

constitutions of the society of jesus

Constitutions of the Society of Jesus are a fundamental part of the governance and spiritual framework of the Jesuit order, which was founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola in 1540. These constitutions serve as the charter for the Society of Jesus, outlining its purpose, structure, and the principles that guide the lives of its members. They reflect the Jesuit commitment to education, social justice, and the promotion of faith, while also defining the communal and spiritual life of Jesuits. This article delves into the historical context, key features, and the contemporary relevance of the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus.

Historical Context

The origins of the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus can be traced back to the early days of the Jesuit order. St. Ignatius of Loyola, after experiencing a profound spiritual transformation, sought to create a community dedicated to serving God through education and missionary work.

Formation of the Society

1. Founding Year: The Society of Jesus was officially founded in 1540, though its roots date back to 1534 when Ignatius and his companions took vows of poverty and chastity.
2. First Draft: The first draft of the constitutions was written by Ignatius himself and was based on the Spiritual Exercises he had developed, which emphasized discernment and spiritual growth.

Development through Revisions

The original constitutions underwent several revisions and adaptations over the years:

- 1540-1556: During Ignatius's lifetime, he continually refined the text to reflect the evolving needs of the Society.
- General Congregations: Subsequent General Congregations, which are the supreme decision-making bodies of the Society, have made significant amendments, the most notable being the revisions in 1558 and 1831.

Key Features of the Constitutions

The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus are characterized by several important features that define the identity and mission of the Jesuits.

Spiritual and Apostolic Orientation

- Mission of the Society: The constitutions emphasize the Jesuit mission of

serving God through the promotion of faith and the advancement of justice.

- Education: A strong focus on education is evident, as Jesuits are encouraged to engage in teaching and learning as a means of evangelization.

Governance Structure

The governance structure of the Society of Jesus is laid out clearly in the constitutions:

1. Superior General: The head of the Society is the Superior General, elected for life by the General Congregation.
2. Councils: The Superior General is supported by a council, which includes Assistants and Provincials, responsible for different geographic areas.
3. Provincial Governance: Each province has its own governance structure, including a Provincial Superior and a council to assist in decision-making.

Community Life and Vows

The constitutions outline the communal life of Jesuits, which is based on a shared commitment to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience:

- Communal Living: Jesuits live in community, fostering a spirit of fellowship and support.
- Vows: The vows taken by Jesuits are central to their identity and mission, emphasizing their commitment to God and service.

The Role of Jesuit Formation

The process of formation for Jesuits is explicitly addressed in the constitutions, outlining the stages and expectations for new members.

Stages of Formation

1. Novitiate: This initial stage lasts for two years, during which novices undergo spiritual training and discernment.
2. Philosophical Studies: After the novitiate, Jesuits typically engage in philosophical studies to deepen their intellectual grounding.
3. Theological Studies: Following philosophy, Jesuits pursue theological education, equipping them for ministry and leadership.
4. Tertianship: This final stage involves a further year of spiritual and practical formation after ordination, emphasizing a deeper understanding of Jesuit life.

Spiritual Exercises

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius are integral to Jesuit formation, serving as a guide for personal reflection and discernment. The exercises encourage Jesuits to:

- Reflect on their lives: Individuals are prompted to consider their relationship with God and their mission.
- Make informed decisions: The exercises assist in making life choices aligned with the Jesuit mission.

Contemporary Relevance

In the modern world, the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus continue to play a vital role in guiding Jesuit life and mission.

Adaptation to Modern Challenges

The Society has adapted its constitutions to address contemporary issues, including:

- Social Justice: The emphasis on justice has become more pronounced, with a focus on issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental stewardship.
- Globalization: The Society responds to the challenges and opportunities presented by globalization, promoting intercultural dialogue and collaboration.

Impact on Education and Social Initiatives

The Jesuit commitment to education remains a cornerstone of their mission:

- Educational Institutions: Jesuits run numerous schools, colleges, and universities globally, emphasizing academic excellence and ethical leadership.
- Social Outreach: Jesuits engage in various social initiatives, working with marginalized communities and advocating for systemic change.

Conclusion

The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus are more than just a set of rules; they encapsulate the spiritual and communal essence of the Jesuit order. Rooted in the vision of St. Ignatius, these constitutions provide a framework for Jesuits to live out their mission of service, education, and social justice. As the Society continues to navigate the complexities of the modern world, the constitutions remain a guiding light, inspiring generations of Jesuits to seek God in all things and act with compassion and integrity in their service to humanity. The enduring relevance of these constitutions highlights the Jesuit commitment to adapt and respond to the needs of society while remaining true to their foundational principles.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the key principles outlined in the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus?

The Constitutions emphasize principles such as the importance of community life, obedience, discernment, and the mission of serving others, particularly the poor and marginalized.

How do the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus guide the formation of its members?

The Constitutions provide a framework for spiritual formation, education, and the development of leadership qualities, ensuring that members are well-prepared for their mission.

In what ways have the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus evolved since their inception?

Over the years, the Constitutions have undergone revisions to address contemporary issues, incorporate insights from different cultures, and adapt to the changing needs of the Church and society.

What role do the Constitutions play in the governance of the Society of Jesus?

The Constitutions serve as the foundational document for governance, outlining the structure, responsibilities, and decision-making processes within the Society, ensuring accountability and unity.

How do the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus relate to Ignatian spirituality?

The Constitutions are deeply rooted in Ignatian spirituality, emphasizing discernment, finding God in all things, and the commitment to the greater glory of God (Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam).

What impact do the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus have on its educational institutions?

The Constitutions influence the mission and ethos of Jesuit educational institutions, promoting a holistic education that fosters intellectual, spiritual, and moral development in students.

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