FIDELITY TO ROME

By JAMES HENNESSEY

I LIKE that title. It is clear and concise. It gets to the point. Not the subject. The object. 'Rome'. Isn't that at the root of many of our difficulties? For some it is norm, for others problem, for still others irrelevance. For Ignatius Loyola, Rome – the roman pontiff – was a central point of ecclesiology. He had a very specific concept of 'Church', and it was at the heart of his spirituality.[1] It is fatuous to attempt a renewal of ignatian spirituality without confronting that simple fact. Then, before we set about giving answers, we must ask hard questions: What does the Church mean to us? Is our understanding reconcilable, not only with Ignatius's view of the Church, but with those other elements in his spiritual doctrine which depend upon his ecclesiology for coherence? Do we think such reconciliation necessary? If not, then what are we about? Are we renewing Ignatius, or like those medieval builders who dismantled classical Rome and used the bricks and marble for their own new buildings, are we undertaking something altogether new, with the help of such older ideas as fit our new preoccupations?

The roman pontiff was central to Ignatius Loyola's ecclesiology, and so, inevitably, to his spirituality. But that was over four centuries ago. We live in a world wholly other. As one of the magnificent flow of committee documents, with which we are presently inundated, puts it:

> . . . there is a profound change in man and society. Man is conditioned more and more by the hypotheses and the tentative conclusions of the human sciences, by political choices, by the affirmation of autonomy and of cultural progress.[2]

What room is there here for the world-view of a sixteenth century

[1] Dominant in Ignatius's imagery of the Church was the concept of it as Christ's mystical body, an imagery he carried over into his conceptualization of the Society of Jesus. See *Saint Ignatius of Loyola, The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus,* trans with introduction and commentary by George E. Ganss, S.J., (Institute of Jesuit Sources, St. Louis, 1970), p 123, note 10; *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola* (trans William J. Young, Chicago, 1959), pp 369–71, for Ignatius's letter of February 23, 1553, to the Emperor Claudius of Abyssinia, where he elaborates his ideas on the Church.

[2] Communication from the Preparatory Commission for the XXXII General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, Doc. 5, September 20, 1972, p 10 (Hereafter CPGC 5).

knight-become-mystic, who was totally taken up by

> . . . an intense desire to be associated intimately with Christ, and to cooperate with him in achieving God's slowly unfolding plan of creation and redemption . . . focused . . . on the glorified Christ who was still present in the Church as his mystical Body and in the pope as its head on earth?[3]

That is our question. We have to answer it in the context of change, development, perhaps regression, in our understanding of that 'mystery of the Church' with which Vatican II very rightly chose to begin its consideration in the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*.

Historians and history

There are preliminary problems. Historical argument is anathema to some. For wrong reasons, I think. They confuse it with antiquarianism. Let me illustrate this. It has been proposed that we jesuits need a completely re-vamped fundamental law, a new Formula of the Institute to replace the one approved by Pope Paul III in 1540 and by Pope Julius III in 1550. Now the Formula is not holy writ. It has, in fact, been revised twice since the original document was prepared by Ignatius and his companions in 1539. But these earlier revisions did not make essential changes. The question facing us is this: does the 'profound change in man and society today' demand a total rewriting of the Formula? Here are the parameters set us by the text of 1550, which is still definitive:

> Whoever desires to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross in our Society, which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus, and to serve the Lord alone, and the Church, his spouse, under the roman pontiff, the vicar of Christ on earth, should, after a solemn vow of perpetual chastity, poverty and obedience, keep what follows in mind . . .[4]

The antiquarian immediately opts for no change at all. The historian, to the consternation of some non-historians, does not. The stuff of his trade, after all, is change. At the same time, he is less inclined than the 'absolute contemporary' to accept at face value the far-reaching claims for the cataclysmic nature of the change which we ourselves experience. When the 'Man of the Year' is straight out of Metternich's and Bismarck's Europe, the historian suspects a continuity in human affairs perhaps greater than Alfred North

[3] Ganss, *Constitutions*, p 3.
[4] *Ibid.*, p 66 (Formula of the Institute, no 3).

Whitehead allowed, when he wrote that we live in an age that has seen the end of the western world which began with Plato.

New-model armies

But there are other objections that bear more nearly on our subject. The accusation has been made that some contemporary religious build their lives on a basis hardly distinguishable from secular humanism. This is to me such a contradiction in terms that I confess myself totally incompetent to discuss it. But that is not to say that it must not be confronted and discussed. I am not much better off with those who speak of a syncretism drawing heavily on non-christian religions. Nor with the catholic professor in a catholic college who solemnly informed us at a symposium several years ago, that christianity was a function of western civilization and would die with it in the dawn of the new technological age. In that hypothesis, it seems to me, we come as close to wasting our time as one can here in beautiful San Francisco. But others may think differently.

Ecumenical dilemma

Christian ecumenism is something else again. Since Vatican II belatedly acknowledged what had long been plain to see – the presence of the holy Spirit, his gifts and graces, among christian communities separated from Rome, the question of pope and papacy has taken the centre of the stage. What are we to think of papal infallibility? Of the primacy of jurisdiction, and not only of honour, defined by Vatican I? Of the ecumenicity of that council and of Trent? Or of Vatican II itself? What do we in fact think of a primary principle of Ignatius Loyola:

> The gospel does indeed teach us, and we know from orthodox faith and firmly hold, that all of Christ's faithful are subject to the roman pontiff as their head and as the vicar of Jesus Christ.[5]

Ignatius, I think, would have little difficulty with what Vatican II actually said, for example:

> They are fully incorporated into the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept her entire system and all the means of salvation given to her, and through union with her visible structures are joined to Christ, who rules through the supreme pontiff and the bishops.[6]

[5] *Ibid.*, p 68 (Formula of the Institute, no 4).
[6] *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

But that is not quite the question. Rather, put bluntly, it is this: Is it not enough that I be a christian? In a moral sense, it is obviously not only sufficient, but necessary. External union with the Church has too often been allowed to masquerade as genuine membership. One must possess the Spirit of Christ. But that is not quite the question either. There is a political, a polemical sense in which 'christian' is used. It means to exclude, or to consider of small moment, some or all of the other elements enumerated in the above quotation from *Lumen Gentium*. Ignatius – and Vatican II – would have their problems there. At the same time, it is clear that there are abroad among christians of all communities germs of a radically new understanding of what Christ's Church is. That developing understanding will heavily nuance the orientations we discuss here.

The Church as people of God

But now, suppose that we are curiously unaffected by secular humanism, resistant to the homogenizing religious pressure of the technological age, and that we can set aside for a moment the serious consideration demanded by the ecumenical dimension of christianity. Look at the roman catholic church in abstraction from all those forces (which in reality it cannot escape. Modern man's sense of 'autonomy and cultural progress' has made its mark internally too). The hierarchical, the juridical, are still with us; but, theologically, if not always practically, emphasis has shifted from structures to people. Again, Vatican II did it, when it avoided neat, clear, precise definition and spoke instead of the Church as the people of God, called together from jew and gentile by Christ who gives himself to them in love. From that Church-considered-as-people flows complementary roles for laity, religious, clergy, bishops and pope, all serving together. It is the same Church, but the perspective is not quite that of Ignatius, for whom:

> ... the foundation of obedience is authority derived from God through Christ to the pope, who in turn delegates it to subordinate officials such as bishops and religious superiors.[7]

Collegiality

It is quite true that *Lumen Gentium* goes on to speak of the hierarchical structure of the Church. But even here with a difference. The heading adds: 'with special reference to the episcopate'. Encircled

[7] Ganss, *Constitutions*, p 247, note 4.

by texts on papal primacy and infallibility reproduced from Vatican I's *Pastor Aeternus*, and further refined by a prefatory note of explanation improbably positioned as an appendix to the whole constitution, collegiality burst upon the ecclesial world, to the great surprise of those unfamiliar with the history of the Church. It added a new dimension to the thinking of those who had been conditioned by the monarchical structure, and the still more monarchical practice, characteristic of catholicism in the century since the first Vatican Council.

Church as monarchy

The definitions of papal primacy and infallibility of July 18, 1870 were immensely successful, perhaps more for the general impression of papal monarchy which they established than for the technical consequences of either definition. Today, both the left and the right accept that monarchy as the starting point for discussion. It became identified with 'the Church'. One side insists that all real power belongs to the pope, who at best shares it with subordinate authorities elsewhere. That this runs clean contrary to the explicit words of the primacy definition is of minor moment. They would be puzzled by *Keenan's Catechism*, widely used among early 19th century english-speaking catholics, with its forthright declaration that the claim that catholics must believe in papal infallibility was 'a protestant invention'. They would wonder what bishop John England of Charleston was talking about when he called for achievement of american church unity through a national council, and not through despatch of a papal nuncio; and they would be shocked to hear him argue that the choice of council over nuncio was necessary to preserve 'what cardinal Bellarmine calls the republican part of church government'. They would be equally puzzled to read archbishop Martin Spalding of Baltimore chiding a protestant author in 1866 for writing that roman congregations made decisions in doctrinal matters. Such decisions, Spalding pointed out, were the province of general councils and, when they were not in session, of the pope with the consent or acquiescence of the body of bishops dispersed throughout the world.

Similar evidence can be found in the history of every nation where catholics lived in the early nineteenth century. And it is not enough to dismiss the evidence airily as a residue of 'gallicanism', somehow propagated by apparently ubiquitous french theology professors. The facts rather suggest that gallicanism was only the peculiar

french species of the genus ecclesial nationalism, a sense of the rights of a national church, and of the limits which those rights placed on exercise of roman central authority, which was submerged only towards the end of the century by the process which Roger Aubert has aptly styled the 'monarchization of the Church'. I call your attention to the fact that it happened in the time of our grandfathers and great-grandfathers, not in some far-off, bygone age.

The monarchic image was fixed for friend and foe alike, accepted virtually as a mark of the Church, in the nineteenth century. It represented a revival of the later-medieval image, the one which had dominated Ignatius's thinking. As such it was eminently acceptable to the restored Society of Jesus. It was propagated on a theological level by the line of theologians at the roman college, who began with Giovanni Perrone and, on a more popular level, in the pages of *Civiltà cattolica* and *Stimmen aus Maria Laach*. It is hardly moribund today. The question we must face is whether it is essential to the ignatian vision of Church, which, in turn, is so fundamental to any understanding of his spiritual vision.

Non-historical liberalism

There are, of course, those whose reaction to monarchic papacy is rather other. Some leap back to the privileged sanctuary of the first century, as if somehow the holy Spirit after that abandoned the Church for a millenium or two. Occasionally, they are willing to alight briefly in the sixteenth century, to cull a few reformation insights. Then, at least in catholic development, all – except perhaps for Newman and Mohler – is darkness down to our own time. Another approach eliminates this historical excursion and simply asserts the absolute priority of current needs as the only valid operating norm. The over-riding necessity is to get on with the business of change; and, for this purpose, new operating principles drawn from the 'hypotheses and the tentative conclusions of the human sciences' are available. The correlation of any authoritative voice – roman or other – with this approach certainly needs study.

Realism

Only at our peril do we ignore the implications of any of the above world-views. All of them affect all of us. The whole complex, from the most rigid reactionary conservatism to the most far-out radicalism, must come into account. We cannot talk about ignatian spirituality, or fidelity to Rome, in a vacuum. Nor does it help to

pretend – for the sake of keeping the peace – that we all mean the same thing when we use those terms, or terms like 'catholic', 'christian' or 'Church'. The 'peace' we succeed in keeping is too fragile and insubstantial really to serve us.

Ignatius, jesuits and papacy

What does all this have to say to the question of ignatian spirituality and, within that framework, of fidelity to Rome? I have no magic answer. I hope only to stimulate discussion. There is no doubt at all that Ignatius had a thoroughly classical view of authority in the Church. Power came from God through Christ to the pope, and was exercised by others in total dependence on the vicar of Christ. There is no doubt either, that the classical view made a strong comeback in the nineteenth century, when its principal propagators were the restored jesuits. The nineteenth-century Society of Jesus quite simply understood the defence of papal claims as its proper mission. It was a major reason why one of the first results of almost any revolution anywhere in Europe was the immedate expulsion of the jesuits. It is the reason why last year Switzerland had to vote on whether to relax the provisions in its constitution which prohibited entry to the Society. And – strange as it may seem today – dissenters from the 'party line' were not long retained in jesuit ranks, even when they were eminent veterans like Carlo Passaglia or Carlo Curci. Passaglia was a light of the roman college and author of the bull of definition of the Immaculate Conception. Curci was the founding editor of *Civiltà cattolica*. Both found temselves unable to defend the papal temporal power in the face of demands for italian unification. Both also found themselves outside the Society. Their situation was not the exception; it was the rule. It was said of pre-World War I italian politicians that they were all liberals. The only distinction was between left-wing and right-wing liberals. The converse was true of jesuits. There were left-wing and right-wing conservatives. Nothing else; particularly when it was a question of papal prerogatives.

At the fringes of the institution

The lyric leap just made from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century leaves out a considerable part of that history which has been both influenced by and influential in shaping ignatian spirituality. The period after the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) is particularly worthy of study. In european history it is the age of the national

monarchies, the period in which men began to think of themselves as english, french, spanish, german, when the modern national states gradually took shape. Europe's religious boundaries were fairly well defined. But within those boundaries, the nationalizing process which affected the body politic inevitably also affected the religious structure, in the direction of a particularism that was cisalpine in orientation and not ultramontane.

Jesuits formed in the spirituality of Ignatius lived in the world of the national monarchies. Ultimately, their traditional attachment to Rome, their a-national stance, was a factor in forcing the suppression of 1773. That is not to say that jesuits did not indulge in a little particularism of their own. Theologically, there were the battles over molinism (1598–1607) and probabilism, the latter including Innocent XI's effort to tip the balance by influencing the election (1687) of Thyrsus Gonzalez as general. There was the chinese rites controversy, lasting from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century. There was the implacable hostility widespread among eighteenth and early nineteenth century jesuits towards the roman congregation for Propagation of the Faith. All of these, and other incidents like them, need study. But not 'pop' study, which, for example, begins with the thesis – recently suggested to me – that jesuits have always been radicals, men at the fringes of the institutional Church. Hardly, even in their most independent days.

I do believe that the road to better understanding of the role of 'fidelity to Rome' in ignatian spirituality will be found by tracing the history of conflicts which jesuits – from Ignatius on down – have had with Rome and various segments of its bureaucracy. It would lead to the discovery that, even in the darkest days of suppression, fidelity won out. But there are two other avenues to be followed. There is the confusion of the terms 'roman' and 'universal', and there are the several planes on which ignatian loyalty has been expressed: political, ecclesiological, doctrinal.

Roman? Universal? Catholic?

Three years ago, during a seminar at Boston College, protestant historian George Hunston Williams read a paper in which he stoutly defended the 'roman' proclivities of Henry Edward Manning at the first Vatican Council as illustrative of the truly universal character of catholicism. Does 'roman' have that universal connotation today? Did it have that connotation for Ignatius Loyola? Was he medieval

man, seeing in the roman church the predestined instrument for achieving the single, worldwide, *respublica christiana?* What did 'roman' mean to Ignatius? What does it mean today? Universal? Or a species of italian particularism? Some words need meditating: 'universal', 'supra-national', 'international', 'a-national', 'anti-national'. Which, if any, of them adequately describe the cast of mind which Ignatius hoped to produce by his insistence on fidelity to Rome? What cast of mind would we want to produce today? Is the 'roman' means chosen by Ignatius the way to do it? What are the consequences of a 'yes' or a 'no' answer?

Obviously, the adjective 'catholic' needs the same treatment. A century ago, bishop Vincenz Gasser laid it down to the fathers of an ecumenical council: 'The Roman church is the Catholic church and the Catholic church Roman'. Henri de Lubac wrote some years back that 'the Church is not Catholic because she is spread over the whole of the earth and can reckon a large number of members . . . Catholicism has nothing to do with numbers.[8]

He argued that the term 'catholic' is a universal, a singular, 'not to be confused with an aggregate'. Perhaps, but I wonder has not new content been added by the fact that we live in a century when, for the first time since its foundation, the Church is indigenous to every inhabited continent? It is no longer, as it was just 100 years ago, a fundamentally european construct, intelligible within solely european categories, responsible only for european needs. Roman. Catholic. Words worth pondering. Hardly uni-vocals, either of them. But in the meanings we attach to them, something of the key to our questions and answers.

Ignatius and fidelity

A final foray. For Ignatius Loyola and those who followed him, fidelity to Rome was expressed on several planes. We have to ask if the circumstances which urged them in their course still obtain. Then questions can be formulated, consequences weighed and answers suggested.

Ecclesiological fidelity

First to the jesuit fourth solemn vow of obedience to the pope in regard to missions. No serious technical understanding of the matter

[8] *Catholicism* (London, 1962), p 14.

of the vow suggests that there is question of doctrinal loyalty.[9] The vow is a reassertion of Ignatius's world-view of the universal *civitas christiana*, christendom, before such novelties as national states confused the issue. It was in that context that the jesuit was to work, not in one influenced by local interests. The vow simply establishes a principle of distribution of human jesuit resources. The principle is simple enough: the distribution is left to the pope, Christ's vicar, in the classical hierarchical role which, as has been seen, Ignatius attributed to him. And so the more universal good is obtained.

Doctrinal fidelity

But if the fourth vow says nothing about doctrinal conformity with Rome, that does not mean that the subject has been neglected in the ignatian tradition. Repeatedly in the *Constitutions* there is an emphasis on uniformity of doctrine as conducive to unity, with uniformity achieved by following what the Church teaches. The pattern is set in the *General Examen*. The candidate is to be asked

> . . . whether he has held or holds any opinions or ideas different from those which are commonly held in the Church and among teachers whom she has approved, and whether he is willing, if at some time he shall hold any, to defer to what will be determined in the Society as to what ought to be held about such matters.[10]

The same theme is repeated in the *Constitutions*, dealing with those who had completed their studies before becoming jesuits:

> One who has already completed his studies should be alert to prevent any diversity from damaging the union of charity and to accommodate himself in what is possible to the doctrine which is more common in the Society.[11]

The little phrase, 'in what is possible' has to bear a heavy load in these days of doctrinal pluralism! Meanwhile it might not be unprofitable to do a study of the inter-relationship of concepts such as

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[9] CPGC 5, pp 5–6, suggests a connection between the 'content' of missions from the pope and the missions themselves, and also talks of a sort of aura of doctrinal loyalty enveloping the vow. While not necessarily disagreeing with the object in view, I still prefer to keep the vow in the ecclesiological context I have suggested, and then confront the issue of doctrinal loyalty in its own place, head-on. Else we end up in a maze of canonical and pseudo-canonical debates. Ignatius himself gave three reasons for the special vow: (1) greater devotion in obedience to the apostolic See; (2) greater abnegation of our own wills; (3) surer direction from the holy Spirit. Cf Ganss, *Constitutions*, p 68 (Formula of the Institute, no 4).

[10] Ganss, *Constitutions*, p 90 (General Examen, no 11).

[11] *Ibid.*, *Constitutions*, pp 292–3 (Pt VIII, ch 1, K); and cf p 189 (Pt IV, ch 5, no 4).

unity, uniformity and conformity. Ignatius clearly saw an interconnection, and his doctrinal norm was what the roman church taught. The same pattern persisted, with only slight and quickly-checked deviation, down to relatively recent days. It involves one of those coherences, mentioned in the first paragraph of this essay, which require careful handling if we are to cope with them – and not simply ignore them – in an effort at contemporary understanding of Ignatius and his ideas.

Political fidelity

The last level on which Ignatian fidelity to Rome can be understood is the political one. It was a natural consequence of the acceptance of the concept of one *civitas* or *respublica christiana*, one christendom as the proper homeland of the jesuit. Ignatius's men were not to know nations or national loyalties any more than medieval man knew them. A good resumé of the tradition as it had come down from Ignatius and his first companions, and an unsparing indictment of regional and national particularism, can be found in Father General Goswin Nickel's *Letter on the Avoidance in the Society of Pernicious Provincial and National Spirit* (November 16, 1656).[12] By and large, this tradition was followed faithfully. Is it, should it be, followed today? In an age when we are passing from nationalism to internationalism, and even glimpse an occasional flicker of supranationalism, what is there in Ignatius's political vision that can inspire us? What of the 'roman' coloration that he and generations after him gave to their peculiar brand of universalism? If not that, then what? Can we find, here and elsewhere in our discussion, ignatian insights which, stripped of their temporality, can be reclothed for the last quarter of the twentieth century? Or is that the way to go about it at all?

Rome: I suggested that it was at the root of many of our difficulties, central to Ignatius's ecclesiology, to his view of what the world is all about, variously understood and variously taken into account today. Norm? Problem? Irrelevance? Until we answer these and the other questions we have been asking, we cannot but move either in circles or in total disjunction from the tradition which we pretend to renew.

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[12] Letter of 16 November, 1656, in *Epistolae Praepositorum Generalium ad Patres et Fratres Societatis Jesu*, II (Ghent, 1847), pp 102–27.