HOW THE CONSTITUTIONS WORK

By JOSEPH VEALE

THE STORY OF THE experience of St Ignatius and his early companions, from Manresa to Rome, is the story of a process by which their experience is translated into the *Constitutions*. Their spirit is given a body. A charism is embodied in an institution.

But institutions can be a tomb of the spirit. In all human life and especially in the life of the Church and of religious orders there is a tension between the charism and the institution. How can you harness an earthquake or regulate a tiger? If you try to domesticate a tiger, do you risk turning it into a kitten? St Ignatius was well aware of the fact that religious enterprises that begin with spiritual energy can with the passing of years become humdrum and depleted of life. Routine and legalism can choke the original vitality. Efficient administration can try to impose by regulation what in the beginning had its source in a shared spirit. Impersonal authority can supplant spiritual government. Obedience in response can grow dispirited. Or, indeed, the body can continue with some juridical semblance of life while from within it can simply disintegrate and decompose.

The decision to be a body

The document which we call the *Deliberation of the First Fathers* describes what happened when the early companions came together in Rome in 1539 'to seek the gracious and perfect will of God according to the scope of our vocation'. They could not go to Jerusalem as they had planned. They had offered themselves to the pope to go wherever he might send them. He was about to send them to different places.

> Would it be better for us to be so joined and bound together in one body that no physical dispersal however great could separate us? . . . Finally we decided affirmatively, namely that since the most kind and loving Lord had deigned to unite us to one another and to bring us together—weak men from such different places

> and cultures—we should not sever God's union and bringing together, but rather every day we should strengthen and more solidly ground it, forming ourselves into one body.

That was quickly decided. It took longer to decide whether 'to pronounce a third vow, namely to obey one of us'. Their eventual decision to obey one of themselves was equivalently to decide to become a religious body. It was a decision to be permanent. They expressly wished to pass on to later generations the particular experience they had shared with one another (*Formula* 2, *Const* 53, 82).

The only way to do that is to institutionalize. How, otherwise, do you communicate and conserve the original spirit? Spirit needs to be incarnated, to be given a local habitation and a name. But how do you wed the charism and the institution without killing the charism?

The Divine and Supreme Goodness

'We think it necessary that Constitutions should be written . . .' (*Const* 134) is there at the opening of the document. The *Formula* says,

> They had become companions . . . and exerted themselves in the Lord's vineyard for many years . . . performing with much praise in whatsoever countries they journeyed, and each one according to the grace granted him by the Holy Spirit, all the services of charity which pertain to the edification of souls.
>
> *Therefore* our predecessor approved, confirmed and blessed their institute . . . *that thus* the bond of charity and unity might be preserved both among the companions themselves and among others who would desire to follow that same institute (*F.*2).

'Therefore . . . that thus . . .'; the object of the institution is to aid the bond of charity to be preserved. You institutionalize in order to sustain love. The *Constitutions* are, in a sense, a Contemplation for Obtaining Love addressed to the body. The bond of love is *de arriba*. The Ignatian phrase says what St Ignatius experienced to be entirely given, from above, not capable of being the object of human achievement or striving.

> The chief bond to cement the union of the members among themselves and with their head is the love of God our Lord. For

> when they 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. Thus from both sides charity will come and in general will come all goodness and virtues through which one proceeds in conformity with the spirit (*Const* 671).

The companionship and the mission are a participation in the love of the Three Persons, 'as the rays of light descend from the sun and as the waters flow from their fountains' (Exx 237). '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 . . .' (*Const* 812). At all important junctures of the *Constitutions* the same theme recurs: the primacy of the divine initiative and activity. The vocation is experienced as being totally contemplative.

The response to the love of the Supreme Goodness is, therefore, '*Deum primo semper ante oculos habere . . .*' (*Formula*). 'In the first place to have God always before his eyes and then this institute which he has embraced and which is so to speak a road to God. And then let him strive with all his effort to achieve this end set before him by God.' The first movement is from God and the constant response to that is to keep God always before one's eyes. *Deinde*, in the second place, is the institute; the particular way of living and the law that endeavours to put words on it are secondary and subordinate. 'And then let him strive . . .'; the ascetical comes third; it is consequent upon and dependent on the previous contemplation of God. 'To achieve this end set before him by God'; it is God who gives the vocation and specifies the end.

The whole movement of the *Constitutions* is there. It can be seen in particular parts and chapters and within single paragraphs, as well as within the document as a whole. The movement is from God to the human means to the person's appropriation of the means and back again to God. There too is the characteristic Ignatian emphasis on being clear about the distinction between the means and the end. It is helpful to notice how frequently St Ignatius reiterates the end: 'This is the order which will be followed in the *Constitutions* . . . while keeping our attention fixed on the end which all of us are seeking, the glory and praise of God our Creator and Lord' (*Const* 137). The end is absolute and invariable. Then, so long as one purely desires the end, one can

be flexible with regard to the means. Besides, not all the means have the same importance; they have a hierarchy of value.

The Constitutions and the Exercises

The *Constitutions* do not stand alone. They are an elaboration of the *Formula of the Institute*, which expresses the outcome of the deliberation of 1539. They are linked with the preceding General Examen. They presuppose, above all else, the experience of making the Spiritual Exercises, which was the experience the early companions had shared and by which 'the most kind and loving Lord had united us to one another and brought us together'. It is not surprising, then, that the *Exercises* are printed as part of the *Institute*.

The *Constitutions* are unintelligible apart from the experience of making the Exercises. There is an organic relationship between the two. It is helpful, as one reads the *Constitutions* and tries to live them, to see the Exercises coming through and to see the differences, to see how they cast light on the Exercises and how the Exercises cast light on them.

'To seek God and to find him in all things': St Ignatius's own words are the best summary of his relationship with God. From the beginning in Manresa his mystical experience was of the Three Persons. As in the contemplation on the Incarnation at the opening of the Second Week of the Exercises, the Three Persons behold, contemplate, the world, the whole of creation and of human history, the reality of all our human experience. He never sees the Three Persons apart from creation, *todas las cosas*. Creation is never seen apart from the Three Persons.

It is integral to St Ignatius's experience of God that the smallest event in our human lives is governed by the providence of God. God manifests his concrete and particular will, his providence for our lives, in many ways: through the gospel; through the believing community, the Church; through the circumstances of our lives; through the demands of service, the needs of God's people; through obedience. And also through the interior leading of the Spirit.

The freedom of the Spirit

What did St Ignatius hope to be the outcome of making the Exercises? Of the many ways in which an answer might be given, I think the one closest to his expectation would be: someone who had been given the freedom of the Spirit, the inner freedom that

enables one to be led by the Spirit in all situations and circumstances. 'Through that same love which will descend from the Divine Goodness . . . and in general will come all goodness and virtues *through which one proceeds in conformity with the Spirit*' (*Const* 671).

To one who is familiar with the *Constitutions* it is evident that behind them is always present a particular experience of God. St Ignatius's experience of God in the world found a focus in the two exercises we know as the Kingdom and the Two Standards. One cannot read the *Constitutions* without being aware of them. More explicitly the *Constitutions* presuppose the experience of the process of election[1], the apprenticeship, as it were, to *discretio*, to the art of discernment. Entailed in that is an experience of the need for the freedom (indifference) that the election requires. There is a dynamic in the *Constitutions* that presupposes an experience of the dynamic of the Exercises.

Exercises and experiences

There are three stages, inseparable and interdependent, of entering into a spiritual appropriation of the Ignatian vocation. First, by making the Exercises. Secondly, in doing what St Ignatius called the experiences or experiments.[2] And then, in the light of one's spiritual experience of those, going back to the *Constitutions*.

The Exercises without the experiments could be detached, olympian, antiseptic, self-centred, self-preoccupied, individualist. If that is what they become, then that is not in harmony with St Ignatius's hope and intention. The whole thrust of the Exercises is towards mission, towards the apostolic contemplative life: 'that filled with gratitude for all, I may in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty' (Exx 233). For St Ignatius, to love and serve the Divine Majesty is inseparable from to love and serve all, *ayudar a las almas*. What serves to ensure that the fruit of the Exercises does not lapse into spiritual egoism or a disembodied spiritualism is the experience of finding God in the limited, messy, disordered, unsatisfactory, illogical and passionate reality of people's lives.

It is the interplay of the Exercises and the experiments that, in the intention of St Ignatius, reconstitutes the contemplative experience of the early companions. What comes first is the experience, what they were accustomed to call *nuestra modo de proceder*. It was

that that they articulated in the process of election (discernment) that they called the *deliberatio* and then put into words in the *Formula.* The *Formula* is the substance of the papal document that founded the institute. The *Constitutions* are an elaboration of the *Formula.*

The *Exercises* and the *Constitutions* are Ignatian in that they are not concerned to expound a doctrine; they avoid the abstract and look to concrete living and choice. They embody a dynamic. The *Constitutions* like the *Exercises* lead into an experience or, more properly, suggest the conditions in which it may be given. Seminally it was St Ignatius's mystical experience in Manresa; his subsequent pilgrim searching alone for the particular way of service those graces entailed; his constant prayerful reflection on experience, leading to decision and action; his discovery that the *Exercises* could dispose others to be given the same kind of grace; the experience of companionship in grace in Paris, issuing in the months of menial service and poverty and street preaching in Venice and Vicenza and the northern towns; the decision to go to Rome, to the pope, and then, as Paul III was about to scatter them, the *deliberatio*, the election to form a body and to pass on the founding experience to later generations.

There are evident differences between the *Exercises* and the *Constitutions*. The *Exercises* are addressed to all Christians; they engage individuals; they may, as happened since the beginning, issue in a Carthusian or a Dominican or a lay vocation. The *Constitutions* are addressed to a body in its members, each of whom has been given the same spirit, has experienced being called by God in the same way and toward the same end, to seek him and to find him in a life of service, to be instruments of God's saving work in the world. The *Constitutions* have as their purpose the health, the well-being, the energy and growth in the spirit of the body (*Const* 136, 812ff).

Structure and meaning

The *Constitutions* are like the *Exercises* in that they cannot be described in terms of any literary genre. It is easier to say what they are not.

> The book of the *Constitutions*, though it contains juridical elements, is not a code. Though it possesses many ascetical-spiritual elements, it is not a book of devotion nor an ascetical manual.

> Though it offers many directives that are apostolic on the human level, it is not a simple text-book for the apostolate or for pastoral ministry (Pedro Arrupe).[3]

Jean Beyer, formerly dean of the faculty of Canon Law in the Gregorian, says of the *Constitutions,* 'We have a law that is not a law, a code that is not a code'.[4] If they are not any of those, then what are they? The key to understanding them and to interpreting any part of them is their structure.

The *Constitutions* are so structured that if we want to understand them we need to see each part in the whole and each part in organic relationship with all the other parts. The *Summary of the Constitutions* served us well, but it was defective. It was as though someone took *King Lear* and extracted the great speeches and lyrical passages, arranged them in some rough logical order, dismembered the text, dislocated the dramatic structure and destroyed the story. And then said, there you have the essence of *King Lear.* Besides, it is as though the dismemberer of *King Lear* had omitted 'And take upon's the mystery of things as if we were God's spies'. Unaccountably the *Summary* left out three of the key Ignatian passages in the *Constitutions*, 414, 671 and 582.

The road, a path, the way

The General Examen explores the level of desire of one who wants to enter the Society (*Const* 101). To desire the end is to have a desire to set out. It is the beginning of a journey. The image of the road, a path, the way, recurs throughout the text. It recalls the autobiography, where St Ignatius speaks of himself always as the pilgrim. That metaphor came naturally to men who knew that it was to be their vocation to be constantly on the road, moving from place to place, never settling or putting down roots, always to experience the insecurity of having no permanent roof, to live 'in journeyings'.[5]

The institute, *quaedam via ad Deum*, is, as it were, one road to God. 'We think it necessary that Constitutions should be written to aid us to proceed better . . . along the path of divine service on which we have entered' (*Const* 134). The novice and the young scholastic will 'endeavour always to go forward in the path of the divine service' (*Const* 260). But he may 'run too rapidly' and may need to be restrained; or he may need to be 'stimulated, urged on and encouraged' when he flags (*Const* 386). The formed members

will be 'men who are spiritual and sufficiently advanced to run in the path of Christ our Lord to the extent that their bodily strength and exterior occupations and obedience allow' (*Const* 582). In experiencing what is characteristic of the poor, 'where the first members have passed through these necessities and greater bodily wants, the others who come after should endeavour, as far as they can, to reach the same point as the earlier ones, or to go farther in our Lord' (*Const* 81). The early companions 'made that fourth vow . . . in order that his Holiness might distribute them for greater glory to God. They did this in conformity with their intention to travel throughout the world and, when they could not find the desired spiritual fruit in one region, to pass on to another and another, ever intent on seeking the greater glory of God our Lord and the greater aid of souls' (*Const* 605). For he gave us an example that in all things possible to us we might seek to follow him, since he is the way which leads men to life (*Const* 101).

The novice or scholastic begins with a desire to set out.[6] But it is as yet unclear what will be the conditions of the road, the climate, the encounters and adventures, the incidents, the hazards of the journey. He cannot know them until he meets them and no one can tell him beforehand because no one knows. The constant interior climate of the pilgrim is to find his assurance and security only in the Supreme and Divine Goodness and in the certainty of being sent by obedience and guided by the Spirit. All the rest is uncertain; he lives with insecurity. He is freely undertaking to be led into and accompanied in an experience, to be incorporated step by step, integrated into the companionship of the body on mission.

It is that that underlies the ten-part structure of the *Constitutions* and the mode without precedent of its composition.

How the body is formed for mission

In Part I the individual is admitted. It may be that he is dismissed (Part II). He is cared for that he may go forward in spirit and in virtue (Part III). He is given the equipment of learning he will need and, besides, begins to be apprenticed to the mission of the body (Part IV). Part V treats of his final incorporation.

The first five parts deal, then, with the formation and growth of the one who will be sent on mission. In treating of the formation of the individual members, the *Constitutions* describe how the body

is being formed in its members. They are approaching the point at which the body is dispersed in its members on mission. But first, Part VI treats of the fully incorporated members in their relationship with God and with the other members, with the body.

Part VII deals with the ways in which the members are dispersed in Christ's vineyard and their relations with other people. This is the end towards which all the rest was moving. It is the end for which the Society was brought into being. And so it is the heart of the *Constitutions*. It is also the most primitive part of the text and the most indisputably Ignatian. The body now fully formed is articulated in its mission.

The last three parts of the *Constitutions* deal with the whole body in its life and mission. First, how the members so dispersed are to be kept in union, in coherent and co-operative action (Part VIII). Then, in Part IX, how the body is to be governed and given a head who will send the members, keep them in union and care for the growth in the spirit of the body by being

> closely united with God and intimate with him in prayer and in all his actions, that from God, the fountain of all good, he may so much the better obtain for the whole body 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 (*Const* 723).

The tenth and final part, 'how the body can be preserved and developed in its well-being', repeats those things that are essential if the earthen vessel that holds the spirit is to be sustained in continual and constant growth.

The order of execution

This description of the process of formation of the body, of the dispersal and the union, of the good government and vigour of the body, follows what St Ignatius calls 'the order of execution', not 'the order of intention or consideration'. The 'order of consideration first considers the end and then descends to the means to attain it' (*Const* 137). Characteristically St Ignatius rejects that way. He prefers to keep to the process of experience.

He prefers the concrete to the abstract. He looks to the means in constant contemplation of the end: while we keep our attention fixed on the end which all of us are seeking (*Const* 137). He is therefore concerned with the less perfect on the road to the more

perfect; he implies imperfection in the traveller at the start and makes allowance for it. Michael J. Buckley has pointed out how St Ignatius is not presenting ideals; he insists rather on contemplating the end, something that is spiritually and psychologically different. This method has to be flexible to adapt itself to the person, to his capacity and pace, 'according to the measure of divine grace imparted to each'. God is found in the reality of our human condition and one finds God and serves him by obeying it. The more abstract 'order of consideration' tends to be rigid. The way favoured by St Ignatius demands flexibility, in that the prescriptions of the *Constitutions* are to be implemented 'according to the circumstances of persons, times and places'.[7]

The order of consideration would properly proceed by topics: a chapter on obedience, another on prayer and so on. That St Ignatius does not express himself in that way has puzzled many a lawyer who comes to the *Constitutions* without the experience of trying to live them and has led to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. St Ignatius's method entails repetition, requires him to take up the same topic in changing contexts and at different stages of a Jesuit's life. To the man who likes things clear and distinct or who is more at home in abstract thinking, or to the legalistic mind, this method is unsatisfactory. In 1551, when a first draft was submitted to the founding group in Rome, the peppery Nicolas Bobadilla said it was like 'a confused labyrinth'. Even Alfonso Salmeron, who was learned and wise, said it had too much repetition.

The same theme is treated more than once. A good example is obedience. Part X treats of obedience in its function in preserving the well-being of the whole body, Part IX of the correlative to obedience, good government, Part VIII in its function in maintaining the union of the dispersed members, Part VII in its function for mission, Part VI of the obedience of the formed and incorporated Jesuit, Part IV in the context of studies and Part III of the obedience of novices. It is made clear that the obedience of a novice is not the same as the obedience of one who has been 'long tested' and who has been given the responsibility of a mission. It does not follow, of course, that what is said of obedience for novices has no meaning for the older men. Indeed, the full Ignatian teaching on obedience of the judgment is given only in Part VI. The earlier teaching is to be taken up and transmuted by the maturer man at a different level of experience.

The Preamble

The Preamble (*Const* 134) is given to help us to understand the nature of the text and how to interpret it. It is to the *Constitutions* rather like the Principle and Foundation in regard to the *Exercises*. The reality that it expresses underpins all that follows and is to be kept in mind as a guiding norm of interpretation, as a compass to hold one on course.

It would seem that constitutions are unnecessary. The Society was not founded by human means (*Const* 812); therefore it must be 'the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness of God our Creator and Lord which will preserve, govern and carry forward in His divine service this least Society of Jesus'. The principal means used by the divine Wisdom is 'the interior law of charity and love which the Holy Spirit writes and engraves upon hearts'. This interior law is effective 'more than any exterior constitutions'. 'Although' all that is true, 'nevertheless . . . we think it necessary that constitutions should be written to aid us to proceed better . . . along the path of divine service on which we have entered'. The interior law of the Spirit is primary. The exterior law is useful and necessary.

There is the same relationship here between the human means and the divine initiative and activity as we find in all the central statements of the *Constitutions* (*Const* 812–814, 414, 671). 'Nevertheless, since the gentle arrangement of Divine Providence requires cooperation from his creatures . . .'; our created and redeemed reality must be true to itself and we do what we can do. The human must be reverenced and its goodness honoured.

A passage concerning the apostolic formation of young Jesuits, omitted from the Summary, is one of those that shows St Ignatius's sense of the relationship between the human and the divine. In the eighth chapter of Part IV, which deals with 'the learning and other means of helping their fellowmen', it is said that toward the end of their studies the scholastics should begin to accustom themselves to the spiritual arms they will employ. Since they will have to associate with so great a diversity of persons throughout such varied regions, they need to learn about the Society's way of proceeding. They are to be able to foresee the opportunities which can be grasped for the greater service of God by using some means at one time and others at another. They are to be flexible and adroit in using a variety of human means.

> Although all this can be taught only by the unction of the Holy Spirit and by the prudence which God our Lord communicates to those who trust in his Divine Majesty, nevertheless the way can at least be opened by some suggestions which aid and dispose one for the effect which must be produced by divine grace (*Const* 414).

That is especially familiar to anyone who has given the Exercises. He knows that he can 'open the way by some suggestions'. What is humanly done is itself the fruit of the action of the Spirit and what is accomplished is wholly God's. As in the opening of Part X (*Const* 812–814) and in the Preamble and in *Const* 671, the spirituality calls to mind the eighteenth-century aphorism in which it was attempted to capture the uncapturable: Trust in God as though nothing depended on him but all on you. But so give everything you have to the work as though God alone were doing it and you not at all.

Incarnation

At the heart of all Ignatian spirituality is a vision of the goodness of created reality and of the earthly and earthy reality of the Incarnation. As one might say, a concrete and contemplative experience of the continuing Incarnation, of the Church. St Ignatius takes creation seriously; he never disdains the human, the real, the concrete, the historical, but sees it as sacramental, the channel of God's presence and power. All human reality, all human experience is sacramental. The spirit seeks a body.[8] Neither a disincarnate spiritualism nor a secular activism truly serves the integral message of the gospel (G.C. 33, par. 36).

There we come back to St Ignatius's contemplative grasp of God's action in the world, of the creating and redeeming action of the Three Persons *ad extra;* the supreme Wisdom and Goodness as our Providence.

> There came to me further understandings, namely how the Son first sent the apostles to preach in poverty, and then the Holy Spirit, giving his spirit and tongues, confirmed them, and so the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit, all three persons confirmed that mission.[9]

God is the one who enters into and is present to and cares for our lives in every detail, who has a will in regard to our lives and

mission, if only we can learn to seek and find it by 'proceeding in conformity with the spirit' (*Const* 671).

Experience discerned

So, to return to where we were at the beginning. The writing of the *Formula,* the General Examen and the *Constitutions* is a human means designed to pass on to future generations the contemplative experience of the first companions. But it is not raw experience. It is prayed experience, reflected upon together and discerned in the *deliberatio*, before it is written down. Between the experience and the text comes the election, *discretio*, a process of discernment.[10]

An analogous process in reverse is required if the text is to be understood, interpreted and lived. It is the same with the *Exercises* and indeed with the other Ignatian documents. To interpret the text, to bring it to life again, to continue to found the order, to animate and to deploy the body, in a post-Enlightenment, post-Darwin, post-Freud, post-Marx world, demands a sensitivity to 'the interior law of charity and love' which is the Holy Spirit. Between the text and the living of it comes the election, a process of spiritual discernment repeatedly named in the text itself, *discreta caritas*. The written law is a useful means, an instrument. The primary instrument is the body in its members, to the extent that they are *instrumenta conjuncta cum Deo* (*Const* 813). The *Constitutions* are not for speculative contemplation but for contemplative decision and action. It is that that embodies them, gives flesh again to the word, always according to the circumstances of persons, places and times.

For that one needs to be in tune with the text, with the Autobiography and the letters, above all with the *Exercises*. A little erudition can help us to be somewhat more exact in understanding the sixteenth-century language, its culture and its theological assumptions. That knowledge is imperfect at best. We need, too, naturally, to be as clear as we can be about our contemporary world and the direction in which it is moving, its different cultures and theologies, the sense of the believing community and the needs of God's people now. Those are the human means. At least as important is the need to be affectively involved in the *Constitutions* and their satellite documents. We learn their meaning by living them.

It is in deeds more than in words that the *Constitutions* come to be understood. Their meaning comes alive in an experience together of 'proceeding in conformity with the spirit', of our way of proceeding. It is *discreta caritas* in action that opens the *Constitutions* to us. It is in that contemplative procedure that we are to seek and find God in what we are brought to decide and to do to meet new needs in a different world, in missionary action that embodies the same spirit in another time.

Not a rule

In that sense the Ignatian *Constitutions* are not a rule, a law that would prescribe in detail what must as a rule be done. For example, in Part VI, where you would expect to find some description of what it would be like for a formed Jesuit to live in a Jesuit house, all you find is, 'In regard to the particular rules which are employed in the houses where they happen to be, it is proper that they should endeavour to observe the part which is expedient either for their own progress and edification or for that of the rest among whom they find themselves . . .' (*Const* 585).

The *Constitutions* are to be observed and implemented. 'Hence all of us should exert ourselves not to miss any point of perfection which we can with God's grace attain in the observance of all the *Constitutions*' (*Const* 547). But that implementation is not a mechanical or literal thing. (Nor is it, for that matter, in the Benedictine monastic tradition.)[11] The *Constitutions* do not say what must invariably be done; they are not in that sense a juridical code. They are aimed at dealing with concrete realities. They are to be pondered rather than executed unthinkingly. They cannot substitute for *discreta caritas,* but require it, demand it, ground its necessity. They provide criteria for that discernment. They describe and prescribe those interior attitudes and dispositions before God needed if one is to use *discreta caritas* according to the circumstances of persons, places and times. They are not just useful spiritual counsels lacking all authoritative and juridical value. They are instruments of missionary discernment prescribed to be used.

The body discerning

The *Constitutions*, then, are a kind of law. But they are a law that provides explicitly for the transcendence of the law by giving first importance to the interior law of charity and love, to the Holy Spirit. They are an instrument for missionary discernment, decision and action.

This discernment is never done, of course, independently of the body to which one has been joined as a member. Certainly a man must take responsibility for himself; that ultimate responsibility to God may not be supplanted by law or by obedience. He must stand over all his choices and be open to being led by God. Yet always as a member of the body. Discernment is always done in the body. One's mission needs to be in harmony with the mission of the body. To be made a member of the body is to surrender one's unredeemed preferences and desires. The link between personal responsibility and the mission of the body is the quality of communication and relationship between the member and his superior.

We come back once again to the relationship between the *Exercises* and the *Constitutions*. The *Constitutions* presuppose the apprenticeship to discernment experienced in making the Exercises. It can be said that the primary note of Ignatian spirituality and of the charism of the institute is *discretio habitualis* (G.C. 33, par. 13). Just as the *Exercises* are not a treatise on spirituality or prayer, but initiate a person into an experience of seeking God in seeking his will, and as the various prescriptions in the *Exercises* are various ways of disposing the person to receive gifts from God, so the various prescriptions in the *Constitutions* are designed to facilitate an experience of the body, to dispose the body of the Society to receive gifts from God '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'. It is a contemplative experience of the whole Company in apostolic action. The prescriptions, the themes, the topics are functional; they are means to something different, namely to the growth in the spirit of the body of the Company in doing what it was called together and sent to do, to respond in love to God as an *instrumentum conjunctum* in serving his people.

A tension of opposites

It has been shown by a French commentator how the *Constitutions* and their parts, the chapters within the parts and even single paragraphs within the chapters, have a structure that is genetic, relational and dialectic.[12] Genetic, in that the *Constitutions* are so structured as to show a process of growth. Relational, and therefore personal; the individual member grows in a series of relationships. You could say that the whole *Constitutions*, certainly its first five parts, are a document on formation, to form a certain kind of

man, an instrument united with God. The process of formation and integration into the body is, like St Ignatius's own, a process of reflecting on experience and praying it. But that is not done alone. It is done in relationship with a guide who, as in the Exercises, has been travelling the same road, and in a wider network of relationships with the other members of the body. The formation is individual and personal, not an assembly line. Without that the essentially contemplative nature of the life is almost certain to atrophy or disappear.

The structure and the reality it reflects are dialectic. It operates in a seeming contradiction of opposites and in their actual interplay. It is easily seen how, for example, Part VI, which treats of the personal life of the incorporated member, moves into Part VII, in which the members are dispersed. And that in turn gives place to Part VIII, in which the scattered members are sustained in union, a juridical union of the body and a spiritual union of hearts. The dialectic can be shown in operation in the language itself. We have seen how frequently St Ignatius expresses his sense of that in the characteristic verbal construction 'although . . . nevertheless . . .' whenever he confronts the mystery of the relationship between the freedom of God and human freedom.

Toward reconciliation

We began with one of those pairs of incompatibles, the charism and the institution, and wondered how they can be wed. The divine and the human we have also seen. There are many others. The individual member and the body. The discerning body and the Church. The spirit and the body. The mystical and the ascetical. Passivity and activity. The freedom of the gospel and the law. The union and the scattering. A personal life and mission that require the deepest levels of freedom, responsibility and initiative in seeming contradiction with entire obedience. Illuminism and rationality. The norms of intelligent reflection and discernment that are at one and the same time subjective and objective. Contemplation and action. The most efficient and professional employment of the human means, whether of learning or of skill, and at the same time the realization that it is only God who can make the fruit grow, leaving in peace the issue in failure or success to him (*Const* 812–814).

St Ignatius was too realistic, he had too keen a vision of the concrete, to be unaware of the tension between these polarities.

The human tendency is to grasp one pole strongly and to relax grasp of the other. What St Ignatius wanted was that both be held gently and strongly. Our minds tend to think in terms of either-or. It is never easy to sustain our grasp of both-and. It is not a question of balance or compromise between two opposing poles; balance and compromise can lead to dilution and apostolic debility; then you have neither one nor the other. It is rather a question of holding firmly to both and waiting upon God to work in us a transcendence of the polarities, a resolution of the tensions, a compenetration of one with the other.

This points inescapably to the difficulty, the pain and the challenge of the life we are called to. We live in the insecurity that lies at the heart of the tensions, the most familiar of which is between action and contemplation. It is somewhere at the intersection of those apparent opposites that we are crucified to the world and the world is crucified to us. But it is also somewhere in that tension that imagination is set free and enlarged and that prophetic creativity takes place.

NOTES

[1] 'Election' refers to that part of the *Exercises* that describes the process of discerning and deciding.

[2] 'Experiences' in the *Constitutions*, sometimes known as 'experiments', were a chief means devised by St Ignatius for the formation of young Jesuits. 'For as he travels about later on, he must associate with men and women both good and bad. Such associations require greater strength and experiences as well as greater graces and gifts from our Creator and Lord than if he were to live his life in a monastery'. (1541, *De collegiis et domibus fundandis*).

[3] Pedro Arrupe, in an address at Loyola, Spain, September 1974, *S.J. Documentation* No 25.

[4] Jean B. Beyer, 'Originalità e dipendenza delle costituzioni', *Introduzione allo studio delle Costituzioni*, (Rome, 1973, *C.I.S. Subsidia* 4).

[5] 'The first characteristic of our institute . . . is to travel . . .' (*Const* 626). Jeronimo Nadal, 'The principal and most characteristic dwelling for Jesuits is not in the professed houses, but in journeyings'. 'They consider that they are in their most peaceful and pleasant house when they are constantly on the move, when they travel throughout the earth, when they have no place to call their own'. *Mon. Nadal,* V, 195, 773. Cf John W. O'Malley, 'Jeronimo Nadal and the Jesuit vocation', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, XVI, no 2.

[6] See Ignacio Iparraguirre, 'Caminare in spirito per la via delle *Costituzioni*', *Introduzione.*

[7] *Const* 208, 211, 238, 297, 343, 351, 382, 395, 462, 626, 746, 754.

[8] See Dominique Bertrand, *Un corps pour l'Esprit.* (Collection Christus 38: Paris, 1974).

[9] *Diary*, 11 February 1544.

[10] See Maurizio M. Costa, '*Costituzioni*: esperienza ed ermeneutica', *Introduzione.* To anyone who has read that article it will be clear how greatly my reflections throughout are indebted to it. So many tributaries have gone over the years to these reflections that I have found it

impossible now to identify them. Besides M. Costa, the chief are Antonio de Aldama, Ignacio Iparraguirre, Jean Beyer and Michael J. Buckley.

[11] See Jean Beyer, *loc. cit.*; 'The cenobitical life is centred on the Abbot who is himself governed by the Rule but of which he still remains the *vivus interpres*; it is for this reason that Benedictine *discretio* is required'. Beyer draws attention to the last chapter of the Rule of St Benedict: *Quod non omnis observatio justitiae in hac regula sit constituta.*

[12] François Roustang, 'Introduction à une lecture', *Constitutions de la Compagnie de Jésus*, II, 122 ff, (Collection Christus No 24: Paris 1967).