DISCOVERING THE CONSTITUTIONS

The return to creative uncertainty

By GEORGE EARLE

THIRTY YEARS ago, vocations were plentiful in the Wessex Province. If it is ever sensible to lay bare a mystery, the recipe for success seemed simple: parents wanted their sons to be Jesuits; boys at an impressionable age came into close contact with large numbers of enthusiastic young Jesuits; older men were compelled by the circumstances of war to question what to make of their lives. Peter Keogh slipped imperceptibly into a cohort of thirty-three candidates for the jesuit novitiate. The first question asked at the front door of the novitiate-house — where do you come from? — was obviously meant to elicit the name of a well-known jesuit school. The novices who had only recently attended their last prize-giving (or graduation) were able to give the required answer. But no one really wanted to know about Catterick (a large army-camp in the north of England), Salerno, Imphal or Scapa Flow. But it was surprising how men whose ages ranged from sixteen to forty-eight, and whose paths to the novitiate had circled the globe, merged into the quiet, well-ordered isolation of a large country-house, wholly given over to prayer, work in the house and garden, long walks, occasional rough games, but above all to the discovery of the 'original inspiration'[1] behind the Society of Jesus.

In spite of heavy losses, first of all in training and then again during the cruel years after Vatican II, Peter Keogh's generation is still bearing a disproportionately heavy share of the work of the Wessex Province. With a vivid imagination, Peter can see what gaps an avenging angel could leave in the ranks of superiors, parish priests, headmasters, formation personnel, teachers, lecturers and province officials, if he were to strike down the men who joined his province in the years 1947 to 1951. Consequently, renewal in its double thrust — backwards into the past and outwards into the modern world — depends to a significant extent on this generation. With a touch of self-pity, Peter surveys his modest equipment and fleeting opportunities for this important and daunting task.

One day Peter picked up the small volume on which his Master of Novices' instructions had been based: *The Summary of the Constitutions*. In the total ignorance of those early years, he had always assumed that it was an accurate reflection of the Constitutions as a whole. After all, many congregations of sisters who professed to follow the jesuit rule had simply taken over this Summary. A rudimentary comparison between the Summary and the Constitutions soon showed him what a selective presentation he had

[1] *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2.

received. Of the fifty-three paragraphs of the Summary, twenty-two were taken from Part III of the Constitutions, which is concerned with 'the preservation and progress of those who are in probation'.[2] Not one word of the Summary came from parts VII and VIII. Part VII is concerned with 'Jesuits' duties towards their fellow-men';[3] what they are to do and how they are to choose their work. Part VIII considers how those who are 'so scattered among the faithful and among the unbelievers in diverse regions of the world' can become 'united among themselves and with their head'.[4]

A strong emphasis on preserving good novices, with all the attendant guilt-feelings, and two striking omissions on the jesuit map, were bound to leave Peter in a state of disorientation. Mission (Part VII) and community (Part VIII) had not only disappeared from the Constitutions; they had become fainter in everyday life. The Pope[5] and the Holy Spirit[6] had ceased to be the leading actors. The General and local superiors were not as important as they had been in Part VII. Much of the power to send on a mission had fallen to Provincials, who had greater responsibilities for their territories than Ignatius had exercised over the whole Society. Provincials often found it hard to follow the method proposed in paragraph 618 or the principles set out in 622. Appointments were meant to follow from prayer[7] and the guidance of the Holy Spirit;[8] 'to proceed more successfully in this sending of subjects to one place or another, one should keep the greater service of God and the more universal good before his eyes as the norm to hold oneself on the right course . . . that part of the vineyard ought to be chosen which has the greater need'.[9] To subvert this process, well-established institutions could marshal powerful pressure-groups and persuasive arguments: boards of governors, former pupils, parents' associations, impressive records, sentimental attachments, financial commitments, support from the hierarchy; all these could restrict the Provincial's choices. The freedom of manoeuvre, or in ignatian language, indifference, written between every line of Part VII, was now severely restricted.

Similarly, the absence of Part VIII from the *Summary* was not an insignificant oversight, but a true record of what had happened to the Society that Peter joined. His experience of community fell into two parts: the *esprit de corps* forged by the hopes and sufferings of a long training, and the isolation imposed by his working years. The two eras, which he caricatured as

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[2] Ganss, George E.: *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, (St Louis, 1970), p 153 (hereafter cited as *Const.* followed by paragraph number).

[3] *Const.* 603.

[4] *Const.* 655.

[5] *Const.* 603-17.

[6] *Const.* 624a, and k.

[7] *Const.* 618.

[8] *Const.* 624a and k.

[9] *Const.* 622a.

Colditz and 'The Entertainer', were divided by that moment on the train-station as he left the tertianship, when he knew that his days in large formation communities were over, and that he would now be expected to stand on his own feet in a shifting group of acquaintances. The first period resembled an old-fashioned boarding school, in which the pupils were not asked to have any say in what was to happen to them, teachers and students rarely met to exchange common views or aspirations, superiors and subjects were separated by walls of unease and misunderstanding. Many infantile patterns of behaviour were reinforced or resurrected during these years. Outward conformity in such matters as dress, being in the right place at the right time, or expressing sound opinions were all-important. Interior states of questioning or anguish were discouraged and did not easily find an outlet. The second period was dominated by work. While his lay contemporaries had been laying the foundations of careers, Peter had gone on studying. Now a decade later, and with heavier pastoral and disciplinary responsibilities than the laity, Peter was breathlessly trying to catch up. The other Jesuits in his community were also absorbed in their work, and had acquired the habit of treating each other with mutual tolerance and studied politeness, marred by an occasional acid comment or well-meant stab in the back. For spiritual refreshment, intellectual stimulus, warmth of sympathy, friendship and relaxation, he found he was turning more and more to his re-discovered family and a widening circle of friends. He fell into the habit of leaving his community soon after the end of each term, and returning only a few hours before the boys. Between one departure and the next, a busy term was interrupted by supplies in a nearby parish and visits to friends. Influenced by those who departed in the late '60s, who seemed to have lived particularly isolated lives in the Society, Peter began to ask himself these questions: Did he feel more at ease and more himself with lay people than with Jesuits? With how many of his fellow Jesuits was he nervous about expressing his true feelings and opinions? With how many would he want to embark on a holiday, a research project or life in a small community? How many would he write to or visit in hospital? How many would mourn his departure from the Society or from this life? In spite of keeping some very good friends, Peter had to admit to himself that his expectations from and contributions to jesuit community life had been growing less and less.

Although his job kept him locked in an ostrich-like position in the 1960s, Peter was one of those who welcomed Vatican II. He had received sufficient injections of de Lubac, Congar and Rahner to predispose him towards a vision of the Church which was more spiritual, more human, more flexible and more comprehensive than the narrowly hierarchical view which had been in fashion in his youth. The Society rapidly followed the Council with its 31st General Congregation,[10] whose purpose was to apply the directions

[10] Held in 1965-66 (hereafter cited as G.C. 31).

of the Council to its own life and work. Peter devoted an annual retreat entirely to the Congregation. Even with some co-operation on his part, the Congregation made little impression on him. He was not alone in this; his Province set up commissions to relate Vatican II and the 31st General Congregation to their own problems; the results, when compared with the energy, the man-hours and the production of paper, were negligible. The 32nd General Congregation,[11] which continued and gave sharper focus to the 31st, was easier to assimilate, but nevertheless seemed to be having too slight an impact on Peter and his contemporaries.

Peter was glad to observe that he had learned something during these turbulent years. He came back time and again to this passage from *Perfectae Caritatis:*

> The appropriate renewal of religious life involves two simultaneous processes: 1. a continuous return to the sources of all christian life and to the original inspiration behind a given community; and 2. an adjustment of the community to changed conditions of the times.[12]

He understood that this meant starting from the gospel as the supreme law of religious life,[13] assimilating the 'spirit of his founder' and the 'particular goals and wholesome traditions[14] of the Society, and so acquiring an 'awareness of contemporary human conditions and of the needs of the Church'.[15]

When he pondered on this passage, Peter was struck by the immense difference between Ignatius's situation and his own. Ignatius and his friends were facing monstrous immorality and ignorance. The jobs they had to do were obvious, and the solutions simple. The preacher, the lecturer, the learned man, the teacher of rudiments, the confessor, the disinterested priest were urgently needed. Peter did not have to go beyond his circle of friends to think of a jesuit astronomer, philosopher, language teacher, scripture specialist, psychologist, nurse, retreat giver, headmaster. He could draw up a formidable list of subjects about which he was expected to know something and which some Jesuits had studied in depth. He concluded that such complexity and diversity had produced the following consequences: he was now part of an army of specialists or aspiring specialists; he had a surfeit of second-hand knowledge and vast areas in which he was woefully ignorant; he was correspondingly short of first-hand, experience-based knowledge; his powers of assimilating and relating so much knowledge into one harmonious vision were weak; he was well educated and yet stricken with a sense of

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[11] Held in 1974-75 (hereafter cited as G.C. 32).
[12] *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2.
[13] *Ibid.*, 2a.
[14] *Ibid.*, 2b.
[15] *Ibid.*, 2d.

inadequacy when he contemplated the deficiencies of his knowledge; he felt cut off from other specialists; and he was particularly sorry for superiors, who were often more ignorant than their subjects, who found specialized work difficult to evaluate, and specialists hard to move. Peter realized that original thought, deliberation, decision and action were bound to suffer.

St Ignatius only knew the first sixteen years of the Society of Jesus. He never saw the Constitutions published. Everything was new. Everything was in the future. Only seventy-eight men were definitively incorporated into the Society, whose total membership was in the region of a thousand to fifteen hundred.[16] Ignatius's Society was small, young and expanding fast. Peter's Society was large, old and contracting fast. Much of the intervening four centuries had been devoted to setting up institutions: the Society itself with its central headquarters and extensive machinery of government; provincial governments and within each province numerous, diverse and sometimes massive institutions. Institutions powerfully constrict the readiness to go anywhere[17] and to do anything,[18] which were characterized by the 31st General Congregation as 'the unique flexibility given to our Institute by the Holy Spirit'.[19] An institution is a complex organism consisting of people, multiple aims, buildings, money and traditions. It soon acquires a life of its own, distinct from other institutions, suspicious of those who threaten its values and existence, powerfully equipped with instincts of self-preservation and capable of imposing its pattern of life on newcomers. Institutions frequently give birth to an unwieldy child called property. Jesuits innocent of financial affairs can find themselves scanning accounts and holding bundles of share certificates and title-deeds. The poor wandering scholar of the Constitutions had become weighed down by millions of pounds worth of assets and liabilities. The spirit and practice of poverty, which had occasioned Ignatius so much anguish in the writing of the Constitutions, were severely chipped as they were moved into a new setting.[20] The Society now consisted of a network of semi-autonomous baronies. Generals, provincials and other superiors found it difficult to penetrate the shells of specific aims, skills, local knowledge, friendships and ethos which protected each institution. Subjects were torn in their loyalties and obligations between the institution and the Society, and found few opportunities for sharing the concerns of other institutions. Each one clamoured for men of this type or that calibre, heedless of talent, training or inclination. This led to some incongruous appointments and a misinterpretation of jesuit obedience that still receives support in some quarters.

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[16] Ganss, *op. cit.*, p 232.

[17] *Const.* 82, 92, 304, 308, 588, 603, 605, 615, 626.

[18] *Const.* 82, 414, 606, 621, 633.

[19] G.C. 31, V. 21, 3,

[20] This judgment was confirmed by G.C. 32 in its Decree 12.

Possibly more important than the distortions brought about by the growth of institutions and the enslavement to establishments founded many decades ago, was the abyss Peter experienced between Ignatius's mentality and his own. When Ignatius and his first companions were striding out into the world, they were almost the only men in their field. The same was true of the nineteenth century. This school had no rivals. That huge mission territory was unexplored. Then the gold rush started: other religious orders of men and women, better educated secular priests, laymen with high professional qualifications and standards. For Ignatius 'this least Society' was a tiny mustard seed with all the capacity for growing into a mighty tree. For Peter and his generation 'this least Society' was the once great oak tree set in broad acres, now overshadowed by high-rise flats. It was difficult to recapture the exhilaration and pride of men on the frontier.

But what were Jesuits doing on the frontier? From the nineteenth century onwards, they were inclined to think that their role was to impose the firm order and clear doctrine of a strong, centralized government in Church and state. 'Order' evoked in Peter the memory of school rules and barrack blocks; for Ignatius it expressed his cosmic vision of man's free and loving surrender to God, and thus the integration of all his faculties, possessions and activities into one harmonious whole. Similarly, the universal mission of the Society, symbolized by the vow to the Pope, was a realization on earth of Christ's love for and desire to help all mankind. Transferred to the sixteenth century, these ideals of order and universal love understandably took the form of protest against the anarchy, the disobedience, the decentralization which were destroying christendom. Translated into action, the ignatian ideals became far-sighted causes, far-fetched apostolates — seminaries! schools! — in far-flung and dangerous places such as England, Ireland, India, Japan, Canada and South America. Peter had grown up in the century that followed the eventual triumph of Ignatius's favourite lost cause: the Papacy. Peter's exclusive devotion to the Pope and the Church of Vatican I had blinded him to the Society's prophetic vocation: prophetic in so far as it was declaring God's word for the sixteenth century; prophetic in going so far beyond the thoughts and practices of Ignatius's own day.

When Peter Keogh began to outline the differences between his Society and Ignatius's, his Church and Ignatius's, his world and Ignatius's, he wondered whether it would ever be possible to span the chasm between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries. What could he, with his irish peasant origins and Manchester middle-class background, have in common with the securely believing basque gentleman? As his burdens were already too great, he was not likely to have the time, energy and skill to jump out of his skin into the identity of a foreigner in a distant age and land. It was obvious that the quest for the spirit of his founder must take him beyond the Constitutions to the life of their author. How would Ignatius have answered that initial noviceship question, 'where do you come from?' Where

exactly did the Society of Jesus begin? Not on the battlefield of Pamplona, which was an historical event of no great significance and might have made no difference to the direction of Ignatius's life. The real starting point of the long journey to Rome was in the heart[21] and imagination[22] of Ignatius as he lay in bed at Loyola. Peter remembered Vatican II's plea:

> . . . the fact must be faced that even the most desirable changes made on behalf of contemporary needs will fail of their purpose unless a renewal of spirit gives life to them. Indeed such an interior renewal must always be accorded the leading role even in the promotion of exterior works.[23]

Ignatius states the same truth in his own way: 'it is not much learning that satisfies and fills a man, but rather to sense and taste things interiorly'.[24] The outstanding quality displayed by Ignatius in those early days at Loyola, and which he expects to find in a person who shares his experience, was to be pulled this way and that with an abundance of feelings and reactions. Many of the Annotations,[25] the moments of reflection and review,[26] the rules for the discernment of spirits,[27] the election,[28] not to mention important asides,[29] all appeal to a retreatant who is highly responsive and deeply reflective. On the other hand, the most unsatisfactory retreatant is not the person who is suicidal or in open revolt against God, but the one who has become becalmed and interiorly dead.[30]

An important event, intense inner activity shrewdly observed and described with simplicity and clarity: this was where Ignatius's *Autobiography* began, just as Luke began his Gospel and account of the infant Church.[31] Peter was relieved to find that in middle age he could identify himself more easily with Ignatius. It did not bother him that he had never felt a cannonball or broken his leg. Clearly the components in each person's experience are so different — the events, how they affect each individual according to temperament and personal history — that the inner drama must vary in each case. Ignatius did not ask his sons and retreatants to be perfect copies of

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[21] *Autobiography*, 6.
[22] *Autobiography*, 7.
[23] *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2e.
[24] Exx 2.
[25] Exx 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 17.
[26] Exx 62, 64, 77.
[27] Exx 313-36.
[28] Exx 176.
[29] For instance: '*reflitiendo en mi mismo*' in Exx 115 and 124, which are intended as models for the Gospel contemplations.
[30] Exx 6.
[31] Lk 1, 12; 1, 29; 24, 37-41.

himself. On the contrary, the particular evolution of each person's experience must dictate a vital adaptation to the needs of the individual.[32] It was difficult to state precisely how Fabre, Xavier, Borgia and Nadal were modelled on Ignatius, and at the same time utterly different from him. They were all in their separate ways men who were deeply and strongly affected by people, landscapes or situations, men of great visions, ambitions and desires, full of laughter and tears, dread and courage. They were in no sense grey, subdued victims of an ignatian mould. Under the influence of fresh ways of making and giving retreats, with the help of psychologists, changes of work and community, with greater opportunities to be himself and heightened vulnerability, Peter was finding that his complex, turbulent, though pedestrian, inner life was coming to the surface and centre of his consciousness.

Peter had made the transition from mindless activist to paralysed contemplative. Ignatius took an opposite course. The lever that moved him out of his bed to walk to Jerusalem was this reflection on his inner states:

> . . . once his eyes were opened a little, he began to marvel at the different feelings, and reflecting on them grasped that some thoughts left him sad and others joyful; little by little he came to know the diversity of spirits that disturbed him, some from the devil and others from God.[33]

Ignatius was a highly sensitive and reflective man, who stopped being merely introspective and became a contemplative in action when he understood that through this combination of inner activity and reflection God was teaching him. Later he was to describe the period at Manresa like this:

> At this time God treated him in the same way as a schoolmaster treats a child when he teaches him.[34]

The basic assumption of the Spiritual Exercises as made and given by St Ignatius is that the Lover gives and communicates what he possesses to the beloved.[35] This is the fulfilment of Jesus's prayer: 'All that I have is yours and all that you have is mine'.[36] Hence the crucial work of the Exercises is for the Creator to communicate himself to his faithful servant, and to leave the Creator to act directly upon the creature.[37] The purpose of the Exercises can be stated thus: for the Creator and Lord to work with greater

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[32] Exx 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 62, 72, etc.
[33] *Autobiography*, 8.
[34] *Autobiography*, 27.
[35] Exx 231.
[36] Jn 17, 10.
[37] Exx 15.

precision in his creature.[38] Or in other words: the love which moves me and makes me choose as I do must come from above.[39] In a passage that is often regarded as a self-portrait, Ignatius writes:

> In regard to the qualities which are desirable in the superior general, the first is that he should be closely united with God our Lord and intimate with him in prayer and all his actions, that from God, the fountain of all good, the general may so much the better obtain for the whole body of the Society a large share of his gifts and graces, and also great power and efficacy for all the means which will be used for the help of souls.[40]

The individual Jesuit too must appreciate that 'the means which unite the human instrument with God and so dispose it that it may be yielded dexterously by his divine hand are more effective than those which equip it in relation to men'.[41]

Peter had long ago come to the conclusion that to be a Jesuit as he had been taught in the novitiate was impossible. For one thing, there was no time, and there were far too many interruptions and worrying responsibilities. But to be an observer — less sharp-eyed no doubt — of the battle within between destruction and creation, evil and good, God and the devil; to know that in this battle God is all-loving, all-giving, all-powerful and ever-present to teach and guide; or, in other words, repeatedly to start where Ignatius started; that did seem to be within his powers. However, for such observation and self-awareness to develop, there was a condition which the novitiate had provided, and which Ignatius found essential: solitude. There seemed no doubt about Ignatius's eremitical vocation: his enquiries about the Carthusians, his devotion to St Onufrius, his anti-social dress and behaviour, his months at Manresa, his determination to do without a companion on the road. Decades after he had cut his nails and his hair, when he was writing the Constitutions for his companions and their successors, the solitary dimension was still vitally important:

> It seems that the general ought to employ the time which his health and energies allow him, partly with God, partly with the aforementioned officials and ministers in conferring now with the former, now with the latter, and partly with himself, in reflecting privately and thinking out and deciding what should be done with the help and favour of God our Lord.[42]

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[38] Exx 16.
[39] Exx 184.
[40] *Const.* 723.
[41] *Const.* 813.
[42] *Const.* 809.

Peter, too, was being drawn back to Ignatius's original vocation. He had outlived his adolescent rebellion against the incomprehensible and authoritarian solitude of his noviciate; he never again wanted to work for eighteen hours a day; parents, brothers, sisters, close friends, had died or drifted away. He felt closer than ever before to Ignatius in the cave or on the road.

Ignatius never occupied one fixed and exclusive position for long. He was and remained an individualist and a solitary, but his vision of the completeness of God's plan, his grasp of the concreteness of reality and his sense of Christ's call, were so acute that he had to set out on his travels again to embrace the other facet of the truth he had just been living. Peter noticed a parallel between the movement of Parts VI, VII and VIII of the Constitutions and Ignatius's own journey: from the personal life of each member in Part VI to the Lord's vineyard in Part VII; from the scattering of individual apostles in Part VII to their coming together in a close companionship in Part VIII; this was the direction Ignatius took from Manresa to Jerusalem to Paris. In a characteristically contemplative-active fashion, Ignatius placed at the heart of his visions the decision to change from solitary hermit to solitary apostle, accompanied by the appropriate sign of cutting his nails and his hair.[43] He was now eager to communicate to others what had been communicated to him.[44] Jerusalem was no longer the goal of a lonely pilgrim, imitating the saints and following his Lord in a life of extreme penance. It had become the frontier post where he could best preach to the faithful and infidels alike.[45]

It was this double movement of God's message to Ignatius in the clash and harmony of all his faculties, and Ignatius's message to the men and women he met, which led eventually to the formation of a companionship. There is a wealth of incident and ignatian method behind the laconic phrase: 'At this time he got into conversation with Master Peter Fabre and Master Francis Xavier, whom he afterwards won over for the service of God by means of the Exercises'.[46] The Society of Jesus was forged in the conversations between the one who gives the Exercises and the one who receives them.[47] The men who met in August 1534 to pronounce their first vows, and in 1539 to decide whether there was going to be a Society at all, were not asking: 'How can we reform the Church? How can we improve our theology or up-date our apostolates?' What bound them together and sent them out into the world as Jesuits was their shared experience of what God had told them through the upheavals of their inner lives. In a deep-felt, prolonged personal

[43] *Autobiography*, 29.
[44] *Ibid.*, 34.
[45] *Ibid.*, 45, which grows into the Formula of the Institute, section 3 of the General Examen and Part VII of the Constitutions.
[46] *Autobiography*, 82.
[47] Exx 6, 7, 8, 17.

knowledge of and union with Christ,[48] they came to feel as Christ felt,[49] and so to choose as Christ chose. Only to the truly Christo-sensitive did the stark demands of the Three Ways of Loving Surrender make sense.[50] From a growing, widening, personal and shared experience sprang the vows, the foundation of the Society, the Constitutions, a way of life and a choice of work. It was equally true to say that the meetings with one another, their prayers, the discussions about what to do and where to go, the notion of what it meant to be a Jesuit, their understanding of obedience, the account of conscience, were simply extensions of the Spiritual Exercises; talking to one another about their feelings and choices for and against, in the company of or in isolation from, Christ. Ignatius expressed the same truth in the Constitutions:

> The chief bond to cement the union of the members among themselves and with their head is, on both sides, the love of God our Lord. For when the superior and the subjects are closely united to his Divine and Supreme Goodness, they will very easily be united among themselves through that same love which will descend from the Divine Goodness and spread to all other men, and particularly into the Body of the Society.[51]

By going back to the beginning, Peter was able to realize that the Society was not a stable organization to which he either belonged or did not; it was always beginning — or not — and growing — or not — in the hearts, in the ears and on the lips of each Jesuit.

As Peter fumbled his way back to the circumstances and mentality of Ignatius and his first companions, it came as a surprise to him to find them so habitually groping in a fog of uncertainty and so frequently wrong. Quite apart from the misleading model of St Onufrius and the productive detour to Manresa, Ignatius's mind was for years obsessed with the dream of going to Jerusalem and staying there. When the franciscan Provincial turned him away from Jerusalem by showing him the papal bulls,[52] Igantius recognized the principal safeguard against wandering astray in his personal interpretation of God's guidance; he was beginning to acquire that true sense of being a member of the Church militant.[53] Although he understood that it was God's will for him not to stay in Jerusalem, he still had to ask himself what he was going to do. No one told him which direction to take: 'He inclined himself rather to study in order to help others'.[54] There followed the

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[48] Exx 104.
[49] Exx 248.
[50] Exx 165-67, which becomes the *General Examen*, *Const.* 101.
[51] *Const.* 671.
[52] *Autobiography*, 47.
[53] Exx 352-70.
[54] *Autobiography*, 50.

frustrating periods in Alcalà and Salamanca, which led him to seek out better courses in Paris. The first companions had a lengthy and contradictory debate about whether they should stay permanently in Jerusalem, and what was to happen to them in the event of not being able to get a ship to Palestine. Rome, the ultimate centre and starting point of the Society, was originally envisaged as part of a contingency plan, and only gradually emerged under the pressure of events and amidst floods of consolation[55] as the true goal in God's specific plan for them. The same ceaseless process of seeking and finding, seeking and finding, asking, asking, asking,[56] is evident in the deliberations of the first fathers, as they tried to discover whether they should stay together and take a vow of obedience to a superior. Clarity and simplicity did not suddenly appear with the official foundation of the Society in 1540. Ignatius took a long time to decide whether to accept his election as general, and thereafter he was for ever searching 'in every way to sense and fully to carry out God's will'.[57] *The Spiritual Diary* is one remarkable witness to his voyages of discovery.[58] *The Constitutions*, like the *Spiritual Exercises* and the man who wrote both, does not answer questions, but rather provides a method for each superior and subject to find out for themselves: 'as the unction of the Holy Spirit inspires him or as he judges in the sight of his Divine Majesty to be better or more expendient'.[59]

In the darkness and confusion of the 1970s, when everything was questioned, even the existence of the Society and the desirability of religious life, Peter felt much nearer to the hesitant stumbling of his founder. In answer to the first question that had been put to him — where do you come from? — he was content for the time being to answer with Ignatius:

> The Society was not instituted by human means, and neither is it through them that it can be preserved and developed, but through the omnipotent hand of Christ, God and our Lord. Therefore in him alone must be placed the hope that he will preserve and carry forward what he deigned to begin for his service and praise and for the aid of souls.[60]

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[55] *Ibid.*, 96, Exx 176.
[56] Exx 1 and *passim*.
[57] Ignatius's way of ending innumerable letters.
[58] 2 Feb 1544 to 27 Feb 1545.
[59] *Const.* 624k.
[60] *Const.* 812.