



THE PORTAL TO JESUIT STUDIES

Exposcit Debitum (1550)

More commonly known by its Latin name (Exposcit Debitum), the papal approval of the Formula of 1550 has articulated the purposes of the Society of Jesus since its issuance by Pope Julius III. The formula was based on the Five Chapters of 1539 and of the Formula of 1540. For more on the history, content, and differences of the formulae, please consult Antonio de Aldama's The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus: The Formula of the Institute, Notes for a Commentary.

Chapter 1

Whoever desires to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross in our Society, which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus, and to serve the Lord alone and the Church, His spouse, under the Roman pontiff, the vicar of Christ on earth, should, after a solemn vow of perpetual chastity, poverty, and obedience, keep what follows in mind.

He is a member of a Society founded chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of public preaching, lectures, and any other ministration whatsoever of the word of God, and further by means of the Spiritual Exercises, the education of children and unlettered persons and the spiritual consolation of Christ's faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments.

Moreover, he should show himself ready to reconcile the estranged, compassionately assist and serve those in prisons or hospitals, and indeed to perform any other works of charity, according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good.

Furthermore, all these works should be carried out altogether free of charge and without accepting any remuneration for the labor expended in all the aforementioned activities.

Still further, let any such person take care, as long as he lives, first of all to keep before his eyes God and then the nature of this Institute which is, so to speak, a pathway to God; and then let him strive with all his effort to achieve this end set before him by God – each one, however, according to the grace which the Holy Spirit has given to him and according to the particular grade of his own vocation.

Consequently, lest anyone should perhaps show zeal, but a zeal which is not according to knowledge, the decision about each one's grade and the selection and entire distribution of employments shall be in the power of the superior general or ordinary who at any future time is to be elected by us, or in the power of those whom this superior general may appoint under himself with that authority, in order that the proper order necessary in every well-organized community may be preserved.



This superior general, with the council of his associates (with the majority of votes always having the right to prevail), shall possess the authority to compose constitutions leading to the achievement of this end which has been proposed to us. He shall also have the authority to explain officially doubts which may arise in connection with our Institute as comprised in this Formula.

The council, which must necessarily be convoked to establish or change the Constitutions and for other matters of more than ordinary importance, such as the alienation or dissolution of houses and colleges once erected, should be understood (according to the explanation in our Constitutions) to be the greater part of the entire professed Society which can be summoned without grave inconvenience by the superior general.

In other matters which are of lesser importance, the same general, aided by counsel from his brethren to the extent that he will deem fitting, shall have the full right personally to order and command whatever he judges in the Lord to pertain to the glory of God and the common good, as will be explained in the Constitutions.

Chapter 2

All who make the profession in this Society should understand at the time, and furthermore keep in mind as long as they live, that this entire Society and the individual members who make their profession in it are campaigning for God under faithful obedience to His Holiness Pope Paul III and his successors in the Roman pontificate.

The Gospel does indeed teach us, and we know from orthodox faith and firmly hold, that all of Christ's faithful are subject to the Roman pontiff as their head and as the vicar of Christ. Yet for the sake of greater devotion in obedience to the Apostolic See, of greater abnegation of our own wills, and of surer direction from the Holy Spirit, we have judged it to be extremely profitable if each one of us and all those who may make the same profession in the future would, in addition to the ordinary bond of the three vows, be bound by a special vow to carry out, without subterfuge or excuse and at once (as far as in us lies), whatever the present and future Roman pontiffs may order pertaining to the progress of souls and the propagation of the faith, and to go to whatsoever provinces they may choose to send us, whether they decide to send us among the Turks or any other infidels, even those who live in the regions called the Indies, or among any heretics or schismatics or any of the faithful.

Therefore before those who will come to us take this burden upon their shoulders, they should ponder long and seriously, as the Lord has counseled, whether they possess among their resources enough spiritual capital to complete this tower; that is, whether the Holy Spirit who moves them is offering them so much grace that with His aid they have hope of bearing the weight of this vocation. Then, after they have enlisted through the inspiration of the Lord in this militia of Christ, they ought to be prompt in carrying out this obligation which is so great, being clad for battle day and night.



However, to forestall among us any ambition for such missions or provinces, or any refusal of them, all our members should have this understanding: they should not either by themselves or through someone else carry on negotiations with the Roman pontiff about such missions, but leave all this care to God, and to the pope himself as His vicar, and to the superior general of the Society. Indeed, the general too, just like the rest, should not treat with the said pontiff about himself being sent or not, unless after advice from the Society.

Chapter 3

All should likewise vow that in all matters that concern the observance of this Rule they will be obedient to the one put in charge of the Society. He should be the best qualified for this office and will be elected by a majority of votes (as will be explained in the Constitutions). He should possess all the authority and power over the Society which are useful for its good administration, correction, and government.

He should issue the commands which he knows to be opportune for achieving the end set before him by God and the Society. In his superiorship he should be ever mindful of the kindness, meekness, and charity of Christ and of the pattern set by Peter and Paul, a norm which both he and the aforementioned council should keep constantly in view. Assuredly, too, because of the great value of good order and for the sake of the constant practice of humility, never sufficiently praised, the individual subjects should not only be obliged to obey the general in all matters pertaining to the Society's Institute but also to recognize and properly venerate Christ as present in him.

Chapter 4

From experience we have learned that a life removed as far as possible from all contagion of avarice and as like as possible to evangelical poverty is more gratifying, more undefiled, and more suitable for the edification of our fellowmen. We likewise know that our Lord Jesus Christ will supply to His servants who are seeking only the kingdom of God what is necessary for food and clothing.

Therefore our members, one and all, should vow perpetual poverty in such a manner that neither the professed, either individually or in common, nor any house or church of theirs can acquire any civil right to any produce, fixed revenues, or possessions or to the retention of any stable goods (except those which are proper for their own use and habitation); but they should instead be content with whatever is given them out of charity for the necessities of life.

However, the houses which the Lord will provide are to be dedicated to labor in His vineyard and not to the pursuit of scholastic studies; and on the other hand it appears altogether proper that workers should be provided for that same vineyard from among the young men who are inclined to piety and capable of applying themselves to learning, in order that they may be a kind of seminary for the Society, including the professed Society.



Consequently, to provide facilities for studies, the professed Society should be capable of having colleges of scholastics wherever benefactors will be moved by their devotion to build and endow them. We now petition that as soon as these colleges will have been built and endowed (but not from resources which it pertains to the Holy See to apply), they may be established through authorization of the Holy See or considered to be so established. These colleges should be capable of possessing fixed revenues, rights to rentals, or possessions which are to be applied to the uses and needs of the students.

The general of the Society retains the full government or superintendency over the aforementioned colleges and students; and this pertains to the choice of rectors or governors and of the scholastics; the admission, dismissal, reception, and exclusion of the same; the enactment of statutes; the arrangement, instruction, edification, and correction of the scholastics; the manner of supplying them with food, clothing, and all other necessary materials; and every other kind of government, control, and care.

All this should be managed in such a way that neither may the students be able to abuse the aforementioned goods nor may the professed Society be able to convert them to its own uses, but may use them to provide for the needs of the scholastics.

These students, moreover, should have such intellectual ability and moral character as to give solid hope that they will be suitable for the Society's functions after their studies are completed, and that thus at length, after their progress in spirit and learning has become manifest and after sufficient testing, they can be admitted into our Society.

Chapter 5

Since all the members should be priests, they should be obliged to recite the Divine Office according to the ordinary rite of the Church, but privately and not in common or in choir.

Also, in what pertains to food, clothing, and other external things, they will follow the common and approved usage of reputable priests, so that if anything is subtracted in this regard in accordance with each one's need or desire of spiritual progress, it may be offered, as will be fitting, out of devotion and not obligation, as a reasonable service of the body to God.

Conclusion

These are the matters which we were able to explain about our profession in a kind of sketch, through the good pleasure of our previously mentioned sovereign pontiff Paul and of the Apostolic See. We have now completed this explanation, in order to give brief information both to those who ask us about our plan of life and also to those who will later follow us if, God willing, we shall ever have imitators along this path.



By experience we have learned that the path has many and great difficulties connected with it. Consequently we have judged it opportune to decree that no one should be permitted to pronounce his profession in this Society unless his life and doctrine have been probed by long and exacting tests (as will be explained in the Constitutions). For in all truth this Institute requires men who are thoroughly humble and prudent in Christ as well as conspicuous in the integrity of Christian life and learning.

Moreover, some persons will be admitted to become coadjutors either for spiritual or temporal concerns or to become scholastics. After sufficient probations and the time specified in the Constitutions, these too should, for their greater devotion and merit, pronounce their vows. But their vows will not be solemn (except in the case of some who with permission from the superior general will be able to make three solemn vows of this kind because of their devotion and personal worth). Instead, they will be vows by which these persons are bound as long as the superior general thinks that they should be retained in the Society, as will be explained more fully in the Constitutions. But these coadjutors and scholastics too should be admitted into this militia of Jesus Christ only after they have been diligently examined and found suitable for that same end of the Society.

And may Christ deign to be favorable to these our tender beginnings, to the glory of God the Father, to whom alone be glory and honor forever.

Amen.

Original Source (English translation):

Aldama, Antonio de. [*The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus: The Formula of the Institute, Notes for a Commentary*](#), trans. Ignacio Echániz. St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1990, pg. 2-23.

Provided for research, teaching, and private study. All rights reserved by the copyright holder, pursuant to the Portal's policies.