

# Constitution of the Society of Jesus

## Papal Bull, 1540

**THE PLAN** of the proposed rule follows and is this:

In our society, which we wish to be called by the name *Jesus*, let whoever desires to fight under the sacred banner of the Cross, and to serve only *God* and the Roman pontiff, His vicar on earth, after a solemn vow of perpetual chastity, let him keep in mind that he is part of a society, instituted for the purpose of perfecting souls in life and in *Christian doctrine*, for the propagation of the faith through public preaching, ministering the word of *God*, spiritual macerations, works of charity, and especially through the teaching of the young and uninstructed in the Christian precepts; and lastly for giving consolation to believers in hearing their confessions. Let him think first of *God*, then of the rule of this order, which is the way to Him; and let him follow after the end proposed by *God* with all his strength. Let each one, nevertheless, rest in the grace given him by the Holy Spirit, and in the proper grade of his calling, and lest anyone use zeal but not discretion, let the deciding of the grade of each, of the offices, and whole arrangement be in the hands of the general or prelate selected through us, in order that the harmony so necessary in all well-governed institutions may be preserved.

Let this general, with the council of his associates, have the power in council to draw up rules suitable for the end proposed, the majority of all voters of the society always having the right of deciding. Let it be understood that there be consultation in regard to the more important or permanent questions, the majority of the whole society, that can conveniently be convoked; in the case of less important or transient matters, all those that are present where the general lives. The right of carrying out laws, however, belongs only to the general.

Let all members know, and let it be not only at the beginning of their profession, but let them think over it daily as long as they live, that the society as a whole, and each of them, owes obedience to our most holy lord, the pope, and the other Roman pontiffs, his successors, and to fight with faithful obedience for *God*. And however much he may be learned in the Gospel, and however we may be taught in the orthodox faith, let all Christians profess themselves under the Roman pontiff as leader, and vicar of *Jesus Christ*. For the greater humility of our society, and toward the complete self-mortification of each one, and in order to aid the abnegation of our own wills to the greatest extent, let each one, besides that common obligation, be devoted to this by special vow. So that whatever the present or other Roman pontiffs order that concerns the saving of souls and the spread of the faith, and to whatever provinces he shall wish to send us, this let us strive to accomplish as far as in us lies, without any turning back or excuse; whether he shall send us to the Turks, or to any other infidels, even those living in the lands that are called the Indies; or to any heretics or schismatics, or believers, whatever. Wherefore let those that are about to join us consider long and well, before they put their shoulders to this task, whether they have enough grace for good deeds to mount this citadel at the command of their superiors; that is, whether the *Holy Spirit* that urges them promises to them enough grace to enable them with *God's* help to bear the weight of this calling. And after they have given their name, at the inspiration of the Lord, to the service of *Jesus Christ*, having thus girded up their loins, they will be prompt to fulfill this grand vow.

Lest in some way there arise ambition or jealousy in regard to such missions or provinces, let all agree never either directly or indirectly to interfere with the Roman pontiff in this regard, but let them leave all such concern to *God*, and to the pontiff himself, His vicar, and to the general of the society. And let the general himself promise the same as the others, not to take upon himself a mission in any direction unless by the council of the society, with the agreement of the pontiff.

Let each vow to be obedient to the general of the society in all things that concern the fulfillment of these our regulations.

Let him command what he knows to be opportune for the advancement of the ends proposed by *God* and the society. In issuing these commands, he shall always keep the memory of the kindness, gentleness, and love of *Christ*, Peter, and Paul, before him, whose example in this rule let the council carefully follow.

Let them have charge especially over the education of children and of the heathen in the Christian doctrine of the ten commandments, and like rudiments, whatever seems suitable to the circumstances of the individuals, and of time and place. It is in fact very necessary in providing this, that the general and council look to it sharply, since it is not possible in the first place to rear an edifice without a foundation of faith, and there may be the danger that as one may be more learned than another, such a one may perchance abandon some province that seems at first sight not promising enough for him, when really no district would be more fruitful, either for instruction, or for training in charity and humility at the same time as our duties. Briefly, then, for the sake of the never enough praised exercise of humility, let them always be held to the obedience of the rule in all things concerning the institution of the society, and let them see *Christ* in the general as if present, and let them venerate him as is proper.

Since we know by experience that no life is happier, purer, or more apt to aid its fellow than the one most removed from all contagion of avarice, and close to holy poverty, and since we know that our *Lord Jesus Christ* provides necessary food and clothing for his servants seeking the kingdom of *God*, let each and all vow eternal poverty, and not to acquire any civil right, either personally, or for the maintenance or use of the society to any property, wherever situated, or to its income, but to be content with the use only of what is given them for meeting their own necessities.

Let them have the power, however, to have a college or colleges at the Universities, having census returns, revenues, or possessions, to be applied to the use and necessities of the students; the thing held to be under control of the general, and the society in accordance with the common government, including the superintendence of these colleges, and students, the method of the choice of governor, or governors, or students, or their admission, dismissal, recall, or expulsion; the introduction of rules for the instruction of the students, or their correction, or punishment, their clothing, and all other government, regulation and management. Nor can the students misuse the estates, nor the society turn them to its own use, but they must be used for the necessary expenses of the students. The students may, however, be admitted to the society after enough training in spirit and in letters, and a sufficient probation.

All members whatsoever in holy orders, even if they do not possess church benefices or the revenues of such, are to be bound each of them privately and individually, that is, not in common with others, to repeat the services according to the rites of the church.

These are the rules which we have drawn up concerning our profession as a model for the approval of our aforesaid master Paul, and the *Apostolic See*; this we have done that by this writing we might briefly inform on the one hand those who ask concerning the nature of the life we have instituted, and on the other the future imitators of our example, if by the will of *God*, there should be any so disposed, how we have intended this life to be lived, since we have learned by experience how many and how great difficulties are attached thereto. No one should be admitted to this society until he has been tried and proved for a long time and very carefully. Then only may he be admitted to the service of Christ, when he has shown himself wise in the wisdom of Christ and his doctrine, and pure in Christian life; and may Christ deign to favor our weak beginnings to the glory of *God* the father, to whom alone be glory and honor forever in all ages. Amen.

(Papal Confirmation.)

But since there is nothing in the above that is not pious and holy, and since those members who have humbly petitioned us in this matter will be more zealous for a holy life if they know that they are held in the special grace of the *Apostolic See*, and if they see that the above rules are approved by us, we therefore from our certain knowledge approve, confirm and bless by our apostolic rules, all and singly, as being apt for the spiritual progress both of the said members and of the whole Christian flock, and we receive the same members into our special protection and that of the Holy Apostolic See, granting to them the right to establish freely and with full warrant such particular institutions among themselves as they may judge to be suited to the ends of the society, to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord, and to the advantage of all.

The constitutions of the general council, and of our predecessor **Pope Gregory X**, of blessed memory, and all other apostolic constitutions, and ordinations to the contrary notwithstanding.

We will, however, that in each society of this kind persons desirous of living by this rule of life to the number of sixty, and not more, may be admitted and added to the said society.

(Warning) Let no one, etc. And if anyone, etc.

Given at Rome at St. Mark's, in the year of Incarnation of our Lord 1540, the fifth before the Kalends of October, in the sixth year of our pontificate.

Source: [http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/vatican/esp\\_vatican13.htm](http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/vatican/esp_vatican13.htm)