothers, events... But it does not always penetrate without resistance, there where there are contrary forces, that is, precisely in this zone of affectivity. It is this zone, then, that is the proper locale of spiritual discernment, because it is the place where the struggle of the "spirits" takes place (figure 3, next page).

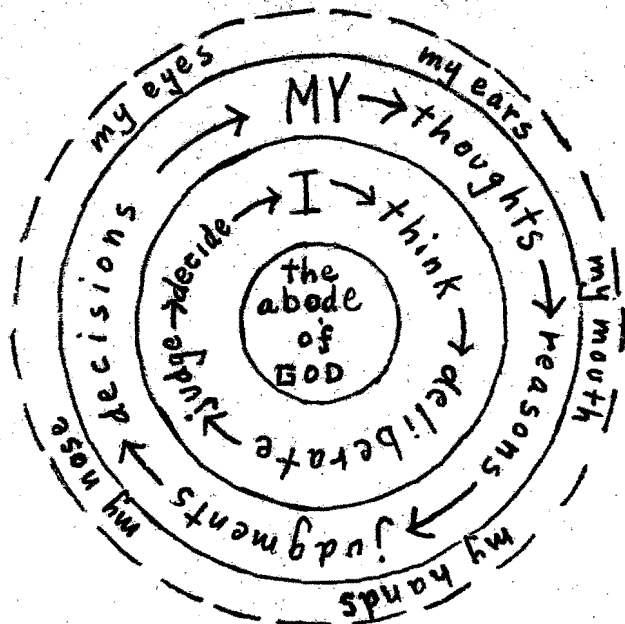


fig .3

What Happens

There is no need to explain in detail what takes place in this zone, and which St. Ignatius describes in his "rules for the discernment of spirits" (Spir. Ex., nos. 313-336). We will have occasion to return to it. Let us limit ourselves here to schematic precisisions.

We begin with this fact: when freedom is at stake for the accomplishment of the vocation of a person (or a group), it is subject to two influences that act as contrary forces. God wishes to help the person, without constraining him, to carry out his vocation according to the universal design of salvation, that of this man in particular being inseparable from that of the world; the adversary of God and men wishes to prevent this. Spiritual discernment consists in discovering the divine influence so as to yield oneself to it without reserve, and to discover the influence of the enemy so as to reject it. Ignatius calls these influences movements, that is to say, impulses or attractions which put the soul in motion in one direction or other. If we return to the diagram of decision-making, two hypotheses present themselves according to the two axes which cross: before/after, and yes/no.

The first hypothesis: with regard to this axis, my

life tends in a bad direction. More or less consciously, I am turning my back on my vocation; more or less voluntarily, I am accepting this retreat, this going backwards. The action of God then consists in making me restless by remorse. The action of the enemy consists in smothering the remorse and in brightening the attraction of sin (figure 4).

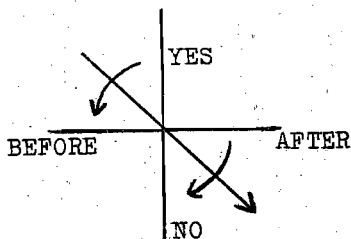


fig. 4

Let us note that, in a community deliberation, this hypothesis is excluded for the group as such from the time that the question has been posed as we have seen it earlier, that is, with a view to better service for the universal salvation of men. The tendency of the group is then positive. This is the second hypothesis.

In this second hypothesis, I have decided for spiritual progress, my life is oriented toward the service of the Lord. In this case, the action of the enemy consists in discouraging me from undertaking it or from going ahead in it. The action of God is contrary: it encourages me and stirs my confidence by giving light and strength, joy and peace "to go forward" (figure 5).

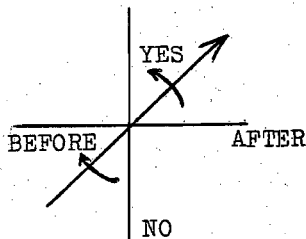


fig. 5

When the group enters into deliberation, it is with this attitude of "yes" to God, in the face of a question, the reply to which will commit us further in the direction of greater service. But the question is posed in alternative form, and the group does not yet know which one of

the alternatives will engage it in the direction of a better service, and which in the direction of that which is less good (figure 6). It only knows that it chooses to say yes to God and that God will help it to say yes by acting in the heart of each of the members of the group as well as in the group itself by encouraging its "movements". At the beginning, then, the group cannot prefer this or that alternative. It wishes only what God will want and which he will make known to it as the experience unfolds. This attitude is that of indifference. It is necessary for

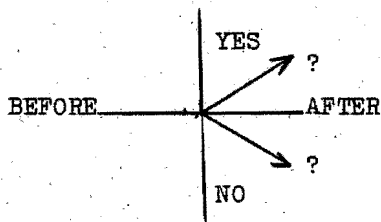


fig. 6

discernment that aims at a decision. But it is not necessary that it have been acquired by all members of the group from the beginning. Each one may have his preferences and will have the opportunity to express them. Indifference consists in accepting that, in the deliberation, one's preferences be ready to accept the final decision. It is the method itself of community discernment which will, to the degree that it advances properly, place each of the members and the whole group in the attitude of indifference.

One sees better now why the question must not be dealt with only according to rational criteria, the reasons for and against, the advantages and disadvantages. It must also be submitted to affective criteria, by paying attention to the movements which are produced in the members of the group and in the group itself.

That is why the first effort, once the question has been posed, is to make it pass from the head to the heart. How?

From understanding to affectivity

It is above all through prayer that the question will be interiorized in that way. At the point where we are, it is not yet question of weighing before God the terms of

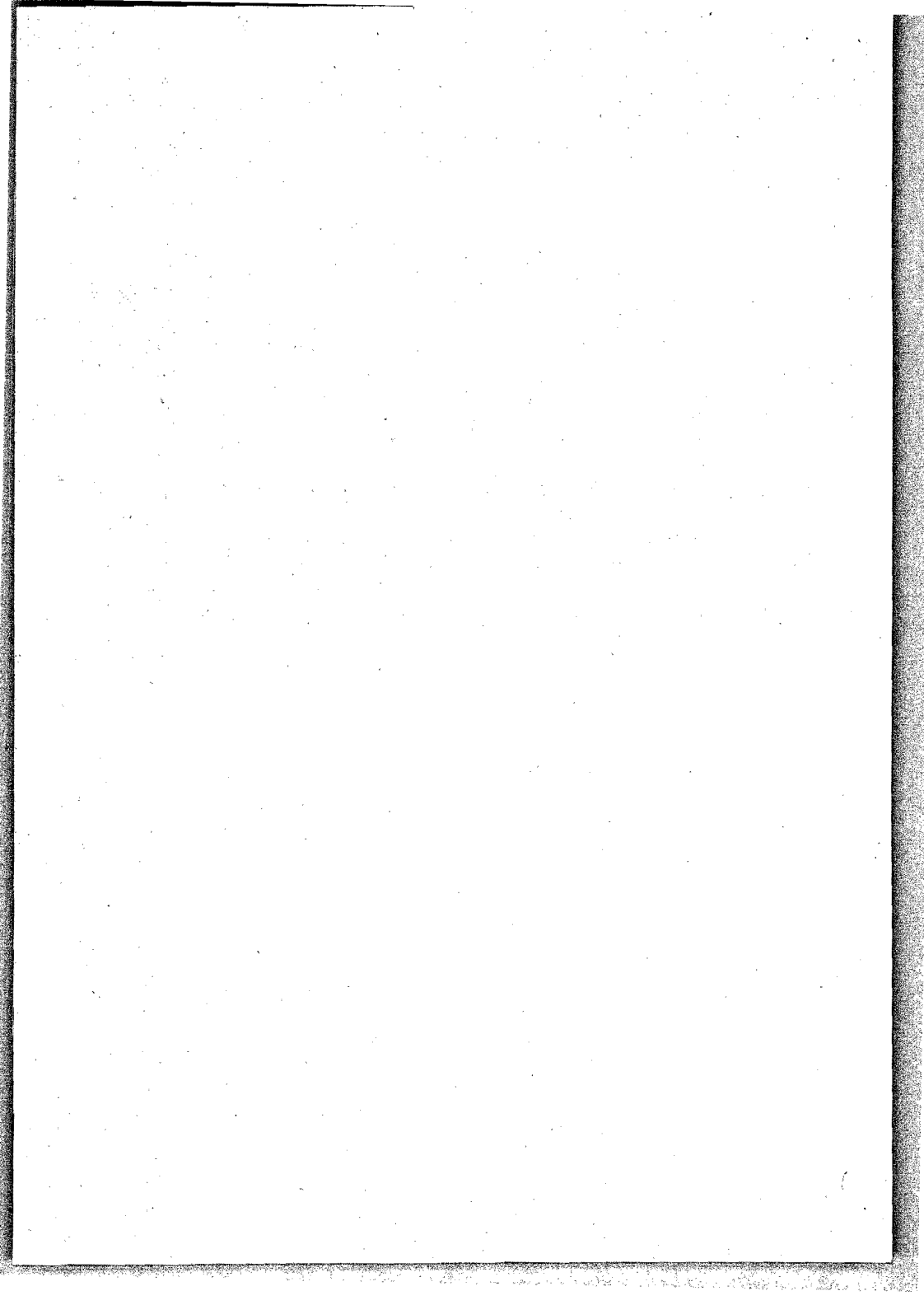
the alternatives, but of praying over the words which, in the question, have an affective resonance. Let us return to the question proposed earlier as an example: "In order that CLCs become sensitized to the struggle for the liberation of men, is it preferable to promote political involvement, or ought one to seek another means?" The group will not pray immediately on the terms "political involvement" or "other means", but on the words which express its deepest will: "community", "struggle", "liberation". It will let these words play on each other, and confront them with the Word of God. "Community" will speak to it of friendship, of warmth, of sharing and of mutual help... "Struggle" will speak to it of difficulty, of violence, of winners and losers... "Liberation" will make it hear songs of rejoicing and of victory... These same words, when confronted with the Word of God, will speak to it another language and will be charged with a new meaning. It will see the community dispersed in view of its mission, the sending out of the prophets and apostles of Christ. It will see the struggle involved in the cosmic vision that St. Ignatius proposes in the meditation on the Two Standards, the sweep of the images of the Apocalypse and the death of Jesus on the cross, pardoning his executioners as a sign of the universal pardon. "Liberation" will evoke the image of the new creation and of the reconciliation of peoples in a single new man...

To move the subject matter of the question from the head to the heart, one will not neglect either more human means, taking care, however, to avoid anything that might be interpreted, with or without reason, as a conditioning or manipulation. For example, the meeting room can be alive with pictures, with biblical texts, with poems, referring somehow to the key words of the question. One will avoid the appearance of conditioning or manipulation by allowing each one to here express himself in the way that he chooses. There is a strong likelihood that the display taken as a whole will be sufficiently well balanced...

Another exercise can also foster the interiorizing of the question: the use of metaphors. In this exercise, the idea is to compensate for our natural tendency to define concepts and so enclose them in abstraction. When one has said that the community is a gathering of persons associa-

ted in the same project, one has said very little. For one has neglected to say that the words, community, liberation, etc. are above all laden with dreams, and that there is real utility in bringing into daylight the dreams that they carry. In place of defining the words, let them first sing! The metaphor exercise consists in taking one or other of these key words, pausing on one of them for ten minutes or so, and taking note of, not the ideas, but the images that surface. "Community is like hands joined, like the grains in a head of wheat, like a song in several voices, etc." At the end of ten minutes, one goes on to the next word. Afterwards, a member of the group reads slowly the different metaphors, and one listens to them as one would listen to a poem... There are those who might look down on such an exercise as childish or not "serious" or simply as an hors-d'oeuvre that delays the work, but one wonders how they could understand that the Gospel is revealed to little ones and that the Church speaks better by its images of the liturgy than by its manuals of theology. It is not a matter of undervaluing the work of the intelligence, as we will see later, but of mobilizing all one's faculties, including those like imagination and sensitivity that may be thought of as secondary, so that the whole person participates in the discernment.

* * *



VI

ASSEMBLING THE DATA

Once the question has moved "from the head to the heart", it becomes matter for discernment. If the response is not very quickly evident, as was the case, it appears, for the first question of the Deliberation of 1539(no. 3), one begins to search for the criteria which will allow arriving at a decision in one direction or the other : this is the work that for a long time occupied the companions when they posed the question of obedience (no. 4, etc.). These criteria, we have seen, will be of two sorts: intellectual (the reasons) and effective (the movements). All through the discernment, they will be influencing each other and will be evaluated by each other. But before doing that, time will need to be given to assembling the data which will throw light on the question and enlarge its field of reference. This material will then have to be organized.

To help carry out this research, the persons deliberating can call on experts, chosen from among the group or from outside it. Their role will be to put their expertise at the service of this preliminary research, but it must be strictly limited to this. The danger is great that an expert, in all good faith, go beyond this limit by giving his personal opinion on the question, and that this opinion, by reason of the competence of the one who expresses it, may have considerable weight in the further discussions. That is why it is doubtless preferable that the expert is not himself or herself taking part in the deliberation, and considers himself not involved in the question being posed. Again, the risk will be less if there are several experts, each clarifying a specific aspect of the question - theological, psychological, sociological, historical, etc.

Still, these precautions will be ineffective if the group itself does not function in an adult manner in its research. If it turns to experts to discover the truth with regard to the question being deliberated, it resigns its task and paralyzes the action of the Holy Spirit. The risk is still greater if the expert is a priest and... a Jesuit! As if the priesthood and the religious state would give a right to a greater portion of the Holy Spirit than would the ensemble of the group! One should, then, be well convinced that the expert, as an expert, is not there to resolve the question, but only to clarify it; the question, to the end of the deliberation, should remain a question. It is not the experts, it is the Holy Spirit who must "guide" the group "toward all truth" (John 16:13).

These precautions taken, what are the data to be assembled?

1. Signs of the times

Those familiar with the Exercises know that God speaks, here and now, through events, through persons, through the Church, through inspirations from within and without. Like the prophecies and miracles in the Bible, there are signs which point the way for our action, and our path is marked by them. Of course, all the signs are ambiguous and do not at once reveal their meaning. One of the plagues of the Church is those Christians who, misusing the expression "signs of the times", an expression highlighted since the Council, believe that they recognize the action of the Holy Spirit through the spectacles of their social and political prejudices... Signs need to be interpreted, and this will be precisely the purpose of the further discernment. Nonetheless, one must first make an inventory of those that relate to the question posed.

One will then ask oneself questions such as these : what are the needs, the expectations and the aspirations of people today? In what are we, and in what is our question, concerned by them? What contemporary events, in all areas, have a relationship to the question? What intellectual movements, what currents of thought in the cultural atmosphere that we breathe, serve as a basis for it? What, in the world as in ourselves, is a stimulus or a

brake to the progress that we seek?...

This inquiry is crucial. By failing to make it, the group risks deliberating about a question that is without concern for the world where our action must be carried out. It can in fact happen that such an inquiry reveals that the question is useless, and precious time will have been gained! Or again, that the question is badly formulated, and time will be gained if the group agrees to take the time to reformulate it. There is no spectacle more distressing than to see men of action pouring out their energies discussing useless questions, of value only to fill the void of conversation at the beach or in the drawing-room. And it is looking at the world and at people that obliges us to ask serious questions and to ask them in a serious way.

An exercise can be suggested to help acquire this awareness: a reading of the daily paper by each of the participants followed by an exchange about this reading. For the way in which we read the paper is indicative of the way in which we read the world. The exchange will bring to light this diversity and will draw attention to aspects of the news that some have perceived and others have not noticed. Each one will say what he has read, and why: because of habit, or a continuing or passing interest in this problem or that category or column, from curiosity, from a desire of confrontation, etc... He will tell the others too or the others will ask him what interpretation he gives to what he has read. Finally the group will seek to see how this article or news story relates to the question the group has posed.

2. Within the Context of Salvation

The world of Scripture too lets us look at things from God's viewpoint, as Ignatius suggests to us to do in the contemplation on the Incarnation: "See the persons one after another. First, those who are on the face of the earth, in such great diversity in dress and in manner of acting: some white, some black; some at peace, some at war; some weeping, some laughing; some well, some sick; some coming into the world, some dying, etc. Secondly, see and consider the three Divine Persons, seated on the royal

throne of the divine majesty; they look down upon the whole surface of the earth, and on all nations..." (Spir. Ex., 106). And further on: "Listen to what the Divine Persons say : let us work the redemption of the human race" (107). This viewpoint of God, sought in prayer, is fitting for orienting the question in its more apostolic sense and for giving it its most universal dimension.

One can, all through the discernment but more especially during this preliminary research, take up the great meditations of the Exercises. That of the Principle and Foundation, to begin with, in its first part, to consider the ultimate end of the human expectations and aspirations in relation with the question to be decided. Sin, considered under its collective aspect, so as to lay bare the evils in us and around us to which one hopes to afford some remedy. The Kingdom, to hear once again, through the appeals of men, the call of Jesus Christ. The Two Standards, to situate our question in the "camp" of Jesus Christ and to inscribe it within the framework of the Beatitudes.

A diligent reading of the Gospel too will furnish elements that will be needed for the experience. This does not mean to provide citations that would serve as arguments for or against, but to renew oneself intimately in the spirit of the Gospel and the perspective of universal salvation.

Evidently it is prayer that will let participants acquire this attitude: continuous prayer, and special periods of prayer. It is not a matter of looking to prayer to reveal the content of the correct decision. The "will of God" that discernment is seeking will be given as the mature fruit of the prayer and the reflection, of all and of each, linked together. Before their meetings in which they exchanged with each other, the companions of 1539 gave time to such prayerful reflection: "Throughout the day, we were accustomed to ponder and meditate on these reasons and to prayerfully search into them"(Deliberation, no. 2). It was, in effect, a confronting of their own reflections with the Word of God.

It is equally important that this prayer be shared. By this we mean not only sharing the results of the prayer

but sharing the prayer as well. When one knows that he with whom he differs about the proposition has prayed over it, because one has heard him do so, it becomes more difficult to reject what he says. This does not mean that one at once accepts the proposition of the other, but that one respects it and, by that fact, relativizes his own. This is the sense of the "presupposition" of the Exercises: "Every good Christian is more ready to put a good interpretation on another's statement than to condemn it as false. If an orthodox construction cannot be put on a proposition, the one who made it should be asked how he understands it. If he is in error, he should be corrected with all kindness. If this does not suffice, all appropriate means should be used to bring him to a correct interpretation, and so defend him from error" (Spir. Ex., 22).

"In the context of community discernment", writes J. C. Futrell, "this preamble would mean that all should presuppose that the proposal of another is based upon true dedication to the scope of their common vocation, rather than to condemn it as improperly motivated, until and when there is proof to the contrary. In the concrete this means that all must really listen to one another's proposals as each man himself intends them, and that all must make the sincere effort to understand one another's feelings and attitudes" (1)

To assure these dispositions, shared prayer seems all the more effective as our age is living through a period in which, as at the time of Babel, all other language sadly appears to have failed. It no longer is enough to speak the same language in order to be understood by others. A word is hardly launched into the marketplace when it becomes as faded as an old coin on which can no longer distinguish the image. Other means of communication must then be found. Prayer, even if it is made up of words, expresses more than words, for, even before the words come to the lips, communion is established.

(1) "Ignatian Discernment", in Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, Vol. II, No. 2 (April, 1970, St. Louis), p. 62.

3. Reviewing What Has Happened Till Now

There is no question, however new, that is not linked with the past. There is no decision that does not effect a passage between a before and an after. Just as a personal decision, so too a community discernment must exercise the memory of the group and assemble the facts to date.

This necessity is based first of all on a faith conviction. The God of the Bible walks with humankind through history and supports them "with a mighty hand and with out stretched arm". The Psalms never stop recalling for us the "marvels of God" that took place in the past - the creation of the world, the flight from Egypt and the passage through the sea - to assure the people that what God has already done, he will do again, "for his great love is without end" (Psalm 136). St. Ignatius takes up the same theme at the beginning of the Contemplation to Gain Love : "recall to mind the blessings of creation and redemption, and the special favors received. Ponder with great affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much he has given me of what he possesses, and finally, how much, as far as he can, the same Lord desires to give himself to me according to his divine design"(Spir. Ex.,234). The constant activity of God in the past is a guarantee of his action in the future. And if it is true that a spiritual decision will involve us in an action that does not rest on human strength alone, then the group must feel sure that God will be at work in the action to be taken in the future as he has been in the past.

The memory of the group should be exercised too in making sure that the question being asked is well rooted in its own history. Otherwise it would feel no concern about it, it would be a dream without solid links to reality. Even if the decision would commit the group to a new path, these roots will play an important role in the discernment, insuring that the decision will be inscribed within the framework of its historical continuity. One sees this clearly in the way that the companions of 1539 responded positively to their first question : "In as much as our most kind and affectionate Lord had deigned to gather us together and unite us, men so spiritually weak and from such diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds,

we ought not split apart what God has gathered and united; on the contrary, we ought day by day to strengthen and stabilize our union, rendering ourselves one body" (Deliberation, No. 3). It is then by basing themselves on their past experience that they decided to unite into one body. The decision would, nevertheless, change radically their destiny : up till then they had been an informal group, they now became a "body", that is, an organism; an institution, a new religious order with its constitutions, its levels of authority, its organic ties... All the same, it was through basing themselves mainly on their past experience that they chose this new way. It means that, however deep changes may be, there is always a profound continuity.

For a group that is deliberating, then, it means assembling the facts of its history with regard to the question to be decided. How did this question germinate, as far back as one can perceive, and how did it mature to the point of requiring this deliberation? What events, what changes, led to the question being posed? These events can be within the life of the group, for example, the entry of new members or the departure of old ones. They can also be external, for example the political situation of the country or an intervention of the Church hierarchy, etc. One should ask how these events were received and interpreted not only by members of the deliberating group but also by others whom it may represent. There is need too to see whether the question is in contradiction with the texts which are the basis of the movement (for example, the General Principles of CLC), not to systematically eliminate it if such be the case - for the movement of life cannot be halted by texts-but to examine the problem more attentively and to foresee the possible consequences.

Finally, the history of the group forms part of a larger history, that of the People of God. Such questions, though they may appear absolutely new as far as the deliberating persons are concerned, have in reality historical roots that are deeper. Conversely, traditions that people take as being immemorial are sometimes of rather recent origin. The changes in the Church that followed the Council appeared revolutionary, if not a profanation, to some, when in fact they were a return to a more ancient tradition that recent customs had buried. For this exploration

into the distant past, the help of experts can be of help to the group and give to the question a more solid basis. The more that the response given is well-founded, the more it will be credible, above all if it is striking out on a new path.

This, then, is the data that the group needs to assemble as material for the discernment: the signs of the times, the perspective of universal salvation, a review of the past. Here we have limited ourselves to simply making an inventory of them, as complete as we could. Now the data needs to be classified. To return to the image of the scales, used by St. Ignatius with regard to the election (Spir. Ex., 179), what is now involved is to weight the two trays of the scales.

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VII

THE TRAYS OF THE SCALES

Starting from the data assembled in the foregoing step, it is now a matter of searching out the reasons that will weigh in one direction or other of the alternatives contained in the question. Since we already presented an example of a specific question, let us return to it as we initiate this new step of the deliberation: "In order that CLCs become sensitized to the struggle for liberation, is it preferable to promote political involvement, or ought we to search for another means?" In this example, since the other means is not specified, there is no need to occupy oneself with it. One will limit oneself to searching for: 1) the reasons in favor of a political involvement; 2) the reasons against such an involvement. If the other means has been specified, then it should be included in the question. For example: "In order that CLCs etc., is it preferable to promote political involvement, or is it better to organize formation sessions?" In this case, it will be necessary to make four lists of reasons : 1) for political involvement; 2) against political involvement; 3) for formation sessions; 4) against formation sessions. We will see, by following the model of the Deliberation of 1539, how to weight the trays of the balance and how to do the weighing.

Searching for the Reasons

The way in which the companions of 1539 searched for the reasons against obedience and in favor of it merit the closest attention. We read in paragraph 7: "...we arranged to assemble, all prepared, on the following day; each one was to declare those disadvantages which could be brought against obedience." And further on: "on the next day we argued for the opposite side of the question, each one put-

ting before the group all the advantages and good consequences of such obedience which he had drawn from prayer and meditation."

This text calls for two remarks : 1) it distinguishes clearly the time for presenting the reasons against and that for presenting the reasons for; 2) all and each of the participants search for and propose in turn the reasons against, and later all do the same for the reasons for. This method is quite different from the usual way in which we pursue our discussions.

In discussions generally, each one has his point of view, at least those who express an opinion. And the natural tendency is to defend one's point of view with arguments and with eloquence. The aim is to make the opinion that one holds prevail over the other by attracting to it more of those who hesitate about it or oppose it. Whether one takes a table conversation or a parliamentary assembly, it is more or less the same process. If the debate is organized, a person takes the floor in an order determined by the presiding officer. A speaker gives his conference, prepared in advance, and without taking account of what the man before him has just said. At least it takes place in an orderly way. When the discussion is a free one, one person takes the floor to contradict at once the proposal of his predecessor. Sometimes it becomes a duel between two, and the others are reduced to "noting the points won" by each, with no opportunity to give their opinion. Or again, everyone talks at the same time, and what was a friendly discussion degenerates into a verbal boxing match in which one sometimes has the impression that every kind of blow is fair... At the end, one no longer knows who said what, one only knows that this one is "for" and that one "against", and that, anyhow, no one has changed his opinion. A vote is taken and it is the majority that decides, not in the least disturbed by the opposing arguments.

It is evident that, among the companions of 1539, some were in favor of taking a vow of obedience to one among them, and others were not. Otherwise, they would not have had to pass "many days without hitting upon any satisfactory resolution of our uncertainty." (Deliberation, 5, at the beginning). They had then, as we all do, each his

own idea about the question. But, in a spiritual deliberation, it is not a matter of knowing who is for and who is against, and why. It is a matter of seeking together "the will of God", that is, an "opinion" that is external, in a way, to that of each one and even to that of the group. Of course one needs to modify the meaning of the term "external", for the will of God will not in fact be imposed on the group from the exterior, as a dictate; nor will it count as an additional vote when the ballots are opened! It will come from the group itself, from its research and its sharing. It will be the fruit of a freedom that, in each person and in the group taken together, has been truly liberated. But for that to happen, it is necessary that the group submit to a method of work which assures the maximum of liberty in what each expresses.

This method is so simple that one is amazed it is not ordinarily used. Since it is a matter of searching for a truth that is, to begin with, not in me nor in the other nor in the group, and the aim is not to achieve the triumph of one of the viewpoints, the reasons are to be examined as objectively as possible. That is, all will first devote themselves to searching for the reasons "against", and use all the time needed to bring them into evidence. Then, at a later time which is distinct, the same will be done for the reasons "for". It is important to note here that, even if I personally am "for", I will, like the others, search for objections against the proposal. On the other hand, even if I personally am "against", I will, on the later occasion, look for the positive arguments.

It is doubtless for this reason that the method is not ordinarily put into practice. For the aim of this method is not just to put order into a debate. It has a spiritual significance, it even expresses a fundamental law of the spiritual life, which St. Ignatius expressed thus: "For everyone must keep in mind that in all that concerns the spiritual life his progress will be in proportion to his surrender of self-love and of his own will and interests." (Spir. Ex., 189) Now, my personal opinion, is it not above all the expression of my self-love, of my will and interests? The fact of looking for the reasons that are not in accord with my opinion begins to make me go out of myself. Thus, the method proposed is liberating, not only because

it allows for the greatest liberty of expression, but even more, because it obliges the participants to become liberated from their prejudices and conditioned outlook.

As regards the reasons themselves, they are to be looked for among the data assembled in the preceding step. One finds them in the several examples mentioned by the chronicler of the Deliberation of 1539 (no. 7). Signs of the times : among the objections made to obedience, there is singled out the fact that the religious life in its classical form is, at the moment, poorly regarded by Christians (one may recall the sarcasms of Rabelais!). Perspective of salvation : obedience, it is said, will reduce the number of candidates, whereas "the harvest is very great but few true laborers are found." On the other hand, obedience will assure apostolic effectiveness, unity and the preservation of the group. Links with past history: in noting their recent history, the companions observe that the choice of obedience, which will make them enter a specific structure, may oblige them to submit themselves to a rule of religious life already in existence, that of St. Benedict, for example or another, from the fact that Rome is showing itself reticent about new foundations; and in that case, they say, "all our desires will be frustrated." But on the other hand, if there is no authority in the group, it will not be able to maintain its existence, and "this would be in conflict with our basic intent." Etc...

In practice, it will help to proceed in the following manner. During a period of personal reflection, each one will list the reasons "against" that come to his mind. Then when the group comes together, each one in turn can express his reasons. They will then be written on a large poster of paper, visible to all. Later, the same will be done for the reasons in favor. This order can also be reversed without difficulty, the essential being that the two periods be separate. When this operation is finished, people have in front of them two lists (or four, if the question offers two choices). Now the time has come to weigh the reasons.

The Weight of the Reasons

Paragraph 8 of the Deliberation of 1539 begins like this : "During many days, from this side and that, we

worked over a mass of data related to the resolution of our problem; we examined and weighed the more forceful and important reasons..."

In effect, in spiritual discernment it is not the number of reasons that weights the scales! It is not enough then to enumerate the reasons, they must also be weighed, that is, those without value must be eliminated, so as to keep only "the more forceful and important" ones. This can be an ordeal for the deliberating group if it is done honestly, for the weight of the reasons involves an examination that will "search hearts." So it is necessary that it be done in a climate of prayer, of truth and of charity.

Each member of the group has then before him, not now the reasons that he had discovered personally, but all the reasons of the group. He, as well as the others in their turn, must now express himself as to which of them he sees as more important and which he views as rather trifling. At this moment will surface the "movements" that propel one in one direction or the other, and that the discernment will penetrate to new depths. For not only does one say which reasons he thinks should be kept and which omitted. One also needs to say why. And the group should help each one to express the reasons for his preferences.

To take again the example already cited, suppose that among the reasons "against" political involvement, this has been mentioned: "Political involvement of members will shatter the unity of our communities." One of the participants judges that this reason is the most important. The group then should ask him why he thinks this to be true. He replies by developing a conception of CLC centered on the spiritual assistance it brings to its members while showing complete regard for their freedom. If the group presses its challenge, he will be asked what is meant by "complete regard for their freedom". Then perhaps will come to light things that had not been expressed: a horror of conflict, keeping reserved a certain sector of life, and specifically that of attachment to personal interests or those of family or social class... Another, bringing up among the reasons "for" the expression of Pius XII as to politics being "a superior form of charity", may want to give to this reason an obligatory character. But if one

asks him how he conceives political involvement by CIO members, perhaps he will be led to recognize that there is question here of only one type of involvement, his own, and so that there is in him a certain intolerance or narrowness that is in contradiction to the outlook of Pius XII.

One should not misinterpret the purpose of this challenge : it is not a cross-examination to lead people to admit things. It is simply the help that the members of the group can furnish each other in discovering the hidden source of the reasons that we advance to justify our personal options. It helps the group as such too in the measure that its members, in trying to cast light on the reasons recognize that the truth which they search for together cannot spring from the conflict of their opposing motivations, but rather from the effort they make to "rid themselves of all inordinate attachments" (Spir. Ex., 1), and hand themselves over entirely to the light and the touch of the Spirit. Then, whatever be the number and the weight of the reasons, the group will find itself, when facing them, in the dispositions required, according to St. Ignatius, for making a decision: "I should be like a scales in balance, without leaning to either side, that I might be ready to follow whatever I perceive is more for the glory and praise of God our Lord" (Spir. Ex., 179).

The Conversion of the Intellect

This equilibrium of the scales, which is Ignatian indifference, represents the conversion of the intellect. It does not of necessity mean a change of opinion, but the humble recognition of the fact that our opinion is not the fruit of pure reason, divorced from all sentiment and all bias.

When a group deliberates with a view to a decision that will commit it to a new action, one of the sentiments that appears with great force is fear, more specifically the fear of losing something and above all the fear of losing oneself, the anguish of dying. It is not a bad thing to feel this fear at certain moments. It is the sign of the eruption of the Lord in us, by means of the words and challenges of others, and this cannot but have effects. The Gospel of Mark especially, gives testimony to this

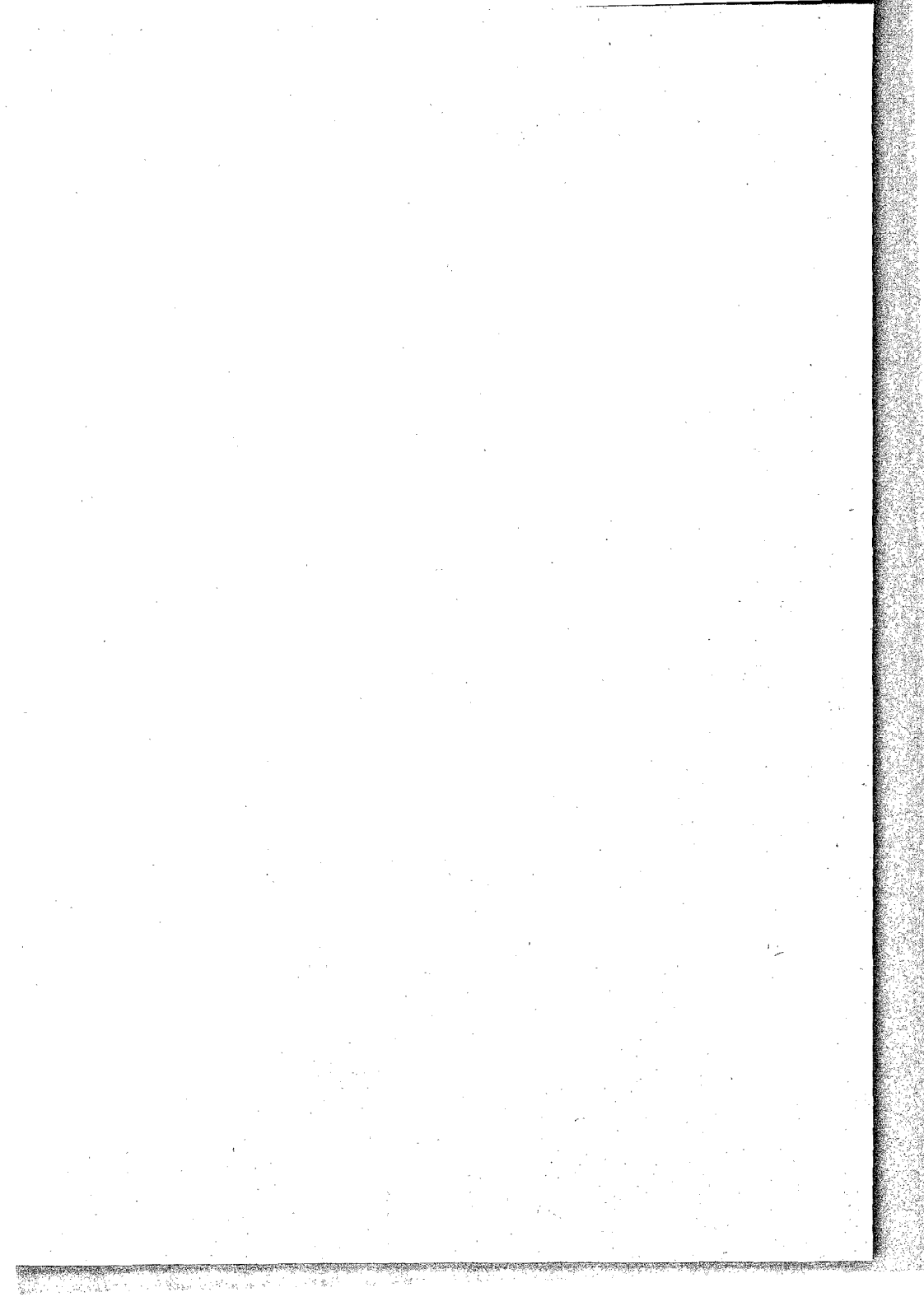
fright which at first seizes those who find themselves in the presence of Jesus. In a community deliberation, it is the sign that the group has gone beyond the intellectual level that our discussions are so often limited to. One will not have this experience, in fact, if the question and the stakes involved in it have not passed "from the head to the heart."

Still, it would be unhealthy if the fear were to become paralyzing: disturbance and restlessness are the manifestations of the adversary who wants to block the spiritual progress of the persons and of the group. That is why this time of discernment needs to be lived in personal and communitarian prayer, and in a prayer oriented towards confidence, so as to receive "courage and strength,... removing all obstacles so that the soul goes forward in doing good." (Spir. Ex., 315). Thanks to this confident prayer, the participants come to "make themselves indifferent" even to the fear itself, and it is then that the reasons can be weighed according to their true value.

In practice, just as one has put up two lists for all to see of the reasons "for" and "against", so here two other sheets can be prepared on which will be inscribed the results of this "weighing" of the reasons, one giving the evaluation of the reasons "for", the other that of those "against". These four lists will be the synthesis of the work accomplished. It is in considering these with the light given by God that progress will be made toward the decision.

But before that, we should retrace our steps a bit, to consider those "accidents en route" that can happen in a deliberation, as was the case in 1539 (see Deliberation, nos. 4, 5, 6).

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VIII

THE BREATH OF THE SPIRIT

In reading the account of the Deliberation of 1539, one notices that the two questions posed in succession were resolved in quite different ways. While the first (see no. 3) seems to have taken place in an atmosphere of lightness and unanimity, with regard to the second it required much time, fatigue and laborious research following a moment of crisis in the group. We need to pause here in the face of this difference, so as to see how the rules for election and the rules for the discernment of spirits set forth in the Exercises (Nos. 175-188 and 314-336) can be applied in a community deliberation.

Consolation and unanimity

Paragraph 3 of the Deliberation makes no mention of the discussions between the posing of the first question and its resolution. But one gathers that a certain period of time passed between the two: "In the end we established the affirmative side of the question." Then are given the positive reasons motivating the decision.

It seems that one here is in the presence of what St. Ignatius terms the "second time" of election. The first, we remember, is an immediate movement which has the effect that "the devout soul, without hesitation or the possibility of hesitation, follows what has been manifested to it." (Spir. Ex., 175). The very fact that there was deliberation ordinarily excludes this case for a group, although on Pentecost Day the Apostles were moved in this way, and we have the time when the adage "the voice of the people in the voice of God" justified the spontaneous election of St. Ambrose as bishop of Milan.

The second time of election is not too exceptional in a group that is deliberating. "When much light and understanding are derived through experience of desolations and consolations and discernment of diverse spirits", say the Exercises (176). It is such an experience which seems to have dictated the decision relative to the first question of the companions of Ignatius. In fact, the principal reason that they advance is but a summarizing of their past experience: "in as much as our most kind and affectionate Lord had deigned to gather us together and unite us, men so spiritually weak and from such diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, we ought not split apart what God has gathered and united; on the contrary, we ought day by day to strengthen and stabilize our union, rendering ourselves one body." Behind these words we must read the history of ten years of companionship, from the day in September of 1529 when Inigo de Loyola walked into the room at Collège Sainte-Barbe where Peter Faber and Francis Xavier were already. One needs to recall the spiritual gatherings on Parisian Sundays in the gardens of the Carthusians at Vauvert, and that radiant morning of August 15, 1534, when the first seven companions bound themselves together to Jesus Christ the Lord for a common project. And their time spent together at Venice, and their arrival at Rome in the spring of 1538, a year before the deliberation.

In reviewing this history, they perceived the evidence of the consolations that God had given them to persevere in their enterprise. Human sentiments enter into the picture: the shared friendship and the fraternal joy that the early accounts bear witness to, a joy and dynamism that impels them to undertake things and to set out, as the Virgin Mary after the Annunciation or the Apostles after the Resurrection. And all of it based on an "increase of faith, hope and love" (Spir. Ex., 316), felt in the form of confidence, of a desire and will "to undertake great and difficult enterprises."

After the "reading" of these signs drawn from their history, they take the decision to strengthen and stabilize their unity by forming one body. Their friendly companionship thus ran the risk of suffering somewhat because of the structure become necessary. But the decision is in the line of their goal, which was never to form a group of

friends, but to place themselves at the service of the Church for the love of God and men. There one sees the continuity between the before and the after of their decision, as later events will show. The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus will be written taking their start from this fundamental intuition : to be united, to form a body so as to assure a greater effectiveness to their mission everywhere in the world, but above all there where are found the most urgent needs and where the most universal and lasting good is to be hoped for.

As to the way in which this decision was taken, it is in fact the method that Ignatius preferred because it was for him the first way he experienced. When convalescing at Loyola, he already found within himself the movement of the "spirits", beginning from the sentiments that he experienced. The criterion is that of consolation, such as it is defined by the Exercises and which, in a community deliberation, ordinarily manifests itself by unanimity. In effect, just as in a personal election, the ultimate criterion is peace and joy, signifying the end of the struggle between adverse forces, the unification of the heart and the concentration of desire toward a concrete realization, so in the group, when one senses that the discussions and sometimes the battles have come to an end, resolved in an accord which is not a synthetic movement based on false compromise but a decision for action in which all find themselves and are ready for action, it is in the end the same criterion of consolation... The group recognizes that the decision has been given to it as a grace.

Nevertheless, except in the case where it is "consolation without cause" and so a sign of the direct action of the Creator (Spir. Ex., 330) of the sort produced in the first time of election, it is not always sure that the consolation comes from God. That is why a confirmation will be needed, as the writer of the Deliberation indicates at the end of the paragraph: 3: "nothing at all that has been or will be spoken of originated from our own spirit or our own thought; rather, whatever it was, it was solely what our Lord inspired and the Apostolic See confirmed and approved." We will need to return to this double confirmation, internal and external.

The Time of Desolation

The second part of the Deliberation of 1539 unfolded in a way very different, and it began rather badly.

The question posed was one that logically followed directly from the first response : since they had decided to form a body, what shape were they going to give it, what would be the spinal column that would maintain the cohesion of the body? More specifically, would the obedience of the members of the body to one among them be this vertebral column? Although secondary, the question was important for making the first decision concrete. But the further one moves on from the goal toward specifying the means, the more difficult agreement becomes.

In the case at hand, there were without doubt several possible means: the decision for obedience is not an obligatory one, and at the moment of deciding the companions will say only "it would be advantageous", and not : "it is necessary." On the other hand, obedience raised serious objections, as one sees in Paragraph 7. Besides the fact that for the companions, the practice was novel. No doubt, in the great monastic tradition, they had practiced some obedience to another among them in turns, but with a view to overcoming their own will, without thinking of making obedience a principle of government. The decisions had been taken jointly.

The prospect of such a change and the objections that it raised provoked in the group a sort of obstacle or "block". Was there a confrontation? The text does not say. Rather it was an impasse, bringing on discouragement : "we had persisted in prayer and thought for many days without hitting upon any satisfactory resolution of our uncertainty..." (Deliberation, 5). They no longer saw clearly, and this phenomenon brings with it other difficulties that affect the whole person. This state is not dissimilar to what St. Ignatius in the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits calls desolation : "I call desolation what is entirely the opposite(of consolation), as darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness arising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The

soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord" (Spir. Ex., 317). In trying to synthesize this description, one can speak of two dominant feelings in the desolation: 1) The feeling that the personality is dislocated, disintegrated; having no longer a landmark ("darkness of soul"), one is like a man newly blind, who lets himself be guided by multiple sensations without being able to find his way ("turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness arising from many disturbances and temptations"). Bumping into all the walls, he ends by losing confidence and turning in on himself without managing to find himself. 2) The other dominant feeling is that of separation: like Jesus at Gethsemani, one experiences a deathly isolation, as if separated from God and from the others. No one comes to our help, those on whom one was able to count are as if sleeping, and God is deaf.

A similar phenomenon can be produced in the group when the deliberation no longer advances because people no longer clearly see the way.

1) The group is dislocated and in process of disintegrating. To the "movements toward what is low and earthly" correspond surface reactions: natural sympathies or antipathies begin to come up again. One notices the formation of cliques, of pressure groups. Gatherings of knots of persons in the corridor, or of little groups apart, multiply, in which people try to build up a majority against a minority. Appeal is made to feelings and to emotions to gain a hearing. All of that stirs up "agitation" and disturbance: one gets fidgety, one loses interest in the assembly that begins talking about something else, for one senses that the real events are taking place in the wings. And as one realizes that all this disturbance is not advancing things, one loses confidence: "What good is this gathering? We have other things to do!" Often too, a certain aggressivity is unleashed against those who have convoked the assembly and organized the deliberation. Since someone must be at fault, one turns on the organizers and accuses them of having led the group into a blind alley and of having manipulated it...

2) The group and the members become isolated and separated. They had taken up the task with enthusiasm, hoping to resolve a problem each one had at heart. Even if an ac-

cord was not yet realized, all were ready to seek the way. And now each one finds himself alone. One's attempts to seek out the others fail, one by one, because people are no longer seeking to find the truth together, but rather each one only wants to make sure that his "truth" triumphs and to win votes, not hearts. And just as each member isolates himself, so the group becomes closed in its outlook. It loses sight of what had set it in motion, the desire to be of better service. It loses sight of the sense of the universal, which gave to the question its dimension of a world to be saved. Lost in the business of winning adherents, it no longer sees its mission...

Although they did not reach this point of dislocation and of separation, it was the danger that menaced the companions of 1539. But no doubt they remembered the advice of the Exercises: "Though in desolation we must never change our former resolutions, it will be very advantageous to intensify our activity against the desolation." (Spir. Ex., 319). That is what they will do.

The Courage to Halt

"We can insist more upon prayer, upon meditation, and on much examination of ourselves..." What is aimed at here is a restructuring, a reunification of the person. The evaluation and the decisions recounted in paragraphs 5 and 6 of the Deliberation of 1539 envisage the same goal for the group: "When we had persisted in prayer and thought for many days without hitting upon any satisfactory resolution of our uncertainty, we put our hope in the Lord and started to cast about for better ways of working out such a resolution." (no. 5).

More striking than the means they will adopt is the courage they showed to halt. Nothing is easier, when one has made a turn, than to keep on going. Even if one is dissatisfied with everything and everybody, it is the easy way out and one ends by taking a certain perverse pleasure in it. This was not the case with the companions. Nonetheless, it took courage for them to control their impatience to resolve things and to put themselves again in a disposition of openness and listening. And so there began a new deliberation within the deliberation, in order to find

their way again.

At first they thought of radical solutions: a retreat in a hermitage, a delegation of three or four to continue the deliberation. They settled on a third solution, one that is quite in line with the recommendation of the Exercises: "...not to change our former resolutions." They did so for two reasons. The first ("to forestall rumors") highlights the feeling of suspicion that prevailed in certain Roman circles with regard to a group that broke with tradition. The second reason seems more applicable today: it is the primacy of the mission that they are at work on. If they were tempted to lose sight of the goal proposed, now they are back on the road.

But to remain at Rome, is that not to go back to the place where they were? No, for now it is a matter of taking means which will "change themselves", and that in a forceful way. "There was a second line of thought which we set in motion for the sake of resolving the impasse regarding obedience. This was to propose the following spiritual preparations for each and every member of the whole group." The dispositions mentioned are typically Ignatian and are valid in any such situation for any community deliberation.

1) Indifference. "Each one would ready himself beforehand, would take time for prayer, Masses, and meditation in order to strive for joy and peace in the Holy Spirit regarding obedience, laboring as much as he could to have a predilection for obeying rather than commanding, when the consequent glory of God and the praise of his majesty would be equal." This resolution supposes that the companions had laid bare the presupposition or bias that gives birth to supposedly objective reasons. Perhaps it involved a certain repugnance to obeying someone who, up till then, had been an equal, or simply the secret desire to command others. To conquer this repugnance or this disordered desire, the only way was to have recourse to prayer oriented in the opposite direction: "When we feel an attachment opposed to actual poverty or a repugnance to it," say the Exercises, "when we are not indifferent to poverty and riches, it will be very helpful in order to overcome the inordinate attachment, even though corrupt nature rebel against it, to beg our Lord in the colloquies to choose us to serve

him in actual poverty. We should insist that we desire it, beg for it, plead for it, provided, of course, that it be for the service and praise of the Divine Goodness" (157). This is the "slight touch on the scales" necessary to re-establish the equilibrium of indifference.

2) Respect for Each Person. "None of the companions would communicate with any other about this matter at issue or inquire about his reasoning on it. The point of this preparation was to prevent anyone from being persuaded by another and, therefore, biased more toward obedience or the contrary. This way each would desire as more advantageous only what he derived from his own prayer and meditation." Here it is a matter of eliminating corridor conversations where intrigues are hatched, where pressure groups or forging of majorities are operative. Discernment is done first of all in the soul and the conscience of each one before God, and then one brings to light the reasons found and the movements experienced.

3) Taking the Distance Needed for Freedom. "Each one would think of himself as a stranger to our group who would have no expectation of joining it. Thinking this way he would escape being carried by his emotions more to one opinion or judgment; rather, as if a stranger, he would speak his thought to the group." In the same way, Ignatius advises that in a personal election "one represent to myself a man whom I have never seen or known" and "consider what I would tell him to do and choose" (Spir. Ex., 185. Just so, in a community discernment, it seems necessary to take some distance with regard to the group and so to create the "space for freedom" where it becomes possible to consider the question in all serenity.

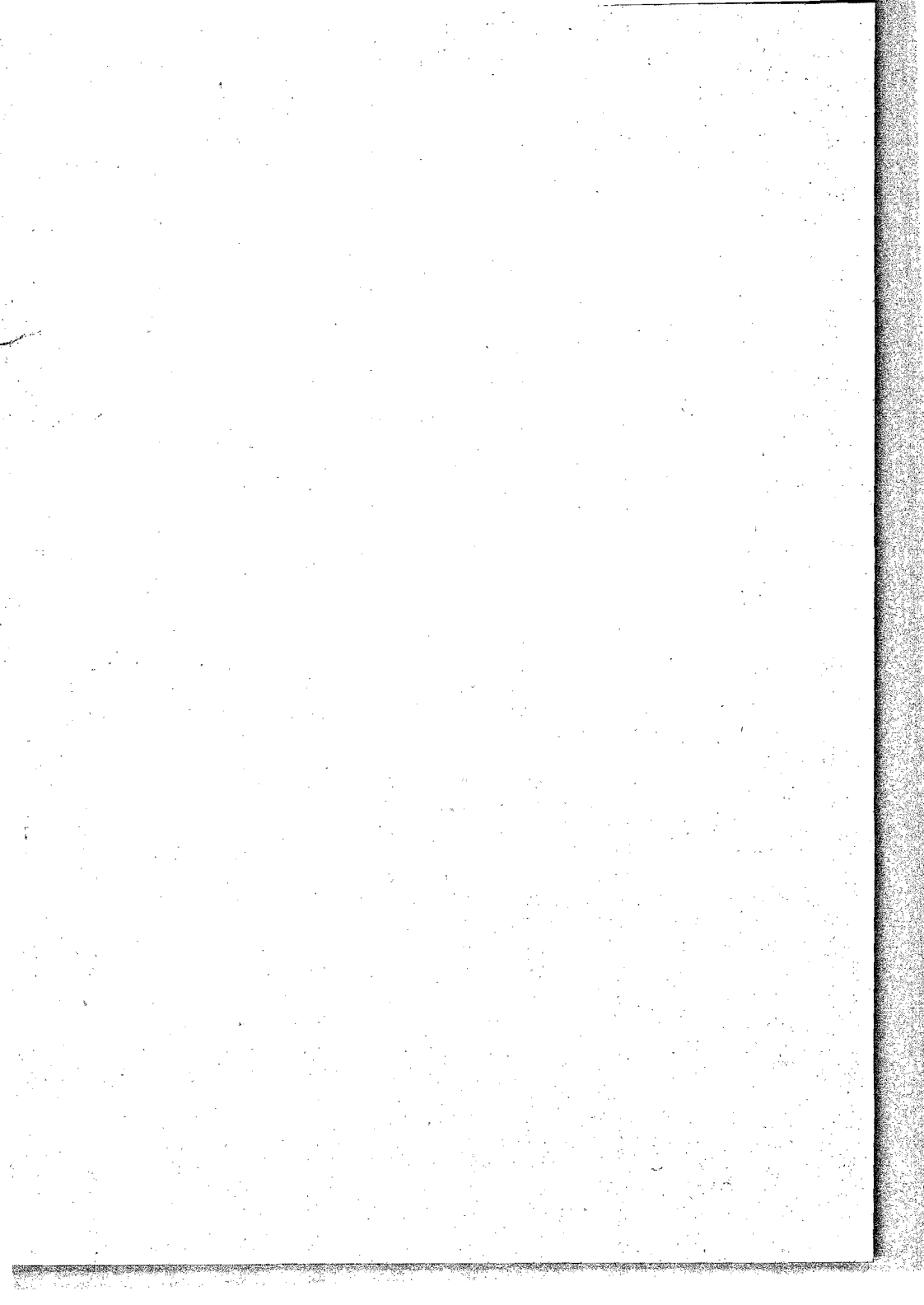
These provisions will no doubt surprise those who, perhaps too quickly, think that light comes from dialogue and not from personal reflection, from confrontation with others and not from interior debate. These arrangements might seem to them, in a community framework, to be marked by an individualism that does not correspond to the method of the deliberation, nor even to the pedagogy of the Exercises which, they would say, is based not only on one's relation to God but also on communication with the person giving the Exercises and guiding the retreatant.

On this matter, there are two remarks to make. The first is that these provisions were taken precisely at the point when the group became incapable of dialoguing fruitfully, and found itself blocked in its path precisely because of the lack of indifference of persons and the lack of freedom in the group. They have as their goal to put an end to the crisis by remedying these faults. The second remark is valid even outside the time of crisis : in order that the group exist, and for the good of the group itself, the persons making it up must be truly free, for only in this way can they be open to the Holy Spirit. The reorientation of the group is achieved by the reorientation of the persons making it up. What, in effect, is one looking for - a man or a worm? Free beings or puppets? The fact that the persons took hold of themselves again, face to face with God and their vocation, made it possible for the isolation in which they had been enclosed to end, and so to overcome the second effect of the desolation.

This is in fact what happened for the companions, as we saw in the preceding chapter. It now remains to see how, in this equilibrium of indifference, they worked toward the decision.

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IX

THE WEIGHT OF GLORY

The events of the deliberation moved toward their conclusion when the participants arrived at indifference, as far as possible, with regard to the alternatives proposed in the question. They made an inventory of all the reasons against, examined them and evaluated them. They sought, by themselves and with each other, through prayer and challenging of each other, the origin of the motions that prodded or attracted them in one direction or the other. Perhaps they experienced within themselves and as a group very intense moments of consolation or of desolation. While guarding against drawing immediate conclusions from these, they nonetheless took note of the fact and, in the case of the desolation, took the necessary steps to meet it. The reorientation of the persons led to a reorientation and reunification of the group, and we see them ready, as on the first day, to find "some unobstructed way" (Deliberation, 1). They are now, in the face of the data furnished by the reasons and the movements experienced, and that stemming from the history of their own lived experiences, like the needle, the pointer, of a scales.

Indifference does not mean that they had renounced their opinions nor that they had totally erased their passions. Supposing that this were possible, would it even have been effective to do so? No decision can be taken except as the result of a personal judgment and cannot become operative unless it is strongly felt as the fruit of a dominating passion. What indifference does is to achieve, practically and in so far as possible, a double disposition:

1. Each one is, in his heart, prepared not to will this or

that so long as he has not felt that it is the greater glory of God which requires this or that.

2. Each one is ready, with reference to the group, to make his own - even against his own judgment - the decision that will come out of the group and, following that, to bend every effort to carry out the decision.

In the end, it is the weight of the glory of God that will make heavier one of the trays of the scales, bringing the participants face to face with the cross of Christ where the ultimate judgment is pronounced by a decision that is based on love.

The Glory of God

"For the greater glory of God." We know the formula, dear to St. Ignatius, and which the Society of Jesus has chosen as its motto: "Ad maiorem Dei gloriam." It does not pretend to add something to God, but it is the moving force behind a human action that aims to make known to a greater number of persons who is the God of Jesus Christ and what his design of salvation is. It summarizes the first words of the Our Father: "May you be recognized as God, may your Kingdom come, may your will be done", in the measure that you will to choose us to accomplish this design.

The Exercises evoke this perspective constantly, and above all as the election approaches:

- "to choose what is more for the glory of his divine Majesty" (152)
- "whenever the praise and glory of the divine Majesty would be equally served" (167)
- "be ready to follow whatever I feel to be more for the glory of God our Lord" (179)
- "beg God our Lord to deign to move my will, and to bring to my mind what I ought to do in this matter that would be more for his praise and glory" (180)
- "consider what I would tell him to do and choose (a man whom I do not know) for the greater glory of God our Lord" (185)
- "let him desire and seek nothing except the greater praise and glory of God our Lord as the aim of all he does" (189)

Being familiar with such expressions, the companions of 1539 return to them when they envisage the ultimate goal of their deliberation: "offer ourselves as a holocaust to our God, in whose praise, honor and glory we would yield our all" (Deliberation, 1).

Let us single out two points in this way of speaking:

1) The Use of the Comparative. "Greater glory of God", and "more". The glory of God, like all the divine attributes, is something absolute: one can neither add to nor subtract from it. The comparative only has to do with the human action oriented toward the glory of God, and to its results, and these are always relative and contingent. It is not without value, at the moment of taking a decision, to formulate it explicitly, so as to recall that the decision is always in the order of a means, and that one must not in any way arrest the dynamic of further movement, which may perhaps require that this decision, taken at a given moment, be called in question. While recognizing that it is "here and now" valid, one will guard against giving it a formulation that would imply it is valid "always and everywhere." Statements of a decision in the form, "it is absolutely necessary...", "it will be absolutely necessary..." would be a mark of an arrogant spirit. With or without reason, they might give rise, among others, to the suspicion of narrowness, obduracy, a tendency to dominate, or self-sufficiency. Modestly, the companions of 1539 concluded that "it was advantageous..."

But this did not in the least exclude an unlimited desire. Quite the contrary. The meaning of the comparative is too to open a boundless perspective as regards the goal one is pursuing. If the glory of God is to be greater, and if that is the goal envisaged by the deliberation, it will appear that no means of attaining the goal will achieve it in the absolute sense. But among two means that may be offered, one will choose that which will allow one to "contribute more" to the glory of God. So, on the one hand, one will never be totally satisfied with the decision taken, because it is only a means still very distant from the goal. On the other hand, one will be happy to have chosen the means that will the better allow one to approach it.

2) The Verb "To Feel". "To follow whatever I feel to be more for the glory of God our Lord", says St. Ignatius. Is it then a feeling, personal or collective, that will be the basis of the decision? No, for the meaning of "to feel" in the Ignatian vocabulary is much more complex. It implies a knowledge, but, as J. C. Futrell says, "a felt knowledge, an affective, intuitive knowledge possessed through the reaction of human feelings to exterior and interior experience." (1) To put it simply, it is the result of the confrontation carried on all during the discernment between "the reasons" and "the movements".

Every man, if he is given the grace, can be laid hold of by the sentiment of the glory of God, as was Isaiah or Paul. Whether this feeling is accompanied by images or not, he can fall in adoration before the divine Majesty. It is a free gift that one cannot demand, but for which one can dispose oneself by prayer, a silent and attentive prayer in the face of the glory of God. This is in fact what sets the will in motion through the very intense emotion that it produces. This is what made Isaiah say: "Here I am. Send me!" (Is. 6: 8).

But for knowing in which direction to go when paths are divergent, it is also the glory of God which ought to be determining. Accustomed to using intellectual or sense criteria, we find it hard to imagine that the glory of God can serve as the criterion for a quite specific choice. But we should recall that here it is question of the glory of God on earth. That is why Ignatius presents a kind of equation which affords a very concrete criterion: "The more a good is universal," he says, "the more it is divine." In other words, the greater glory of God is the more universal good that one can achieve through an option. One should reread the passage of the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus (2), where one finds presented

(1) Op. cit., page 56.

(2) Part VII, nos. 622-626. Translation with introduction and commentary by George E. Ganss, S. J. (Institute of Jesuit Sources, St. Louis, Mo., U.S.A., 1970). This reading may disconcert a reader lacking the historical sense to judge a text evidently dated. In the socio-political con-
(Continued next page)

some principles of discernment for the choice of apostolic activity based on the place, the work to be done, the persons to send, the methods to employ and the duration of the activity. Under all these aspects the criterion is that of the more universal good looked for from the proposed enterprise, because for St. Ignatius, that is more "divine." And so, too, it is not merely quantitative: it is important to foresee the number of persons or institutions who will be reached, it is no less important to consider the quality of the good hoped for - for example, the criterion of duration (universality in time), or of the urgency calling for attack at a point where the need is more immediate so as to limit the expansion of an evil which otherwise would become more universal. The more universal, the more lasting, the more urgent, there are the criteria we have at hand to choose, between two paths, which one is the better. When confronted with the movements we have experienced about the glory of God in prayer, they will indicate with the greatest certitude what will contribute to the greater glory of God.

ception of Ignatius's time, the more universal good appeared to be more assured by "the spiritual aid given to important and public persons (whether laymen such as princes, lords, magistrates or ministers of justice, or whether they are clerics such as prelates)" or to "persons distinguished for learning and authority." (no. 622) In this context it should be admitted that the Society of Jesus has perhaps worked too much with the higher levels of society. The phrase immediately preceding would have allowed a progressive readjustment to historical changes: "The more universal the good is, the more it is divine. Therefore preference ought to be given to those persons and places which through their own improvement become a cause which can spread the good accomplished to many others who are under their influence or take guidance from them." The 32nd General Congregation of the Jesuits (1975) demonstrated a keener awareness of these changes by discerning the more universal good in the promotion of justice and in work with the poor, that is, in a general way with those are more the carriers of hope or are more bereft of it.

The Crucial Moment

The criterion of the more universal leads the participants of a spiritual deliberation to the place where is effected the universal judgment of Love, that is, to the Cross.

The image of the decision, this crossing of two lines that divides our time into a before and an after because it is traversed by a proposition to which we must answer yes or no, does it not have the form of a cross? And the decision, it too, is the result of a judgment made, not between good and evil, but between the proposal made and the response that we bring for a better service. As at the Cross, it is a judgment, a decision, of love.

What is involved at this crucial moment of the deliberation? To recognize in Jesus crucified the author of the universal good, in this place where Love "manifests itself in deeds rather than in words" and "consists in a mutual sharing of goods, for example, the lover gives and shares with the beloved what he possesses" (Spir. Ex., 230-231). In the Gospel, this crucial moment is that of the confession made at Cesarea - "You are Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16), which has its equivalent at the end of the 6th chapter of John: "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have known that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68).

On a day, we heard the call of God to recognize and to follow Jesus Christ. Like Peter, we no doubt hesitated when Jesus spoke of his Passion; perhaps we even denied him. But what once we had come to recognize stayed with us, for we have had the confirmation that this decision to know, love and follow Jesus Christ did not come from ourselves, but from the revelation of the Father: "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for it is not flesh and blood that has revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 16:17). This confirmation put us at peace: a certitude as to the rightness of our choice, within the framework of a total uncertainty as to the consequences of our choice. There was no question except to "follow", and yet we were confident.

The discernment we are in the process of making now,

consists in comparing our search of today with the sure peace that we experienced then, when first called. This peace has nothing to do with the tranquility of inertia, precisely because it is the fruit of this comparison, this confrontation. Every spiritual decision, in effect, is a Passover, a Paschal mystery, a passage through death so as to open oneself to a more abundant life. This is true of every human decision ; what one chooses eliminates what one did not choose. It sacrifices this other possibility which, without doubt, did not lack its attractiveness. This is why peace of heart, at the moment of the decision, can be accompanied by a very lively repugnance when one considers what one has sacrificed.

But there is no need to look for the cross elsewhere than in the decision itself. In particular, it is not to be sought by imagining the painful consequences of any decision. If there is need to have foreseen the consequences of a decision - and this work had to be done in discovering and weighing the reasons - there is no question of "imagining the worst." Such morbid musings would be opposed to the openness expected to the path by which Christ will lead us. The cross is, then, here and now, in the decision itself. It is that which dies in us when we adhere to that which God wills. It is that which dies in me when I adhere to the sentiment, the judgment, of the community. But it is also the fulness of life that comes when we hand ourselves over to that which is greater than we. Such is the election, according to St. Ignatius : a participation in the paschal mystery, in death and resurrection.

I die to myself when I hand myself over to the decision of the community, for the avenues of my self-love, my self-will and my own interests are from now on cut off. But I enter on a path where I am sure of being able to count on companions as they can count on me.

And the community dies to itself when it hands itself over to the service of men in order to accomplish more effectively the design of God, for it accepts not to place its end or goal within itself. But it achieves its fulfillment in the enterprise which it has decided upon, and participates to a greater degree in the life and the design of God.

That is why it is important that the members of the group, each and all, find themselves at the foot of the Cross at the moment of the decision. There they meet Christ who, in his passion, carried not so much the weight of his sufferings as the weight of the love and the glory of God.

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HOW CONCLUDE?

The group has expressed itself in prayer and work. It has allowed differences to come to light. In and through the arguments "for" and "against" freely presented, deeper motivations, whether permanent or recent, have manifested themselves at the same time as impulses more or less conscious, of which they have tried to discern together the origin. Conversions have taken place : reasons "against" have perhaps been able to be seen as reasons "for", or vice versa. Or again, the reasons of one of the participants have been assimilated by another who, up till then, rejected them...

From all that, the result has been that the content furnished by each one has become bit by bit the very matter of the deliberation, to the degree that people have "taken distance" from the question and that, if necessary, it has been reformulated. The history of the group, this too, has become the object of the deliberation, especially if it has passed through quite intense movements of joy or of discouragement. All of this, remarked and evaluated day by day in prayer and in the exchanges, has allowed the group, in and through what has been lived by each one, to become aware of the movements of the Spirit.

Let us note in this regard the importance of the daily evaluation, indispensable not only to take stock of things but, even more, as time went on, to review this history. It is not a matter of judging what was good or bad nor of finding where one may take satisfaction or where there is evidence of bad conduct, but to consider in the presence of the Lord how the day was lived by each one and by the group, and what were the interior movements, at-

tempting to discover their origin. This may go on to a judgment as to good or bad, but the essential is not there. The essential is to encourage each other mutually to continue, after having grasped anew that the grace of God is always at work to bring to its conclusion an enterprise that it willed, until the end be attained.

When can one judge that the end has been attained? It is difficult to specify this, at least if this has not been determined beforehand - something which, unhappily, occurs too often, when the deliberation has been scheduled within the limits of some days! Let us simply say that the deliberation reaches its end when this is "felt". It is a certain unanimity that is arrived at, not on the decision itself, but on the sentiment experienced that it is now possible to terminate it. And the group decides to do so. Such a decision ought not to depend on weariness or lassitude: it is better to finish before people are at the end of their energies! Nor should it hinge on the response given to the question. This may seem surprising, since it was the reason for coming together, but on reflecting, it is normal that people separate if they have decided not to take any decision. Then they stop, not because they are fatigued or discouraged, but because they have come to realize that there is still too much uncertainty, that there is need to take up again contacts with others and daily living in order to take more distance or to gather more information... And a gathering is planned for later on. This way of concluding is not a failure, and it is important to take care that no one looks on it as a failure. It is, on the contrary, when it occurs, a mark of courage, of lucidity and maturity, signs that the work undertaken has borne fruit, even if it is not the fruit one expected!

Unanimity

The Deliberation of 1539 on obedience clearly ends on a note of triumph, if not triumphalism! "During many days, from this side and that, we worked over a mass of data related to the resolution of our problem; we examined and weighed the more forceful and important reasons and took time as usual for prayer, meditation and reflection. By the Lord's help, we did at last, not (just) with a majority judgment but without a single dissenting voice, come

to this conclusion..." (Deliberation, 8). Very good! Only let us simply note that this perfect accord "lasted as long as last the roses": that, only a few days after, such or such a companion not having rallied to another decision of the group, it was necessary to stipulate that, "in all questions to be discussed, however important they be, the judgment of the majority must be abided by" (1). That means, to say the least, that the search for unanimity can be utopian. But it means more : that it is dangerous and contrary to the law of the Spirit to make of it a human law. This requires a brief explanation.

It would seem, on the contrary side, that if all the members of the deliberating group were faithful in listening to the Spirit, their final decision could not be other than unanimous. If not, does this not mean that they have failed to respect the process required by a deliberation? And should not one conclude that a deliberation which does not result in unanimity is a deliberation that has failed its end because of the fault of the participants?

In reality, this criterion of unanimity as a norm of whether a deliberation has succeeded, if it is set at the beginning of the process, runs the risk of falsifying the issue by depriving the participants of the freedom of expression necessary for all at the outset. "A certain obsession for unanimity", writes C. Viard, "quite probably might restrict this freedom, without taking into account that it may, whether one wills it or not, induce conduct capable of exerting pressure in one direction or the other. The will for agreement at all costs can run counter to the freedom and inventiveness of the Spirit that one claims to be furthering.

In addition, to make of unanimity an absolute rule is to too quickly suppose that problems have been resolved.

(1) Decisions of the Companions. The dates are important: the debate on obedience concluded before April 15, 1539. The Deliberation continued till June 24, and it was on May 23 that the rule of the majority was substituted for that of unanimity.

One too easily risks, under the cloak of spirituality, to scorn the realities, in a group, of human relations, and of the laws and exigencies they involve. At certain moments in its history, unanimity in a group can be a snare. Agreement at any price may win out through the too-easy denial of what divides a group, and will continue to divide it as much as before. It is the illusion of a cordial understanding that wants to bypass real tensions, or again the search for an immediate fusion in the euphoria of a warm embrace. It would varnish over any differences by an appeal to the Holy Spirit or by calling on our ecclesial unity. People will indeed be in accord, but they will not be in the truth. Perhaps a caricature? But it is important to guard against illusions, and not to stray from the true path of unanimity, which is not that of false pretences. The path to agreement, as experience shows, does not dispense with confrontations, nor with the labor of arriving at the truth, a truth more profound than the differences, which need to be recognized and accepted, not in order to be suppressed, but to be overcome." (2)

Unanimity, viewed from the start as a requirement for the success of a deliberation, is not only a snare but a danger to the liberty and truth of the process. The companions of 1539 quickly perceived this. The only unanimity to be demanded from the start consists in the common will to "discover some unobstructed way" to attain the goal that has been fixed by common accord.

This same aim, however, presumes that unanimity, while it cannot be a criterion, should be maintained as an objective and a hope. Sometimes it will be given, as it was to the companions with regard to obedience. Then the group will acknowledge it as a gift of the Spirit, and will give Him thanks. It will also see in it an interior confirmation, insufficient as we will see, but necessary under one form or other. Still, in the course of the deliberation, it will, during the evaluations, examine itself and ask whether any spiritual illusion or moral pressure may have led to this result which, in that case, as we have said, would be a false unanimity.

(2) Cahiers Vie Chrétienne, April, 1971 (no. 136), P. 17-18.

But not to attain unanimity does not mean ceasing to hope for it. A human decision, even one inspired by the Holy Spirit, is but a moment of our history. Just as, for an individual, the decision, for example, to enter religious life, does not necessarily imply the adhesion of one's whole being, and can be accompanied by a lively repugnance even extending to a sensible revulsion, in the same way the decision of a group to enter on a new path can and should be taken, if it has matured, without the agreement among the members of the group being unanimous. As a moment of our history, it is relative, the relationship being to its execution. Its confirmation will be in that execution, and in particular by the way in which all, including in their own way those who did not wish to adopt it, collaborate in it. The unanimity will be little by little realized in its execution. That is why before, during and after the deliberation, it does not cease to be an objective and a hope, for without this hope one would not undertake the enterprise.

Majority and Minority

If unanimity does not exist, there is necessarily a majority and a minority, and the group must search for the best fashion, depending on the circumstances, to arrive at a decision.

What comes spontaneously to mind is to proceed to a vote. It is the solution that apparently poses the fewest problems because it is simple. But it is to be feared that, for that very reason, it will not be easily adopted. That is why there is need to deliberate about this way of coming to a conclusion. In effect, it is not enough to take a vote and decide in favor of the majority. What would come of a decision arrived at by a very slim majority? It is the rule of democracy, people say! But we have seen, all through the process of a deliberation, that respect for persons takes precedence over respect for rules, even though rules may need to be established. One of them will be better assure this respect for persons: it is that, be for a vote is taken, the group specify, by prior agreement, what majority will be required. Certain decisions call for a simple majority, others a two-thirds majority. It is up to the group to deliberate about this and to decide. As for the decision to adopt the procedure of a

vote, this too should be reflected on in such a way that it inscribes itself within the spiritual movement that has carried the group along and does not break with this. If one has recourse to a vote solely "to make an end of it", this is but a makeshift solution which will in future harden oppositions and introduce relationships of power. Each one, after having prayed, should give his view about the procedure envisaged; and particular account should be taken of those who feel themselves in the minority.

Another way of proceeding can be adopted in certain cases, especially within communities that are more structured and have levels of authority, as religious communities or associations closely attached to the hierarchy: the group hands over the decision to the person or persons who are in charge. This procedure will not appear surprising except to those who persist in confusing spiritual discernment and democratic procedure! It can only be really understood in faith, and in the context of the guidelines St. Ignatius has given in the Exercises for "thinking with the Church" (Spir. Ex., 352-370). We are the Church, and in the Church those in charge, even when elected, receive from the Lord, who is "the Spouse", their own authority. It is then legitimate to have recourse to this procedure, which consists in passing on to them the final decision. But, even here, it would be absurd to do this without taking certain precautions that will inscribe this procedure within the framework and movement of the deliberation. In the first place, as for the vote, it is the entire group which should take this decision after examining the circumstances of the deliberation as it approaches its end. If, for example, one senses that the decision, although sufficiently matured, and although the necessity of its being made is recognized by all, will obtain only a slim majority, or that, it having been decided that a two-thirds majority is needed, this will not be obtained, the best solution will without doubt be to hand over the decision to the one or ones in charge. Still, it will be necessary that the group has deliberated about this procedure, so that it does not appear in its own eyes as failing in its responsibilities. On the other hand, it seems important that the one or ones in charge have themselves taken part in the deliberation as a whole, but without any privileged

position in the deliberating group. (3) It is especially not fitting that they act as facilitators or "animators" of the deliberation. And in every case, the decision to have recourse to this procedure should be motivated by the desire to maintain and to increase unity.

If, in the two ways of proceeding mentioned, such precautions have been taken, the deliberation has attained its objective, and the deliberating group has only to await the confirmation of their decision. This confirmation will partly be shown in the attitude of those in the "minority". That is why, at the moment of taking the decision, a careful attention should be given to them.

The Importance of the Minority

It is not a matter of "making them feel good", which would be a way of looking down on them. A spiritual deliberation rules out a "consensus movement" that rallies everyone but empties the decision of all content. "Let your word be yes if it is yes and no if it is no..." Nevertheless, what they have said in the course of the discussions, after having prayed and reflected like the others and with the others, was said under the influence of the Spirit, supposing that they themselves had "discerned the spirits" that were active within them. If it is true that the decision should express clearly the yes or the no to the question posed, the opinion of the minority can furnish nuances which will render its implementation more human and more respectful of freedom. On this score, that which they have said, sometimes in a negative fashion, ought to appear positively in the final motion. If, to re-

(3) The case is obviously different when a working group or commission has been mandated by an assembly or a hierarchical authority (pope or bishop). In effect, it is in this case foreseen in advance that the decision does not pertain to this commission, whose role is limited to presenting the complete file and report of the question studied and sometimes to give its opinion. Here, it is clear that the one or ones in authority do not form part of this commission which, its work accomplished, simply hands over to the authority the dossier of its deliberation.

turn to the example cited, the deliberating group decides to promote political involvement in the CLCs, all that has been able to be said by the opponents regarding partisan spirit, polarization, "horizontalism", etc., as reasons for opposing this option, should appear "in a positive sense" so as to specify its evangelical approach.

But it is not enough to recognize the minority on paper! The higher stakes are the cohesion of the group, the effectiveness of future action and a respect for persons. That is why, at the moment of concluding, the group ought to make sure that the minority have put away any strong feeling in their manner of opposing it. They will not be able to do so unless they are sure they have been heard and understood. Better if need be to delay the conclusion so as to arrive with certitude at this climate, this result. For the minority, while remaining what it is, is called on to collaborate in future action, totally integrated into the group, and even integrated in a special way: for it is they who, in effect, by serene and intelligent challenging, will be better able to foster the evaluation and calling in question of human decisions, something on occasion necessary, and, by that fact, to be a source of dynamism for further progress.

The Confirmation

One reads in the Exercises that "after such a choice or decision, the one who has made it must turn with great diligence to prayer in the presence of God our Lord, and offer Him his choice so that the Divine Majesty may deign to accept and confirm it if it is for His greater service and praise." (Spir. Ex., 183) One reads too in the Deliberation: "We want it understood that nothing at all that has been or will be spoken of originated from our own spirit or our own thought; rather, whatever it was, it was solely what our Lord inspired and the Apostolic See then confirmed and approved." (no. 3). A community decision, just like a personal election, needs to be confirmed.

In the Exercises, the election is confirmed in two ways. First of all in the heart, by the sentiments fostered by the contemplations of the third and fourth week of the Exercises: a closer adhesion to the person of Jes-

us Christ in his paschal mystery, peace, joy, and the desire to undertake what has resulted from this adhesion. On the other hand, an external confirmation can come from the continuing dialogue that the retreatant and he who gives the Exercises have been having from the beginning.

One finds this double confirmation in the text of the Deliberation: interior("what our Lord inspired" in us) and exterior("what the Apostolic See confirmed and approved").

The external confirmation is necessitated by the fact that it is a group of the Church which is deliberating, and so any particular decision ought to be inscribed within the universal plan of salvation, God's design for uniting and assembling all men. Every community within the Church has ties, even if the decision launches it on quite new paths. Does this mean that adult Christian communities ought, once they have deliberated, to bring their decisions to the hierarchy of the Church for their blessing and approval? If that were done, it is likely that little progress would be realized within the Church. Let Christians cease to conduct themselves as children asking for permissions! But on the other hand, it is necessary that the communities be linked by a permanent dialogue with the hierarchy of the Church. This dialogue is of itself a confirmation since it is a sign that one wishes to maintain unity. But it is evident that if a decision is explicitly disapproved by the hierarchy, a community which is living the spirit of the Exercises and the "rules for thinking with the Church" cannot but submit, even if it has the sentiment of having been inspired by the Spirit.

This feeling of having been inspired by the Spirit is the interior confirmation. It is experienced first of all in a quite human way, as one can sense in the final lines of the account of the Deliberation of 1539: "On that day (Feast of John the Baptist), but not without long vigils, much prayer and labor of mind and body preceding the deliberation and decision, all our business was completed and terminated in a spirit of gladness and harmony." (no. 9) They have finished, they are content, they will now be able to breathe for a moment before the plunge into action! It is the return to calm and repose of mind. But this human feeling itself is not possible except as an expression

of the felt experience of a spiritual confirmation of the decision. What is meant by that? Above all, a grounding in the freedom and the desire to serve. A path has been found along which one experiences the pressing desire to engage oneself in service. A desire, by the way, that is compatible in some cases with an intellectual or sensible reluctance, especially if the decision commits one to a path still unexplored while the other was familiar, or to a more difficult way while the other posed no problems. He who is given the power to act must know that it involves the power to suffer.

This confirmation can be given at the same time as the decision (for example, when this is taken unanimously). But more often, it is the experience of the days that follow which will confirm the decision: it is during this period that the group will verify that each of its members is confirmed in his or her vocation and strengthened by the action, at the same time that it itself becomes more coherent.

"The complete accord of hearts" will be shown first of all by the attitude of the group with regard to the minority, which can keep its nonconformist point of view with full recognition of this by the majority; and by the attitude of the minority with regard to the group, by putting all its energy - including its challenging - at the service of the new destiny of the community. The cohesion will be further reinforced by the inevitable obstacles: to take a new path is always to run into the resistance of men, of things and of institutions. These trials will not call into question the decision taken. But neither should it harden the members of the group into an attitude of fierce reaction. Rather it will arouse the desire to make oneself better understood and to explain to others the motivations and the spiritual journey that has led the group to this decision.

As to the joy and dynamism, it will give birth to a new creativity, based on a renewal of faith, of hope and of charity. The decision will bring with it not only a new activity, but a new quality of action. By a spiritual reading of its history, the group will find that its decision, which seemed to open for it a new path, was in fact rooted

since some time in its history. It is thus that the disciples of Emmaus, having reread their history with Christ, afterwards become aware that "our heart was already burning within us..." From that comes their assurance, which in fact makes them witnesses of the resurrection. Just as in the group, the new creativity has as its basis the hope that looks to the future. Most of all, the renewal of charity will produce in their activity the multiple gifts of the Spirit : "love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faith, gentleness, self-control, all of these things against which there is no law" (Galatians, 5: 22).

Could it be otherwise? The glory of God is creative, and it fills the universe. Creative too, and ever more universal, is a decision that has been prayed over, ripened, deliberated, and finally taken "for the greater glory of God."

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