IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND THE PROTESTANT PRINCIPLE

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SITUATING IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY on the Protestant-Catholic spectrum is no easy task. We need first to recognize that the terms Protestantism and Catholicism are abstractions, drawn in each case (especially perhaps the former) from quite a diverse array of historical realizations. Harvey Cox and Jerry Falwell are both Protestants—both in fact are Baptists. Both Hans Küng and Joseph Ratzinger are Catholics, though the Roman cardinal might deny to the Tübingen professor the 'canonical mission' accrediting him as a 'Catholic theologian'. To describe what makes a set of ideas or practices Catholic or Protestant is an elusive task indeed. And, whatever the preferred language of differentiation, today's pluralistic situation compels us to acknowledge the lived reality of Protestant Catholics and Catholic Protestants. So far as mentalities are concerned, the lines of demarcation are quite blurred.

And yet, provided we withhold absolute trust from our neat categories and nice distinctions, the effort to view Ignatius from a Protestant-Catholic viewpoint is worthwhile. Roman Catholic directors and retreatants can be enlightened in their respective roles by appreciating how much modern Christianity owes to the passionate insights of the Reformers and the abiding convictions of their heirs. In addition, the significant number of Protestants who come into contact with Ignatius, especially through making his Spiritual Exercises or guiding others with their help, may find both confirmation and kinship as they experience what may legitimately be termed Protestant accents and motifs in this patently Catholic mystic and spiritual guide.

There have been many attempts to pinpoint the crucial differences between Protestantism and Catholicism. We might first recall the array of theological issues commonly portrayed as stumbling blocks to ecumenical harmony: justification by faith alone or

justification through faith and good works; the degree of disfigurement of God's image in the human person consequent upon original sin, and the resulting degree of incapacitation for salvific works; the potential of the justified Christian for meriting salvation; the degree and kind of certitude one may have of being saved by God's love and the blood of Christ; the respective roles of scripture and tradition as normative for Christian doctrine and the moral life; the weight and role of Church authority in shaping the beliefs and moral practice of believers, together with the significance of status and role differences between laity and clergy; the number and efficacy of the sacraments; and so forth. With regard to most of these themes and issues, recent scholarship and ecumenical dialogue have tended to disclose a greater underlying communality between Protestant and Catholic traditions, as well as considerable diversity within the respective traditions. Significant progress has also been made in revealing how dogmatic and theological differences have been, at least in part, a function of conflicting social, cultural, economic and political divergences.

In addition to these discussions of specific themes and issues, for decades thinkers on both sides of the ecumenical divide have attempted more synthetic characterizations. Karl Barth, the preeminent Protestant theologian of our century, seized on the theological use of *analogia entis* (analogy of being), so dear to Roman Catholic thinkers, as a touchstone of difference. A Swiss theologian, J. J. Leuba, attempted some decades ago to show in the New Testament a basis for two contrasting perspectives, one conceiving God's revelatory action in the language of *event*, the other in the language of *institution* (corresponding, respectively, to Protestant and Catholic outlooks). It has also been suggested that Protestantism is more inclined to accent *time* (past, future, present), while Catholicism is more at home with *space* (above, below, between).

Perhaps the best known expression of a synthetic view, at least in the English-speaking world, is that of Paul Tillich, who wrote of 'the Protestant principle' as a kind of transcendent ground which both informs and critiques particular historical realizations of Protestantism. For Tillich the Protestant principle serves as '. . . the prophetic judgment against religious pride, ecclesiastical arrogance, and secular self-sufficiency . . . the guardian against the attempts of the finite and conditioned to usurp the place of the unconditional . . .', against '. . . the self-assertiveness of the finite being in its pride, concupiscence, and separation from the ground . . .'.[1]

In line with Tillich's theology, a widespread self-image of Protestantism sees it as verified wherever the Spirit of God moves Christians to protest against any and every form of ecclesiastical idolatry, every substitution of the creature, finite and sinful, for the all-holy creator and redeemer. Whether directed against such Roman creations as meritorious works, *ex opere operato* sacraments, monarchical and authoritarian papal rule, the clerical caste, or the juxtaposing of ecclesiastical traditions with the divinely inspired scriptures, the Protestant principle serves as a firm safeguard of God's power, glory and honour. 'Let God be God'—these four little words starkly express what Protestantism stands for. Rooted in the impassioned Pauline diatribe against pagan wisdom and Judaizing reliance on ritual signs, the principle claims support also from the gospels, particularly from Jesus' polemic against Pharisaism and its addiction to signs, as well as from prophetic traditions in the Old Testament in their denunciation of idolatry, both formal and virtual.

I will not attempt here to delineate a corresponding 'Catholic principle', which would doubtless focus on how the creaturely image of God mediates and participates in the divine—centrally in the person of the Incarnate Word of God, but more broadly in the extension of incarnation and sacramentality to all that is ecclesial and even to the utmost limits of the human and the cosmic. Most readers of *The Way* are familiar enough with this viewpoint, nor does it take much argument to show how it is embodied in Ignatian spirituality.

If one accepts that we are dealing not only with mystery, but with mystery that contains much paradox and a certain dialectical rhythm, then one might approach the polar tension of Protestantism and Catholicism with an anticipation of risk. Origen once wrote that it is a dangerous thing to speak of God. The challenge for sound theological and pastoral speech is to let God's Spirit so move in both speaker and hearer as to respect both the firmness and the openness of genuine faith. Authentic Christian witness requires both daring and sobriety. A fanatical fundamentalism on the one side, and a flabby liberalism or modernism on the other, both fall short of the committed yet docile faith which Bonhoeffer eloquently described as the simultaneity of believing and obeying. Salvation is, from start to finish, pure, undeservable and unachievable gift, but at the same time the outcome of radical and costly obedience to God's word and God's Spirit; a yielding to the often baffling

workings of divine freedom and at the same time an exercise of human freedom at its finest. Or, to have recourse to Augustine's untranslatable *Da quod iubes et iube quod vis*, genuine faith is constituted by the conjunction of the always sinful creature's helpless (but not hopeless) plea for redemption with the graced Christian's readiness to fulfil the divine command. Or, finally, we can appeal to Paul's highly paradoxical exhortation to work at one's salvation *because* (not although) God is effectively working it (Philippians 2,12-14).

Partly for brevity's sake, and partly because Ignatius' Catholicity is beyond question, the present reflection will focus on intimations of the Protestant principle in three intertwining expressions of his spirituality: his own personal journey to God; his *Spiritual Exercises;* his structuring of the Society of Jesus.

At the risk of an invidious comparison, it may be said that Ignatius yielded nothing to his contemporary Martin Luther in his crisis experience of the need of salvation from sin. His *Autobiography* discloses that at Manresa he tasted despair to the point of being tempted to suicide. Tossed by scruples, he confessed that he would at that point have asked advice of a dog had it promised relief from his anguish.

What needs to be emphasized from the beginning about the Ignatian version of the Protestant principle is that its central locus is not mystical contemplation, liturgical symbolism, or doctrinal orthodoxy but precisely human decision, the exercise of freedom, within these and all other theatres of Christian life. Where he was determined that, by God's grace, God would be God in his life was not the niceties of doctrinal formulation or ritual gesture or even the contents of a moral code but the arena of moral and spiritual choice itself. Along with this central pre-occupation it is worth accenting that everything else was seen as context, whether antecedent, simultaneous, or consequent with respect to the moment of decision, and chiefly as these other factors affected one's *disposition* for holy choice. Further, holy choice was not merely and not primarily the choosing of *what* God wanted but rather a choosing that was as fully as possible *from God* and, in the measure of God's grace in the circumstances, *experienced* with clarity and conviction to *be* from God. The elaborate, sometimes almost tortured, technology of decision laid out in two sets of rules in the *Spiritual Exercises*, and described in his *Spiritual Journal*, were but

articulations of the laboured experience of letting God be God for him which he first underwent at Loyola and Manresa.

One symbolically important incident in the early stages of his converted life illustrates his concern that it be God, not human resources, which would ultimately shape his decisions. When he decided to travel alone in his 1522 pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and when he left the money given him for that journey by a benefactor on a bench at the Barcelona port, he was in effect disposing himself for the hoped-for grace of pilgrimage, a personal intimacy with Jesus of Nazareth, gained on the very soil where the Son of God had walked. This desire for solitude and poverty as ways of letting God be God he described thus:

> He wanted to exercise the virtues of charity, of faith, and of hope. By taking a companion he would expect help from him when he was hungry, and if he should fall, he would expect him to help him get up; consequently he would put his trust in his companion and have affection for him, but he wanted to place his trust, love, and hope in God alone . . . It was with such a disposition that he wanted to set sail, not only by himself but also without provisions.[2]

Against this background of decisional and dispositional detachment in his personal life we can now sample the expression of the Protestant principle in the text of the *Spiritual Exercises*. An endeavour like this may help to dispel an initial bias, which would see in Ignatius' concern for method in prayer a violation of the axiom of letting God be God, a way of programming the movements of the Spirit. The primary refutation of such a bias lies not in any textual study but in the actual making of the Spiritual Exercises with the help of a director faithful to Ignatius' insistence on the freedom of God within the freedom of the retreatant, or rather vice versa. Still, a few highlights will serve to commend our thesis.

In Ignatius' statement of the purpose of the Exercises (21), in the Principle and Foundation (22), and in the first 'Introductory Observation' (1), we find a first and rather abstract voicing of where Ignatius locates the core idolatry: 'inordinate affections'; as well as the basic graced disposition which is the key countering strategy: 'indifference'. For any measure of concretization of these idols and their relinquishment we have to wait until the exercises on the Kingdom and Two Standards, where such terms as 'sensuality', 'carnal and worldly love', and the triad of 'riches, honour and pride' are employed. Ignatius, we might say, is a rather sober

prophet. Since he is not standing at the city gates or preaching in the synagogue or confronting earthly powers in royal palaces but discreetly guiding individuals through a solitary encounter with good and evil spirits, his language is not the fiery denunciation of idolatry that we associate with prophecy. But it is crystal clear throughout the Exercises that God alone and God's will must be not only the term of all earthly desire but the moving force behind every step towards that goal.

The Protestant principle as a perspective on the Ignatian Exercises provides a new viewpoint on several specific aspects of the journey. It is no extravagance to say, for example, that his admonition to the one who is helping the retreatant to 'permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature directly with his Creator and Lord' is a virtual imperative to 'let God be God', and also let the retreatant be who he or she truly is in God's presence.

A further example might be the very character of the contemplations of the mysteries of the life of Christ. There are at least two ways in which they are akin to the predominant preoccupation of Protestantism. They are a radical opening up of mind and heart, in a disposition of complete availability, to the power of God's Word in the language of scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ, the living Word of God. Secondly, the engagement of imagination and affectivity, together with the encouragement to linger with any single gospel word or scene that particularly grips one, means that God is being invited to address, move, hold, surprise, and confirm the retreatant as God wills. While holy election is the eventual outcome of the process, the attitude encouraged by Ignatius is at an opposite pole from being a trigger-happy eagerness to choose this or that. Rather, it includes a contemplative readiness to choose or not to choose at any particular moment. Waiting for *God's* moment of choice is possibly the most important and the most difficult act of generosity asked of any retreatant. Once again, the initiative and the confirmation must be from God.

This suggests attending to another interesting point in the language of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The key term of *election* is used predominantly of *human* choice. This hardly matches the typical Protestant accent on *divine* election, with its roots in Paul and in the larger history of the covenant of God and his people. Yet, though Ignatius does not employ the language of covenant, the dynamic of his Exercises conditions the election made by the

retreatant on God's prior election of the retreatant. This key 'if you so graciously choose', which is explicitated in the offering of the Kingdom exercise, is a clear sign that, despite the more frequent mention of human election, Ignatius knows that the choice which counts most is God's choice of the retreatant for this or that vocation or role.

The same acknowledgement that salvation is pure gift and that God remains free in his call is implicitly present in the deep earnestness of the *Suscipe* in the Contemplation for Gaining Divine Love. At this point the retreatant, to a degree at least, has tasted what it means to be in love with God with a love characterized by total mutuality. It is the awareness, however, that all is gift, all is grace, and that the creature can do nothing to compel the divine love which in fact first has asserted itself in lavishing gifts, culminating in the gift of the divine Self—it is this passionate awareness of having to wait in trust for a love which is both assured and yet incapable of being guaranteed, which informs the *Suscipe* with such an intense ardour.

Another important facet of the *Spiritual Exercises* which assumes the posture of letting God be God finds expression in the two sets of rules for the discernment of spirits. What is most significant here is not the assumption that God's will is to shape an absolute Christian obedience; this is presupposed. It is rather the assumption that the knowledge of God's will, so often mysterious and even scandalous in its workings, is not within the easy grasp of the sinful creature, even when that creature has been converted by the power of God's grace. It would be a total distortion of these rules to see in them a mere tried and true technique for ferreting out God's will. At most they are helps for believers to dispose themselves for a call and choice which, whatever its clarity, leaves God and God's will within the realm of mystery. The responsive human election remains a leap of faith and especially of trust.

We turn finally to the celebrated Rules for Thinking with the Church. For the Protestant mind, no aspect of the Ignatian Exercises is as vulnerable to the charge of absolutizing the relative as are these rules. And indeed, we may have to let the vulnerability stand, at least until the rules receive the kind of hermeneutical understanding which, like the rest of the Ignatian and Jesuit core documents, they require if they are not to be mere venerable relics. In many respects the Rules do exhibit the danger of ecclesiastical idolatry, that very idolatry of forms and formulations which helped

to provoke the Reformation. Living as we do in a repressive period within the Roman Catholic Church, the Rules, if fundamentalistically interpreted, could well be made to serve dark powers of unfreedom, not the Christian freedom to which both Ignatius and Luther, in however diverse ways, were so powerfully drawn.

In historical context, the Rules are like a red flag flourished in front of a raging bull. Not only the celebrated dictum, 'What seems to me white, I will believe black if the hierarchical Church so defines' here seems to infringe the Protestant principle. The virtual litany of practices which, Ignatius says, 'we should praise', contains numerous instances of what, in wide-spread practice, had become forms of idolatry or at least of superstition, magical efforts to manipulate divine power and mercy: the vows of supererogation, the veneration of relics, indults and indulgences, fast and abstinence, devotion to images, and so forth. On more doctrinal questions such as those touching predestination, faith and good works, and the delicate balance of love and fear, Ignatius shows himself in the Rules to be more reserved, though his formulations do accent the Catholic side of the balance.

It is the first Rule that most strikingly illustrates that Ignatius was not a speculative but a mystical theologian. His simple and easy identification of 'the true Spouse of Christ our Lord, our holy Mother' with 'the hierarchical Church' represents a Catholic challenge not only to Protestants but to many Catholics today, in the distress and even scandal which they experience from policies and practices of the institutional Church. The Rule, while it is far from embodying the Protestant principle, may help Protestants and many Catholics to understand how Ignatius could bring himself to some of his other 'Catholic' formulations.

The third place where we can sample the virtual presence of the Protestant principle in Ignatian spirituality is in the Jesuit *Constitutions*. Each of the three instances here selected illustrates the pragmatic and dialectical way in which Ignatius' mind worked, as he sought simultaneously to let God be God and to let creaturely agencies exercise their power in fulfilling God's design for the world.

At the very beginning of the *Constitutions*, in the Preamble, Ignatius engages in a typical 'Although . . . nevertheless . . .' construction.[3] He not only permitted himself some real doubt as to the value of written constitutions, but enshrined that doubt within the *Constitutions* themselves. It is basically God's wisdom

and goodness, working through the interior law of love imprinted by the indwelling Spirit, and not any letter of written law, which will preserve the Society of Jesus. What follows the '. . . nevertheless . . .' invokes the Catholic principle of creaturely cooperation with the process of salvation, along with the requirement of obedience to the vicar of Christ, the example of saints, and reason itself. The preamble is an excellent example of the typical Ignatian effort to let God be God while insisting that it is Godlike to involve the creature in the work of redemption.

The same kind of dialectic is operative when Ignatius, in the concluding tenth part of the *Constitutions*, describes 'how the whole body of the Society can be preserved and developed in its well-being'. Here he orchestrates the concept of *instrumentum coniunctum cum Deo*.[4] The very heart of mission and ministry, in his view, lies in bringing the synergic power of both Creator and creature to bear on the process of human salvation. What counts most, he asserts, is that the instrument be docile in God's hands, and those means which more immediately foster this docility have priority over means aimed at developing the instrument in its own connatural power. Hence moral virtue, purity of intention, communion with God in prayer, and zeal for souls are seen as 'interior' gifts which, penetrating such 'exterior' gifts as learning, give to these an efficacy for salvation that is beyond their inherent power. But priority does not mean substitution, and Ignatius, though he is no Hegel, Barth, or Rahner, nevertheless does what he can to formulate his insight so as to honour both poles of the dialectic. Though he may never have come across St Irenaeus' oft quoted dictum, *Gloria Dei vivens homo*, it seems clear that he would endorse it, and would be sensitive to the element of paradox and risk that it entails.

A final illustration: Ignatius' structuring of his Company with respect to material life-style. The same anxious concern he had felt a few decades earlier lest his pilgrimage not be an experience of total dependence and trust towards God was renewed in Ignatius the founder and lawgiver when he came to plot the pilgrim journey of the Society of Jesus. Eventually he chose a structure which distinguished 'professed houses', whose members would have no fixed income but would need to depend on alms day by day, and 'colleges', which as stable apostolic instruments would require assured sources of income.[5] The radicality of this provision is grasped only when we realize that the elite, the core of professed of four vows within his differentiated order of solemnly professed

and coadjutors, spiritual and temporal, were the ones called to the more austere existence of living by alms. In the long haul, the distinction turned out to be unworkable. What has endured, however, from this poignant moment of Jesuit history, is a two-fold memory that is crucial for our fidelity. First, the cryptic pages of Ignatius' *Spiritual Journal* preserve for us the experience of his paradigmatic mystical search for God and God's experienced will in institutional decision-making. Second, the same pages enshrine a powerful representation of the dialectical understanding which would, on the basis of mystical experience, yield neither pole of the Protestant-Catholic tension.

We might conclude by repeating that for Ignatius, in his personal mystical journey, in his guidance of retreatants, and in his provision for the corporate life of 'this least Society of Jesus', the place where God must be God and must be experienced as God was above all the place of encounter of divine and human freedom. To echo Karl Rahner's crystallization of the single mystery of creation and Incarnation, the human reality of election is most truly human and most genuinely free not in spite of, but precisely because of, its being *simultaneously* the realization of divine freedom. Like Paul, Irenaeus and Augustine before him, Ignatius the mystic knew very profoundly that God is most God when he enables and effects human self-actualization. The Catholic principle and the Protestant principle, if each is to have validity and life, call for each other as partners in the strange dance of faith that will always elude our best formulations.

NOTES

[1] Tillich, P.: *The Protestant era* (London: Nisbet & Co, 1951), pp 240, 242.

[2] Tylenda, J. (trans): *A pilgrim's journey. The autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*, (Wilmington DEL: Michael Glazier, 1985), p 42.

[3] Ganss, G. (trans): *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (St Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), Preamble n. 1 [134], pp 119f.

[4] *Constitutions*, part 10, nn. 2-3 [813-814], Ganss, pp 332f.

[5] *Constitutions*, General Examen n. 4 [5], Ganss, p 79; Part 4, chapter 2, n. 5 [326], p 178; Part 6, chapter 2, n. 3 [557], Ganss, pp 253ff.