

PRAISE

The Fundamental Attitude in the Church

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An Ignatian Contribution to Ecclesiology?

WE LIVE IN TIMES not much given to handing out praise. This seems true in most situations, but perhaps most of all where the Church is concerned. Any praise is seen either as a form of adulation of those who govern or as a veil drawn over unfortunate realities. Yet St Ignatius, who can hardly be accused of either tactic, places praise as the cornerstone in his advice for discerning how best to think *within* the Church. Many writers are convinced that this was his major contribution to the renewal of the Roman Catholic Church of his time and it remains a key contribution to modern ecclesiology.

The evidence for this view is to be found in the so-called ‘Rules for thinking *within* the Church’.¹ These are a set of notes published at the end of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Unfortunately, these pages are among the most misunderstood, or the most wilfully misinterpreted, in the whole of spiritual literature. As a result, too many Christians have been deprived of their valuable message.

For many who are not familiar with the process followed in the Ignatian Exercises these Rules are regarded as if they were a set of theological assertions in the discussion concerning popular devotions and liturgical acts; or else they are transformed into a fanatical defence of some general orthodoxy which has to be upheld by everyone. In fact, the Rules are something quite different. Such interpretations as these fail to make sense of several of the Rules which aim above all at the

¹ As will become clear in this article, this title does little justice to the original which speaks of the ‘*sentido verdadero* that we ought to maintain in the Church militant’; here the term *sentido verdadero* is partly covered by the phrase, ‘the true attitude of mind’, chosen by Michael Ivens for his translation, but the Spanish *sentido* implies both meaning (*mind*), and also feeling. [Translator’s Note]

avoidance of adopting radically fixed opinions. Quite absent from the *Spiritual Exercises* is any polemical tone, and the Ignatian approach avoids anything that would be foreign to openness of spirit and constant respect for personal freedom.

Given that these Rules come as the final stage in the process of the Exercises, one can only interpret them correctly as being a means of discernment related to the Church. In the words of the eminent ecclesiologist Jesús Corella:

The difficulty that many experience with these Rules is probably due to their being taken, falsely, out of context. These are not intended to be game rules or guidelines to a minimal orthodoxy in relation to the Church. They are rather rules for discernment, intended to help the exercitant recognise if he or she really appreciates the mystery of the Church, and what effect that is having. Thus, far from being conditions required for perfection, they are concrete options in a life in the Spirit. They require maturity and have to be understood from within, certainly not from some slavish preoccupation with correct orthodoxy. Attitudes that lean towards anything fanatical would be a perversion of what Ignatius intended with these Rules.²

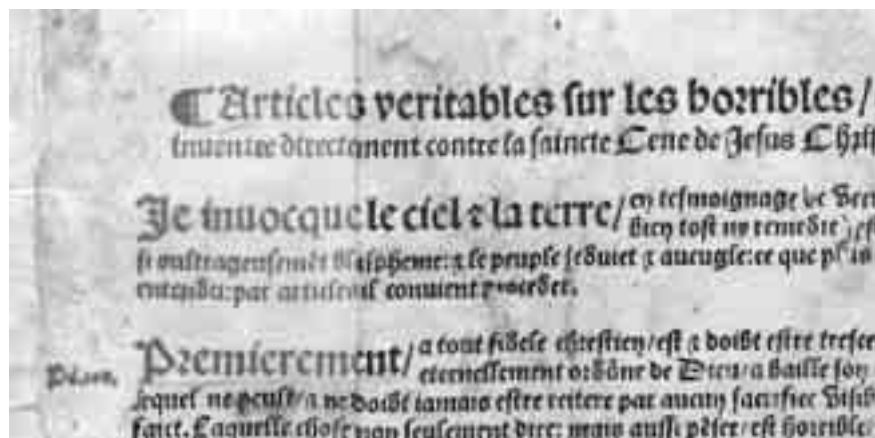
A striking feature of the Rules is that more than half of them begin with the phrase, 'We should praise'. Some readers may well be confused to find a text praising a whole series of practices or ecclesiastical structures which are very unequal in theological relevance: the sacraments; liturgical ceremonies; religious vows; the veneration of relics; popular devotions; indulgences; Lenten penances; ecclesiastical images and decorations; schools of theology; canonical rulings Why continually praise and treat as if they were comparable personal devotions, however legitimate, and the precepts officially proclaimed by the Church? What was Ignatius thinking when he used the same term in connection with such different things? Was there a purpose behind this?

An examination of the historical context of the Rules is very revealing.

To Praise Something Is Not to Adopt It, but to Speak Well of It

On arriving in Paris early in January 1528, St Ignatius found the Church in anything but a peaceful state. Erasmus had just abandoned the city after the Sorbonne had condemned one hundred propositions selected from his works, but his admirers continued to spread his views. Calvin

² Jesús Corella, 'Ejercicios Espirituales para desarrollar sentido de Iglesia', *Manresa*, 62 (1990), 24.



Leaflet attacking the Mass, by Antoine Marcourt, 1534

also would soon depart, after one of his disciples had delivered a very controversial speech. There was general confusion in the halls of the University and condemnations were flying left, right and centre.

Precisely in that same month of January 1528, the local bishops of the region of Sens met in Paris to examine the situation and to repeat the earlier condemnation of the errors of Erasmus. The Council lasted over nine months, the Acts being published only in 1529. They were met with opposition from the followers of Erasmus, and this opposition became public. Nearly every one of the structures that the Council considered essential were presented by the Erasmians as needing reform and being open to criticism. Paris was flooded with leaflets opposing the sacrifice of the Mass, contradicting the teaching of the Council. There were arrests and burnings at the stake.³

Later, Ignatius was to make use of this incident and the controversy it aroused when working out his own vision of the Church. All historical commentators are agreed that his first thirteen Rules are directly related to the Council of Sens. This is stated succinctly by one historian: 'If one casts an eye over the *Acta* of the Council of Sens, held in Paris in 1528, the similarities with the themes mentioned there and the text of the Ignatian Rules become obvious'.⁴ There is a clear correspondence

³ The *affaire des placards* took place in Paris in October 1534, very shortly before Ignatius left for Spain: see Cándido de Dalmases, 'The Church in the Personal Experience of St Ignatius', *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* (CIS), 14/3 (1983), 56.

⁴ Santiago Madrigal, 'Claves para una relectura de las Reglas para sentir con la Iglesia', *Manresa*, 73 (2001), 6. The first to call attention to the parallelism was Paul Dudon, in *Saint Ignace de Loyola*

between nearly all the Rules and the Acts of the Council of Sens and, where this does not occur, one can see a direct reference to theses or statements of Erasmus.

Ignatius did not himself pick out the points to be praised; rather he followed the list of polemical themes that he had found when living in Paris. His contribution was to take over an existing list and, without engaging in controversy on one side or the other, to form his Rules by adding at the front of each proposition the phrase, 'One should praise'. He does not defend them as indisputable, nor criticize them as erroneous. He says, simply and above all that one should 'praise' them, that is to say, speak well of them.

If one considers the themes contained in the Rules, it becomes possible to understand what St Ignatius has in mind when in this context he recommends praise of so many propositions and asks so bluntly for an unconditional attitude. It is immediately clear that for him 'praise' is not the equivalent of acceptance or defence under all circumstances. In fact, four (!) of his first eight Rules mention topics which he was to consider unsuitable for his new Institute or which he would try, as much as he could, not to support.

To this group belong the Rules that refer to the singing of Office in choir, and the stipulation concerning corporal penances (found in many monastic constitutions); he would later obtain permission from the Pope to exempt the Society from both these practices. Similarly, Ignatius showed little enthusiasm for the veneration of relics, or collection of indulgences, or ecclesiastical ornamentation and buildings. There are few references to his devotion to relics, as is also true of St Francis Xavier—though not of the Blessed Peter Favre. Ignatius kept his followers out of the sale of indulgences in Germany, and opposed any ostentatious decoration in the church of La Strada. It was only after this death that the majestic church of the Gesù was built.

In the light of such reservations, it would be wrong to interpret the word 'praise' in the Rules as the expression of some blanket approval or

(Paris: Beauchesne, 1934). The hypothesis was confirmed by Pedro de Leturia, 'Problemas históricos en torno a las reglas para sentir con la Iglesia', in *Estudios Ignacianos* (Rome: IHSJ, 1957); Jesús Corella, *Sentir la Iglesia. Comentario a las reglas ignacianas para el sentido verdadero de Iglesia* (Madrid: Mensajero-Sal Terrae, 1988); Santiago Arzubialde, *Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio. Historia y análisis* (Madrid: Mensajero-Sal Terrae, 1991); José María Lera, 'Experiencia de Iglesia en el libro de los Ejercicios (2): "Sentire in Ecclesia"', *Manresa*, 68 (1996); Santiago Madrigal, *Eclesialidad, reforma y mission* (Madrid: San Pablo-Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, 2008).

a defence, for the sake of orthodoxy of particular Church practices or structures—whether the use of candles or the sale of indulgences. Rather it is intended as a call to recognise the working of the Spirit in them. There are Christians with whom the Spirit communicates by these means. What is admirable is that St Ignatius is willing to embrace that truth wholeheartedly, while also accepting that the Spirit can be present in a different way of thinking. Really he is advocating, with all its consequences, a plurality of opinions—theological, liturgical, canonical—as being legitimate in the Church. The one attitude he is not permitting is that which ridicules or rejects any situation where the Spirit is at work. And so, he strongly urges all Christians to appreciate and speak well of whatever may lead others sincerely towards God.

***To ... speak well
of whatever
may lead others
sincerely
towards God***

The true import of the Ignatian message has been encapsulated in these words of Fr Kolvenbach:

Let me say here that ‘praise’ does not necessarily mean that we should adopt the practices he mentions. Ignatius, as we know, placed firm limitations in the Society of Jesus on practices such as these. What he deplores is a tendency to attack and ridicule them. A representative of this tendency was Desiderius Erasmus, who died in 1536. He and his disciples were not heretics. They shared with Ignatius a firm faith in Christ and a contemplative approach to the Gospels. But a reading of the *Enchiridion* of Erasmus brings out a negative and critical attitude, one contrary to the way of thinking that Ignatius developed from experience.⁵

By repeatedly calling for praise in these Rules, St Ignatius is excluding from his ecclesiology attitudes that are bitterly critical or fanatical. He is asking us to accept a plurality of opinions and tendencies wherever they may appear, avoiding outright criticism of views that differ from our own. Such is explicitly the message of the final Rules, written in Rome in 1541, when the violent controversy that broke out between the First Companions and the preacher Mainardi, a crypto-Lutheran, during the Lent season of 1538 had calmed down. One cannot build up the Church by exacerbating opposition and prohibiting controversial views: such would be the core message that Ignatius wanted to get across with these Rules.

⁵ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, ‘The Rules for Thinking, Judging, Feeling in the Post-Conciliar Church’, *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* (CIS), 35/1 (2004), 19–27, here 21.

Praise of the Church and Its Doings, No Matter What These May Be

One may ask what sort of Church Ignatius had in mind. Was it one that was completely saintly, devoid of all signs of corruption and abuse of power among its more distinguished representatives? Surely not! Ignatius' residence in Rome coincided with a period of blatant corruption in the papacy and in many bishoprics.⁶ There is not a single account of Ignatius or any recorded saying of his to indicate that he accepted or was evasive about this situation. But it is quite clear that he never allowed the reality of such corruption the authority to modify his ecclesiology.

Ignatius was convinced of the love that Jesus had for the Church militant in all its doings, and he clearly saw that its moral standing, no matter how doubtful, could not eliminate the presence of the Spirit in it. The 'hierarchical' Church (Exx 353)—in other words, the Church that comes before us incorporating the *mediation* of the hierarchy—is, through God's will, 'our holy mother Church'.⁷ The Church is the 'true spouse of Christ', as he reverently calls it on several occasions.

It is only in this context that it makes sense to continue praising—as he does—the measures taken by a hierarchy tainted with corruption. It was that hierarchy that Protestant reformers were directly attacking when they criticized the structures of the Church. Ignatius is asking us to praise the entire Church as a whole, the work of the Holy Spirit, in all its fullness and in all its members. As Fr Corella rightly points out:

When mention is made of the 'Church' in the Rules we should be careful not to interpret this as a reference to the Pope or the bishops or the Magisterium or the clergy. Rather the Rules are a heartfelt invitation to recuperate the true image and the proper use of the term 'Church' in all its integrity and exclusive rightness. Ignatius has to be thanked for adding the adjective 'hierarchical' to indicate an attribute of the Church as a whole, one that points to much more varied and important aspects than simply that of authority-obedience.⁸

⁶ See, for example, Mario Fois, 'The Hierarchical Church in the Time of St Ignatius', *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* (CIS), 14/3 (1983), 11–38.

⁷ The term 'hierarchical Church' was probably invented by Ignatius and has the meaning, 'Church that incorporates mediations', quite distinct from 'Church hierarchy' with which it should not be confused. See José Maria Lera, 'Experiencia de Iglesia en el libro de los Ejercicios (3)', *Manresa*, 69 (1997), 82–87; also Madrigal, *Eclesialidad, reforma y misión*, 94–99.

⁸ Jesús Corella, 'San Ignacio y la Iglesia: Unas reglas que nos siguen iluminando', *Manresa*, 79 (2007), 179–180; and compare Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, 'The Rules for Thinking, Judging, Feeling', 20: 'We must take care to avoid misinterpreting Ignatius when he speaks of "the hierarchical Church". He does not take it to mean the world of popes and bishops, ecclesiastics and clergy.' Ignatius has in mind the Church as a whole.



The Church Hierarchy: Pope, Cardinal, Archbishop, by
Tobias Stimmer

Consequently, to praise all in the Church is not the same thing as to adulate the hierarchy or to turn a blind eye to doings that may well be corrupt; it is not to disregard a clerical reality that would have been as shocking then as it may continue to be today or at any time. To urge praise in this context is rather an exhortation to everyone, members of the hierarchy as much as other clerics and all members of the Church. We are all called equally to discover the Spirit at work in others. And this means seeking the Spirit, even more and with veneration, among those who see things very differently from ourselves. Perhaps nothing is more needed in the Church, now and at all times, than that bishops and clerics should openly recognise that the Spirit is really at work inspiring the faithful, while the latter in their turn should acknowledge that the Spirit can never cease constantly to bless the Church's pastors. To believe truly in the Spirit necessarily implies that both attitudes should be kept alive.

Part of the same article by Fr Corella, published posthumously, deserves to be quoted, even if it is rather long:

We should not forget that the image of a pyramid is not one that best suits the Church. We are not a pyramid. That may have been true of the Tower of Babel, as it was of the tombs of the pharaohs, but

the Church is best likened to a sphere: like the earth itself and the humanity that lives on this planet; like a mirror-image of the heavenly sphere; and more especially like an image and likeness of the Divine Essence of the Trinity, such as Ignatius experienced it though lost for words. To 'praise' is to offer thanks to God for the variety in the Church. It is to welcome generously and respectfully the diversity of races, charisms, ministries and functions in the Church. Here nothing is monochrome and nothing should be grey. Praise helps us to emerge from ourselves in order to find ourselves in the encounter with others, in the love and respect for the Church and its members.⁹

For every Christian, the Church is 'flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone' (Genesis 2:23), and therefore we cannot allow ourselves to harm her, let alone destroy her, with our criticism. Faced with the attitude of the Erasmians, Ignatius appeals to the exercitant never to speak ill of the errors, falsehoods and corruption of the ecclesiastical hierarchy '... except to the persons themselves who can remedy the situation'.¹⁰ In the Professed House in Rome it was a commonplace that Ignatius would turn the conversation when there was harsh talk in his presence of Pope Paul IV: 'Let's talk of Papa Marcello ...', he would say, knowing well that the Jesuits in Rome would find plenty of praiseworthy things to say about him.¹¹

There is much to be praised in the Church, if one is willing to focus on the presence of the Spirit. For the rest, unless one can speak to someone who has the power to put things right, one should be silent. To speak ill serves no purpose and can be a cause of much harm, especially as it commits an injustice against the Spirit who is present in all.

Praise for the Ecclesial 'We' Rather than the Individual 'Ego'

Erasmus had made fun of the attitude of 'praise' when he coined the phrase: 'The white cannot be black even if the Pope of Rome says so'. The ingenious animosity of this phrase was not really lessened by his

⁹ Corella, 'San Ignacio y la Iglesia', 180–181.

¹⁰ 'Before the Church Ignatius never took on the attitude of judge or accuser. He did not criticise the Church for its defects. If he could not hide them, he preferred to remain silent about them just as a son would not talk about the defects of his father or his mother.' (Dalmases, 'The Church in the Personal Experience of St Ignatius', 59)

¹¹ St Ignatius had excellent relations with Cardinal Cervini, a saintly prelate from whom the First Companions were hoping for great things for the practical reform of the Church when he was elected Pope, as Marcellus II, in 1555; however, he died twenty days after his election and his successor was Cardinal Gian Pietro Carafa (Paul IV). There had been controversy between him and Ignatius at Venice in 1536 when the latter declined the invitation of the Cardinal that he and the First Companions should join the Theatines, newly founded by Carafa. The likelihood was that the new Pope would not look with a benevolent eye on the Society of Jesus. See Dalmases, 'The Church in the Personal Experience of St Ignatius', 62–63.

adding, in what only seemed a more conciliatory tone, 'But I know that the Pope would never say that'.¹² If Erasmus was so sure, why did the Pope continue to call 'black' what Erasmus claimed to be 'white'?

In his reply, Ignatius correctly went to the heart of the matter that Erasmus had failed to take into account: 'the white *I see* I shall believe to be black, if the hierarchical Church so decides the matter' (Exx 365). As the great commentator on the *Spiritual Exercises* Santiago Arzubialde has pointed out: 'It is not a question of denying the natural or moral evidence, but of not wanting to make an absolute of what a fallible human being may come to grasp of the divine reality'.¹³ In dealing with the things of God, can we pretend to have the same absolute certainty as when we are considering physical or even social realities? For the latter, reality is what it is. But for the former, all that I can claim without presumption is, 'I *see it* as white', and in such matters, how can I know if truly and in reality it is *white*? How can any individual person, on his or her own authority, have any certain access to such privileged knowledge except as within the living body of the Church?

Already the world of the sixteenth century had begun to give priority to the individual over the social group, so that the proposal Ignatius was making, to favour the ecclesial 'we' over the individual 'ego', may have been a counter-cultural aberration. However, he was counting on the promise that the Spirit would be ever present in the Church; and so, at this moment, he is offering Rules for ecclesial discernment. They are not intended to be axioms allowing no appeal.

The distinctive element in discernment—the priority given to *feeling* over *opining*—is something that he presents once more at the beginning of the Rules:

Laying aside all judgement of our own, we should keep our minds disposed and ready to obey in everything the bride of Christ our Lord, which is our holy mother the hierarchical Church (Exx 353).

This sentence is one that has been constantly disfigured because people will not take the words to mean what Ignatius intends them to mean. To 'lay aside all judgement' is not the same thing as 'to stop thinking'.

¹² Desiderius Erasmus, 'Supputatio calumniarum Natalis Bedae', in *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami opera omnia* (Leiden 1703–6), volume 9, 517, available at http://erasmus.cyltr.nl/pdf/2707/EOL2707_6a09.pdf, accessed 14 March 2013.

¹³ Arzubialde, *Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio*, 818 n. 32.

Rather it requires that one should free oneself from any previously formed judgment, one that may have grown so rigid that it has become immovable: such is usually called a 'prejudice'. Unless there is a preliminary purification, the way is blocked to the novelty of the Spirit.

In every case of an Ignatian discernment process, an essential prior condition is that we should 'lay aside all judgement of our own'—more precisely, as Juan Polanco, the first secretary of the Society of Jesus, later noted with a certain dry wit, 'all judgments to which one is attached more than is advisable'.¹⁴ Quite rightly the exercitant is advised to undertake the discernment without a set mind, but be ready to reconsider and to replace stubbornness with 'our minds disposed and ready to obey' (Exx 353) the Church, 'keeping the mind ready to seek arguments in their defence [of the precepts of the Church], and never in any way to attack them' (Exx 361). To do otherwise would be to put one's own opinion in place of any discernment.



The Church Hierarchy: Priests and Deacon, by Tobias
Stimmer

¹⁴ MHSJ EI 3, 503. And see Corella, 'San Ignacio y la Iglesia', 114–116.

In place of generalised destructive criticism, Ignatius is suggesting that, in order to maintain true and constant ecclesiastical discernment, the attitude needed is that of praise. One should be prepared to praise any manifestation of the Spirit, no matter how disconcerting and unexpected it may be. Certainly, we all find it very difficult not to identify the Holy Spirit with our own way of thinking! It is never pleasant to recognise that the Spirit's presence is simultaneously at work both in ourselves and in those who have different views from us. That is probably why all need to keep ever in mind the advice that runs through the whole of the *Spiritual Exercises*, that they 'divest themselves of self-love, self-will, and self-interest' (Exx 189).

An important point to remember is that the Rules for thinking with the Church are placed in the final stage of the Ignatian exercises. They presuppose an acquaintance with, and practice of, the Rules of Discernment for the First Week (where the appearance and nature of consolation are explained—an increase of faith, hope and charity, inner joy and peace of soul) and also with the Rules 'serving for a more advanced discernment of spirits, more applicable to the Second Week' (dealing with how to recognise when one is misled—by sophisticated subtleties, fallacies and false reasoning—to 'something bad or distracting or less good' [Exx 333]). Unless there has been this previous investigation, sorting out consolations from deceit, the spiritual considerations connected with the Church will not be valid.

Praise comes as the result of having discovered the action of the Spirit in all things and of having witnessed how that Spirit works and is reflected in the actual reality of the Church. It comes as the fruit of finding ourselves full of gratitude to God and of knowing how to regard with justice and lucidity the divine reflection in everything ecclesial. Thus it opens the way to our being able to recognise the Spirit, preparing the soul for the 'inner feeling and relish' (Exx 2) gained from the Spirit's presence in the Church—given that it belongs to the Spirit.

Praise for the Presence of the Spirit Even in Ecclesiastical Controversy

It is quite likely that for many Christians today church life is conditioned in a way very different, in its problems and context, from what Ignatius took as normal when composing his Rules for thinking with the Church. But can the latter shed some light on the former, especially with regard to the ecclesiastical controversies that trouble many Christians today? Clearly they can, because the genius of these Rules is that, quite apart

from the particular context in which they were written, they show us the tools that can be used when dealing with any ecclesiastical discord or conflict. The aim of St Ignatius is to offer these Rules so that we may ‘keep our minds disposed and ready’ (Exx 353) for any discernment involving the Church. He would have us seek the solution to our conflicts without extinguishing the fire of the Spirit burning within us, and without denying—or failing to recognise—the presence of that Spirit in others.

Such occasions arise particularly and quite obviously in the wide field of discernment that involves religious communities. Any discernment practised in common, by a community, requires the foundation that Ignatius suggests here: respect shown to the presence of the Spirit in all—and a search for that Spirit in common.

Equally inevitable today are the conflicts and controversies that divide different institutions within the One Church, such as parishes, religious congregations, apostolic movements, diocesan structures and specific pastoral projects. Unfortunately the search for solutions is often misguided: they cannot be found—far from it—by saying ‘I order and command’; nor with obvious contempt; nor by constant criticism and the resultant bitterness; nor by institutional splits. The Spirit would never have invited us to undertake the search for solutions along those lines.

So, the advice offered by St Ignatius does continue to have value today. For him ‘praise’ is not some accommodating tactic for dealing with ecclesiastical authority. Instead it is a direct consequence of the principle that serves as a presupposition for the whole of the Exercises: ‘it must be presupposed that every good Christian should be readier to justify than to condemn a neighbour’s statement’ (Exx 22). The Rules draw their strength from their faith in the work of the Spirit.

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