

IGNATIAN CRITERIA FOR CHOICE OF MINISTRIES

By JOSEPH VEALE

THE IGNATIAN CRITERIA for choice of ministries are found in Part VII of the *Constitutions* (cited here as *Const*): 'The distribution of the incorporated members in Christ's vineyard, and their relations with their fellow men'. The text which we know as the 'Deliberation of the First Fathers' gives us an account of how the companions came together to pray and to find God's will for them:

Near the end of Lent the time was drawing near when we would have to be dispersed and separated from one another. We were very eager for this, recognizing it as necessary in order to reach the goal we had already fixed upon and thought about with intense desire . . . We decided to come together for some days before separating to discuss with one another our vocation and manner of life.

It was from those weeks of busy apostolic work together with 'prayers and sacrifices and meditations with greater than usual fervour' and 'casting all our concerns upon the Lord' that the universal scope of their vocation became clearer. They had been called together and united in a single desire 'to help souls' in order to be separated. Part VII treats of the different ways in which they, and the others who soon joined them, were to be distributed throughout the world.

The four ways of mission

The four chapters of Part VII name the four ways of being sent:

They may be sent to some places or others by the supreme vicar of Christ our Lord (ch 1);

. . . or by the superiors of the Society, who for them are similarly in the place of his Divine Majesty (ch 2);

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. . . or they may themselves choose where and in what work they will labour, when they have been commissioned to travel to any place where they judge that greater service of God and the good of souls will follow (ch 3);

. . . or they may carry on their labour not by travelling but by residing steadily and continually in certain places where much fruit of glory and service to God is expected (ch 4).

The means of helping souls

The first companions were in no doubt as to the kind of things they were to do. These were named in the 'Formula' (*Const* 3):

. . . by means of public preaching, lectures, and any other ministry whatsoever of the word of God, and further by means of the Spiritual Exercises, the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity, and the spiritual consolation of Christ's faithful through hearing confessions and administering other sacraments. Moreover, this Society should show itself no less useful in reconciling the estranged, in holily assisting and serving those who are found in prisons or hospitals, and indeed in performing any other works of charity, according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good.

The means which the Society uses are named again in chapter 4, where residences and even houses of jesuit studies were seen as centres from which Jesuits went out and were constantly on the move to exercise a vigorous and varied apostolate:

The good example of a thoroughly upright life and of christian virtue—desires in the presence of God our Lord and prayers for all the Churches—Masses offered especially in gratitude—the sacraments—the ministry of the word, proposed to the people unremittingly both in the Society's church and in other churches, squares or places of religion—spiritual conversations and the Spiritual Exercises—the members will also occupy themselves in corporal works of mercy to the extent that the more important spiritual activities permit and their own energies allow—and by writing books.

The selection of these means was to be made 'according to the opportunity which exists and the decision of the superior'.

Criteria: (a) the length of missions

We find it surprising that no mention is made in Part VII of the founding of schools. Already, while St Ignatius was sifting his criteria for sending men, the bishops and authorities of towns in which jesuit missionaries had been converting the people were pleading with him to start boys' schools. With fewer than a thousand men to send, he saw the apostolic value of schools and was accepting the need and the demand as a sign of God's will.

The second chapter does not look to the question of founding professed houses or colleges or places where Jesuits would reside 'steadily and continually', but to missions that would ordinarily take two or three months (*Const* 615).

Characteristically, St Ignatius requires flexibility in determining the length of such missions:

One should attend to the first characteristic of our Institute. Since this is to travel to some regions and to others, remaining for a shorter or longer time in proportion to the fruit which is seen . . . (*Const* 626).¹

Thought should be given to the nature of the spiritual affairs to be dealt with; to the greater or less importance of the men themselves as viewed against the need and the fruit which is reaped or expected; to the opportunities available in other places; to the obligation there is to take up these works; to the resources which the Society possesses to provide for these undertakings. These suggest certain ignatian criteria that are permanently valid for choosing ministries: the actual resources of personnel and their particular talents; the greater opportunity elsewhere that we may be neglecting; the need and fruit which is being reaped or expected, as against a greater need elsewhere or a greater fruit that these particular people might meet or gain elsewhere.

(b) For one purpose rather than the other

When the demands for men were many and the men few, the criteria for sending one or two or three Jesuits for a time to a place for a particular work are given in *Constitutions* 623. A series of alternative kinds of work is listed and in each case the first is to be preferred to the second. It is clear that a hierarchy of importance is indicated by the repetition of 'if both things cannot be done simultaneously and other considerations are equal'. Firstly,

superiors were to prefer work of more importance, urgency and need:

When there are some things which are especially incumbent upon the Society, or it seems that there are no others to attend to them: and there are other things in regard to which others do have a care and a method of providing for them; in choosing missions there is reason to prefer the first to the second.

Nadal sees the meeting of those needs 'where there are no others to attend to them' as the *raison d'être* of the Society. It is a view that is central to his teaching and which recurs insistently: '*Sed hae quidem prorsus praeferendae, ut ad quas Dominus proprie Societatem vocavit. Eo enim nostra vocatio spectat, ut illae animae iuventur quibus ab aliis ministris subsidium non exspectatur*'.² Secondly, 'Among pious works of equal importance, urgency and need, when some are safer for the one who cares for them and others are more dangerous; and when some are easier and more quickly despatched . . .'³ Thirdly, what aids more of our fellow human beings, such as preaching or lecturing, is to be preferred to other work which is concerned more with individuals, such as hearing confessions or giving Exercises, 'unless there should be some circumstances through which it would be judged that to take up the second would be more expedient'. Finally, 'When there are some spiritual works which continue longer and are of more lasting value, such as certain pious foundations for the aid of our fellow men; and other works less durable which give help on only a few occasions and for a short while . . .'⁴

(c) *To one place rather than to another (Const 622).*

These are the criteria that are most familiar to us. What may not be so familiar is that a hierarchy of importance in the criteria is indicated by the rubric: 'When other considerations are equal (and this should be understood in everything that follows) that part of the vineyard ought to be chosen in which there is . . . 'greater need'⁵; greater fruit 'through the means which the Society uses'⁶; a greater debt of *gratitude*⁷; a greater *multiplying effect*⁸; greater *opposition* to the Society⁹.

The governing principle

These criteria are simply articulations of the governing principle

that St Ignatius repeats over and over again. The Society does not exist to serve this or that local or particular need: 'there are many who request help while considering more their own spiritual obligations to their flocks, or other advantages not so immediately their own, rather than the common or universal benefits' (*Const* 618).¹⁰

The Society's mission is to look to the more universal good, the reason why the Society 'has placed its own judgment and desire under that of Christ our Lord and his vicar' (*Const* 606). 'The more universal the good is, the more it is divine'. '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'.

What is important is the general norm. The articulations of it are an attempt to show how the norm might be applied in concrete situations. They are not to be taken absolutely or rigidly (since it was always in St Ignatius's mind that the more particular a prescription is, the more flexibly it should be implemented in view of the end and in the light of circumstances). Neither are they to be too easily dismissed, since St Ignatius and Polanco laboured long in refining them.

They deal with the question of temporary missions. The Society has rightly taken them in a more general sense as a valuable indication of St Ignatius's mind regarding better choice of ministries, especially when they are confirmed by what we know of his mode of decision in his practice and from his letters.

They have been given authoritative confirmation and interpretation by the recent General Congregations:

The Spiritual Exercises can pour into us a spirit of magnanimity and indifference, of firm decisions and reformation, a renewal of our activity or of the means for reaching our goal more successfully through the light of those well-known principles: the greater service of God; the more universal good; the more pressing need; the great importance of a future good; and special care of those significant ministries for which we have a special talent (GC 31, 365).

What the criteria presuppose

But the criteria are simply aids to 'hold oneself on the right course' in a process of prayer that we learnt in the election in the Exercises, a prayer that looks to decision and is governed and

directed by 'the unction of the Holy Spirit' (*Const* 624,414,161). Just as the criteria are subordinate to the general norm (the more universal good), so even that criterion is subordinate to a process or procedure that St Ignatius has at heart here in Part VII and throughout the Constitutions:

Although it is the supreme providence and direction of the Holy Spirit that must efficaciously guide us to bring deliberations to a right conclusion in everything . . . still this can be said in general . . . (*Const* 624).

Therefore the superior . . . ought to bestow much careful thought on missions of this kind in order that that procedure may always be used which is conducive to the greater service of God and the universal good . . . while holding fast to this thoroughly right and good intention in the presence of God our Lord . . . (*Const* 618).

This is the language of the Exercises. Here, as throughout, the Constitutions presuppose that the Jesuit who reads them and is trying to live them has made the Exercises, is familiar in practice with all that is said there about making right and good decisions, and is living by the *discretio* they dispose him to receive.¹¹

That these dispositions are not seen by St Ignatius to be required only by superiors who send on missions, but by all Jesuits as well, is shown in his luminous statement on the formation of scholastics:

In general they ought to be instructed about our manner of acting . . . Hence they should foresee . . . the opportunities which can be grasped . . . by using some means at one time and others at another.

Although all this can be grasped only by the unction of the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 2, 20. 27) 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).¹²

The thirty-third General Congregation confirms this where it says: '*Ut Deum nos in hoc mundo vocantem audire eique respondere valeamus, opus nobis est habituali discretione*' (1. 12). We know from the Exercises that the precondition for such *discretio habitualis* is the gift of indifference, and that the disposition for receiving that

degree of freedom is self-abnegation:

We cannot attain this discerning attitude (*hunc discretionis habitum*) without self-abnegation, which is the fruit of our joy in the presence of the coming kingdom . . . Today our *interior freedom* will show itself in a greater availability on the part of the whole body of the Society as well as of each one of us, an availability by which we will respond in obedience to the changes and diverse cultures of the world (GC 33 1. 13).

Mobility

Even a cursory reading of Part VII brings home St Ignatius's concern for mobility. We were to be set free so that we could leave a work when a greater need could be met or a greater good be obtained:

They did this in conformity with their desire 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).

Since Fr Janssens in 1947 said that a better choice of apostolates was 'the most important task of all', the Society has been painfully trying to regain its mobility. Now, it is not geographical mobility that is called for so much as mobility of imagination and enterprise. Now, it is not only individuals who are called to mobility, but also institutions.

The Constitutions are, in large part, a set of guidelines for forming members of the body with those attitudes and dispositions which would ensure that the body should have a high degree of *freedom, obedience, responsibility and initiative*.

The recent General Congregations call communities and institutions to take the means to acquire the same dispositions. They provide for each community or team an inbuilt principle of change, by asking men to come together prayerfully to assess whether their work is meeting the criteria of greater need and greater fruit. A province of apostolic teams like that would be free, adaptable, available and mobile.

When the Constitutions were written, the problem of long-

established institutions had not arisen. They do not deal with the question. Jesuit houses were places where Jesuits lived, not settled communities in which they worked. Even houses of studies were places from which men went out to meet local apostolic needs.¹³

Obstacles to mobility

Quite early in the Society, apostolic institutions were found to be a way to respond to needs. They will continue to be. It is useful to take account of the deeper and more lasting good they can do. It is useful, too, to look from time to time at the ways in which they can in practice reduce the Society's mobility, its freedom to move to meet a more pressing need or to gain a more universal good.

We are all familiar with the multiple and subtle ways in which what we begin to use as a means insensibly becomes the end. 'Consequently we make an end of the means, and of the means an end. As a result, what we ought to seek first, we seek last. Nothing must move me to use such means, or to deprive myself of them, save only the service and praise of God our Lord' (Exx 169).

More easily than other means, the institutions to which we happen to be assigned can become the end for which we live and work. Since the nineteen-forties the Society has been asking us to look beyond the horizon of our particular work and to cultivate responsibility for the mission of the whole body.¹⁴ There can be unspoken pressures in any settled apostolate to give all one's energies and ingenuity to defending the work against other jésuit institutions hungry for men, or against General Congregations or Generals who point out that the world has changed, that other demands may be more urgent.

The freedom that the Spirit gives includes a freedom from prejudice, whether in favour of relinquishing a work or of keeping it. It gives the freedom also to retain what is discovered to be reaping more spiritual fruit: 'They will make efforts neither to want that, nor anything else, unless the service of God our Lord alone move them to do so. As a result, the desire to be better able to serve God our Lord will be the cause of their accepting anything or relinquishing it' (Exx 155). The freedom to keep something is found only when there is freedom to let it go.

Indifference

The secret of the Society's mobility is indifference. It is everywhere presupposed in the Constitutions and is expressly referred to in Part VII, where St Ignatius says that a 'thoroughly right and pure intention' will keep us on the right course. It is the constant and purifying search for 'the interior law of charity and love which the Holy Spirit writes and engraves upon hearts' and which is more important than 'any exterior constitution' or any part of it.

The thirty-third General Congregation speaks of it when it says: 'Today our interior freedom will show itself in rising above individualism'. The Congregation refers to the individualism that is an obstacle to integration into the mission of the community. But retreat houses, schools, institutes of spirituality or of justice, parishes, any kind of work embodied in any kind of institution, can suffer from an analogous individualism that is an obstacle to integration into the mission of the whole body. It is a way in which the Society itself experiences the oppression of structures. It is all the greater an obstacle because it is less recognizable and less tractable than our individual clinging to comfort, convenience, prestige and influence and all the other clamouring egoisms that face us daily.

That is why the recent Congregations prescribed that responsibility for apostolic initiatives be shared by all. When an apostolic community becomes aware, together, of the urgency of an apostolic need, and labours to come, together, to an apostolic choice and shared purpose, then it has to discover its need to work and pray for a continued deepening of spiritual freedom. The pain of that and the fears it arouses are something that each of us experiences.

A spirituality of risk

The spiritual freedom that is at the heart of the Exercises and the Constitutions seems to have been the secret of the early Jesuits' ability to undertake new and daring enterprises. It liberated their imagination to seize opportunities 'now using one means, now another', to create new ventures, to realize undreamt-of possibilities. It may also be the secret of the disproportion between their small numbers and small talent and the great spiritual fruit God worked through them; it freed them to be supple instruments through which the Spirit could blow where he willed (*Const* 813).

Both the Constitutions and the Exercises embody the conviction that God can make his concrete and particular will known when we take the means to be made free. The Exercises are a school of discernment for the individual. The Constitutions are a school of discernment for the whole body of the Society. Part VII gives the norms for discerning missions and, in our times, for adapting apostolates.

The Constitutions give guidelines for the exercise of *discreta caritas*. That is not an invitation to imprudence. But in practice discretion can be so emphasized that the *caritas* evaporates. We have to go to St Ignatius's practice to understand it properly. In the *Memoriale* it is said of him:

Our father often gives the impression that in his undertakings he is not at all concerned with human prudence, as in the case of the college that he started without having any definite income at his disposal . . . As, at the beginning of such undertakings, he seems to go beyond human prudence, so he uses divine and human prudence to look for the necessary means to maintain them.¹⁵

In Part X of the Constitutions we are told that 'the human or acquired means ought to be sought with diligence' (814). But the measured judgment and sanity of the Constitutions are also a clear indication that good decisions are not made by confining ourselves to the level of reason. St Ignatius wrote in a letter:

For it may often be that those things which do not seem to fit in at all with human prudence are perfectly compatible with the divine prudence. For this cannot be bounded by the laws of our reasonings.

Hugo Rahner's comment on that is: 'These words are the best commentary on the three times of election. They sum up the whole of Ignatius'.¹⁶ In the same place he quotes as an accurate reflection of the mind of St Ignatius some words attributed to him by Ribadeneira:

In the things of God, those who are over-prudent will hardly ever achieve anything really great. For those who are always thinking about difficulties and who are constantly brooding and vacillating because they fear the possible outcomes which they foresee, will never turn their hearts towards things of real beauty.

NOTES

¹ 'The first characteristic of our Institute . . . is to travel'. It has often been pointed out that the early companions envisaged a body of men dispersed but united in imitation of Jesus on the roads with his apostles. Nadal comes back to that theme frequently:

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, when they are always in need, always in want — only let them strive in some small way to imitate Christ Jesus, who had nowhere to lay his head and who spent all his years of preaching in journey (*Monumenta Nadal*, V, 773).

The principal and most characteristic dwelling for Jesuits is not in the professed houses, but in journeyings . . . by which they diligently seek to gain for Christ the sheep that are perishing. And this is indeed the distinctive mark of our vocation: that we accept from God and the orthodox Church the care of those for whom nobody is caring . . . This is a work that is at the same time of the greatest difficulty, labour and danger, as well as the greatest utility and necessity. It is hence that the Society seems somehow to imitate the condition of the Church of the Apostles . . . (*Mon. Nadal*, V, 195).

² Nadal, Jeronimo: *Scholias in Constitutiones* (1976, Granada), p 442. Fr Antonio de Aldama, in his commentary on Part VII, *Repartíendose en la viña de Cristo*, says: 'No aparece con la misma exclusividad en los escritos ignacianos'. (p 104).

³ When Fr James Miron and later Fr Luis Gonzales da Camara were asked to be confessors to King John III of Portugal, they refused firmly, partly on the grounds of safety. St Ignatius was equally firm in telling them to do it:

I can see, of course, your reasons, based on humility and the security which is more easily found in lowly than in prominent occupations, and I cannot but approve and be edified by your motives. But, all things considered, I am convinced that you are ill-advised in this determination, if you consider the greater service and glory of God our Lord (Young, *Letters*, p 282).

⁴ The 'spiritual works' in question here are organizations which a Jesuit, during a short stay, could begin and then leave to the care of their members. De Aldama (*op. cit.*, p 108) quotes Polanco to this effect. Examples were the Company of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, founded by Peter Favre in Parma in 1540, and the Company of Charity founded by Broët in Faenza in 1544.

⁵ Need: 'because of the lack of other workers or because of the misery and weakness of one's fellowmen in it and the danger of their eternal condemnation'. What weight should be given to Nadal's insistence that this is the note of our vocation? De Aldama tends to play it down: 'Ya dijimos que esta idea es propia de Nadal' (*op. cit.*, p 104). St Ignatius chose Nadal to explain the new Constitutions throughout Europe and said of him in doing so: 'He altogether knows my mind and enjoys the same authority as myself'. Polanco said of Nadal: 'He knows our father, Master Ignatius, well because he had many dealings with him, and he seems to have understood his spirit and comprehended our Institute as well as anyone I know in the Society'.

The references are given in John W. O'Malley, 'Jeronimo Nadal and the jesuit vocation' *Studies in the spirituality of Jesuits*, XVI, no 2, pp 3 and 17.

⁶ Fruit: 'Where one sees . . . a better disposition among the people . . . This disposition consists in the people's greater devotion and desire . . . or in the condition and quality of the persons . . .'

⁷ Gratitude: What is in question here is temporary missions of valuable workers to places where the people had already founded a college or welcomed jesuit students.

⁸ Multiplying effect: 'Preference ought to be given to those persons and places which,

through their own improvement, become a cause which can spread the good accomplished to many others who are under their influence or take guidance from them'.

⁹ Greater opposition: where all the above considerations are equal, some men might be sent for a time who 'by their life and learning' might open gates that had been closed, since 'it is helpful in general to strive to retain good will and charity . . . especially of those whose favourable or unfavourable attitude towards it is of great importance for opening or closing the gate leading to the service of God and the good of souls' (*Const* 823).

¹⁰ *Mirando más sus propias obligaciones espirituales cerca sus ovejas o otros cómodos no tanto inmediatos.* This notoriously contorted and untranslatable phrase was inserted by St Ignatius in *Text B*. The earlier words were plainer, simply: *sus propios comodis espirituales*. De Aldama recommends Polanco's gloss: *aliorum commodorum a fine nostro magis distantium*.

¹¹ 'The wellspring of our apostolate. We are also led back again to our experience of the Exercises . . . Thereby we gradually make our own that apostolic pedagogy of St Ignatius which should characterize our every action' (GC 32,87).

'The pedagogy of the Exercises is a pedagogy of discernment. It teaches a man to discover for himself where God is calling him, what God wants him to do, as he is, where he is, among his own people' (GC 32, 106).

¹² The construction 'although . . . nevertheless . . .' is found wherever St Ignatius wishes to indicate his reverence for the usefulness of the human means and their entire subordination to the unction of the Holy Spirit. The preamble to the Constitutions (134), which is their principle and foundation and determines their interpretation in practice, is constructed in that way. Though the words are not used, the key passages that are found in paragraphs 813 and 814 express the same relationship between the human and the divine.

¹³ 'Houses of the Society must be like quarters for squadrons, from which soldiers leave to skirmish and to make various sallies against the enemy, and then to regather there. Thus it shall come to pass that members of the Society will leave for one or other region to struggle against vice and against demons: while others will make up the main corps for battle (constituting places) where ours will gather "*et requiescent pusillum*", to use our Lord's words, where they come together to refresh themselves . . . to gain friendly and spiritual strength from the other fathers' (*Mon. Nadal V*, 470, 773).

¹⁴ 'Collaboration of every kind, transcending every sort of individualism, is more necessary in contemporary circumstances than ever before' (GC 31, 321).

'The missions on which Jesuits are sent do not exempt us from the need of discerning in what manner and by what means such missions are to be accomplished' (GC 32, 29).

'Our Jesuit communities have to help each of us to overcome the reluctance, fear and apathy which block us from truly comprehending the problems' (GC 32,92).

'We belong to a province, which itself should constitute an apostolic community. Coordination of the apostolate on a larger scale than at local level should take place' (GC 32,117). Formation is to 'help young Jesuits to experience the whole province as an apostolic body united in one spirit' (GC 32, 148).

¹⁵ Luis Gonçalves da Camara, *Mémorial* (Collection Christus 20), p 234.

¹⁶ The references are given in *Ignatius the theologian*, p 225.