ATTITUDES OF THE EARLY JESUITS TOWARDS MISBELIEVERS

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TEXTBOOKS AND POPULAR LITERATURE on the sixteenth century depict Saint Ignatius and his early companions as the spearhead of the Catholic attack on the Reformation especially in Italy and Germany, and they leave the impression that the Society of Jesus was founded in 1540 with precisely this 'defence of the faith' as its primary objective. Scholars have long realized that such depictions fail to take full account of what the first Jesuits were about, but by and large they have not analysed Jesuit attitudes towards Protestants—or towards others of different religious beliefs, like Jews or the pagans with whom they worked in places like India and Brazil. I shall briefly address the issue.

To forestall any possible misunderstanding, however, it must be stated clearly at the outset that the early Jesuits were to a man utterly convinced that the Roman Catholic Church of their day held in its dogmas and essential religious practices the unique key to every human being's eternal salvation. For this conviction they were willing, if God gave them the grace, to suffer a martyr's death at the hands of heretics, schismatics, infidels, Jews or pagans. In this supreme sacrifice they considered that they would simply be doing their Christian duty.

With that preamble firmly in place, we can begin to descend to a few particulars about their basic religious attitudes that will correct some common misapprehensions. The first such misapprehension is that the Society was founded to fight the Reformation. The original statement of its purpose, the so-called 'Formula of the Institute', 1540, reads simply, 'for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine and for the propagation of the faith'.[1] In their earliest years the Jesuits were much more concerned with the conversion of the infidels in Jerusalem than with the Lutherans in Wittenberg.

In 1550, however, the phrase 'defence of the faith' was added to the statement of purpose in the 'Formula', an indication of growing awareness of the threat of Protestantism.

This does not mean that Ignatius and his companions were previously unaware, as the documentation surviving from the period incontestably indicates. Given the turmoil over Protestantism in Paris when Ignatius and his first companions were studying there, 1527–35, and in Italy where they subsequently arrived, what is remarkable about that documentation, however, is the relatively small role Protestantism plays. It is scarcely mentioned, for instance, in Ignatius' *Autobiography*, completed in 1555, the year before his death, and it in effect nowhere appears in the *Constitutions* he composed for the Society. If we except for a moment the special problem posed by the 'Rules for Thinking with the Church', it plays no role in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

But beginning about 1550, more attention began to be paid to it by Jesuit leadership in Rome, although it would always remain only one concern among many. The reasons for this shift in emphasis are manifold. Among them surely would be the ever more desperate plight of the champion of the Catholic cause, Emperor Charles V, and his final defeat in 1555, codified in the provisions of the Peace of Augsburg.

More pertinent, however, were certain developments internal to the Society. In 1550, after a brief sojourn in Italy, Peter Canisius returned to Germany, which he would in effect never again leave until his death in 1597. He became the great catalyst for the Society's extensive ministries in the Empire. Almost by definition those ministries dealt either directly or indirectly with Lutheranism. His insistent demands on Jesuit headquarters in Rome for reinforcements in manpower signalled a new alert. Moreover, in 1555 Jerónimo Nadal, trusted confidant of Ignatius and itinerant troubleshooter for the nascent Society, made his first trip to the Empire, where he was utterly appalled by what he found. He would thereafter be an especially strong voice in the Society for assigning high priority to the German situation.

Nadal seems to be the first person in history, in fact, to propose in bold fashion the interpretation of the origins of the Society that linked it intrinsically with the battle against Protestantism. As early as 1554, Ignatius had come close, with the benefit of hindsight, to saying the same thing.[2] His secretary, Juan de Polanco, took up the idea.[3]

Once Ignatius was dead, however, the temptation to compare and contrast him with Luther was too great to resist. The very year after his death, Nadal suggested the theme in an exhortation to the Jesuits at the Roman College.[4] In his second *Dialogue* some five years later he pits Ignatius, the new David, against Luther, the Goliath.[5] He reminded the Jesuits at Cologne in 1567, with some confusion of dates, that in the year Luther was called by the devil Ignatius heard the call from God.[6] The now familiar diptych, so beloved of historians, with Luther on the one side and Ignatius on the other, was first painted by the early Jesuits themselves.

Perhaps more important, Nadal and others began to interpret certain practices in the Society in a way that could lead to the impression that they were undertaken specifically as antidotes to Protestant errors. He refers, for instance, to frequent confession and to the special vow of the professed to obey the pope 'concerning missions'.[7] Antidotes they may well have become, but all the things to which Nadal refers had their real origins in some other cause.

The distorted view of how and why the Society came into being to which we have become accustomed began, therefore, with some of the first Jesuits themselves. Why, then, *was* the Society originally founded? Scholars who are aware that it was not founded specifically to counter the Reformation sometimes state that it was founded to 'reform the (Catholic) Church'. This comes closer to the mark. But we need to be aware that, although the expression 'reform of the Church' was on practically every thinking Catholic's lips, it was rarely employed by the first Jesuits—and practically never to describe what they themselves were about.

As the expression was then commonly employed, it meant a reform of ecclesiastical legislation that would effect more genuinely pastoral practice and attitudes in the bishops, especially the Bishop of Rome, and in the pastors of parishes. This was the understanding enshrined in the 'reform' legislation of the Council of Trent. The Society, a religious order exempt from episcopal jurisdiction and as one that had explicitly foresworn undertaking parochial ministry, never officially spoke of its scope as 'reform of the Church' in this sense.

The word 'reform' (*reformatio*) does appear frequently, however, in Jesuits' letters and other documents. While it sometimes refers to their efforts to bring convents and monasteries back to a stricter discipline, it more often applies to the result they hoped to effect in individuals of every class of society by their various ministries.

It stands as a close equivalent to what we usually mean by 'conversion'—conversion away from a life of sin or conversion from a mediocre Christian life to a much closer following of Christ. If we should wish to make this type of reform mean the same thing as 'reform of the Church', we must be willing to apply the same designation to phenomena like the Fransiscan movement in the thirteenth century. In so doing, we must admit that we are using the designation differently from the way in which it was used in the sixteenth century—a rather questionable procedure.

The Jesuits' understanding of 'reform' echoes its meaning in the *Exercises* (Exx 189). As practically everybody who has written on the Jesuits agrees, we must turn to that book for our fundamental understanding of what they thought they were about. There is no doubt that it is about conversion of life and conversion of heart—conversion from sin in the First Week and conversion to a more efficacious following of Christ in the Second, to be confirmed in the Third and Fourth.

The purpose is betrayed even more generically in the Fifteenth Annotation: 'to permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature directly with his Creator and Lord'. Amidst all its structure, suggestions and directives, what finally emerges in the *Exercises* is its basically non-prescriptive character regarding the outcome of those dealings. Although the *Exercises* are obviously biased towards a life of 'real' poverty by adherence to what were known as the 'counsels of evangelical perfection', they are clear that, for various reasons, this may not be literally possible or best for everybody. For precisely that reason they were held in great suspicion by some important Catholic contemporaries of Ignatius.[8]

We are here touching not only on what is central to the *Exercises* but also on what was central to Ignatius' own religious experience, which he distilled for others in his book. No more significant passage appears in his *Autobiography* than where he relates how at Manresa he was directly taught by God [Exx 27]. The 'word of God' to which he and his fellow Jesuits made such frequent reference was often specifically this personal word spoken within. In many ways that is what the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits in the *Exercises* are all about.

For him and them the 'word of God' also referred to the scriptures, as is clear from the way the last three Weeks are organized. In them was the objectified counterpart to the inner

word. But what kind of book were the scriptures as they are presented in the *Exercises?* They are not a data base from which to draw dogma and theological doctrine in the ordinary senses of those terms, which is how scholastic theology viewed them. They are, rather, a book about living the Christian life. As such, they were intended for every human being on the face of the earth. Noteworthy about the *Exercises* in this regard is that they propose no dogmatic theses for adherence and that the dogmatic assumptions about the Christian religion they assume would belong to the common heritage. In that sense they were about *Christianitas*, as that term was understood in the Middle Ages and in Ignatius' own day.[9]

What was the teaching of *Christianitas?* Nadal tells us in an impassioned passage from his *Apologia* for the *Exercises* against their detractors: 'What did Christ and what did the Apostles, what have the saints and the Church ever taught except that mortals should love God above all things, with their whole heart, their whole mind, their whole soul, and their whole being?' According to him, this was the essential message of the *Exercises*. It was a message written in every human heart.

The point of this important passage is, in fact, that the *Exercises*, or at least parts of them, can therefore with profit be engaged in not only by Protestant heretics but even by pagans.[10] Nadal states this idea as his 'personal opinion', but his opinions always carried a great deal of weight. In the early days of the Society some few Protestants did in fact make the *Exercises*.[11] Although the Jesuits who guided these persons clearly hoped that they would thereby be cured of their heresy, the point is that even in the sixteenth century some persons saw in the *Exercises* transconfessional validity.

There were of course elements in the *Exercises*, like the confession of sins recommended at the end of the First Week, that would require considerable adaptation if the *Exercises* were given to persons who were not practising Roman Catholics. Many traditional commentators on them, however, would see the largest obstacle in the 'Rules for Thinking with the Church', i.e., with the Catholic Church. Some have in fact tended to see these 'Rules' almost as the hermeneutical key for interpreting the whole book. Interpreted in that sense, the *Exercises* become a manifesto of Roman Catholic orthodoxy. Even today that is the impression conveyed by many textbooks and general studies of the sixteenth century.

Several considerations need to be kept in mind if we are to understand those 'Rules'. First of all, although the wording of a few of them sometimes seems particularly emphatic, even those like the notorious thirteenth rule about believing what seems to me white to be in fact black if it is so defined by the Church, do not differ from what other Catholics would have believed, as has recently been shown precisely for that thirteenth rule.[12] They do not represent some exaggerated or special orthodoxy.

Secondly, they are in their essence statements of attitudes that generally bear on pastoral practice and do not attempt to settle in any specific way controversial issues. In this regard, they are perfectly in accord with Ignatius' customary posture.[13] When he wrote to the Jesuits present at the first period of the Council of Trent, for instance, his only counsels concerning doctrine were that they were to avoid favouring any position that might seem to approach that of 'heretics and sectarians' and avoid taking sides on issues on which Catholics were divided among themselves.[14]

Finally, important though the 'Rules' are in other ways, they were rarely commented upon by the early Jesuits and were not seen by them as integral to the *Exercises* as such. Juan de Polanco, Ignatius' secretary and *alter ego*, equivalently states this when in his *Directory* for the *Exercises*, 1573–75, he joins them with three other sets of 'Rules'—for almsgiving, scruples, and the use of food: 'About these four the following can be said in general. They should not be proposed to everybody, but only to persons who seem to need them and for whom it is worth the effort'.[15]

The *Exercises* are not, therefore, about correct dogma, but about conversion of *heart*. If we had to sum up the Jesuits' agenda in all their ministries in one expression, that would be it. That was what was important to them, for they believed that that was what was most important in life. If that could be effected, all else would fall into place. Contrariwise, the root of all evil in individuals as well as in society lay in not having undergone such a conversion. They accordingly subscribed to the ancient persuasion that the root of heresy lay in some other sin. With conversion of heart, the heretic would abandon his or her heresy.

This persuasion helps explain their sometimes benign, if perhaps condescending, attitude towards Protestants. In 1541 Peter Faber, the first Jesuit to have direct contact with the Lutherans in Germany, recorded a list of those for whom he explicitly prayed on a regular basis: 'The Pope, the Emperor, the King of France,

the King of England, Luther, the Sultan, Bucer, and Philipp Melanchthon'.[16] He noted that God had given him a great love for heretics and for the whole world, especially for Germany—'*esta pobre nación*'.[17]

In 1558 Diego Laínez, already elected to succeed Ignatius as superior general of the order, told a lay audience in Rome that, although some persons maintained the contrary opinion, it was praiseworthy to pray for heretics, schismatics, and excommunicates. He especially exhorted them to do so for the first group, misled because of their own sins but also 'scandalized by our rottenness and simony'.[18] If the Lutherans could undergo a conversion of heart, he implies, they would no longer be susceptible to the heresy of their leaders.

In 1545 Faber expressed sentiments of compassion for both Henry VIII and Luther.[19] By about 1560, however, other Jesuits began at least on occasion to fall into explicit vilifications of Luther that practically never occurred during Ignatius' lifetime. Laínez said he was perverse.[20] In 1577 Canisius went so far as to call him a 'hog in heat'—*subantem porcum*.[21] Nadal became perhaps the worst and most consistent offender, for whom Luther was 'disturbed and diabolical', 'an evil and bestial man', 'a wicked, proud, enraged, and devilish monk'.[22] Revealing though such passages are in Nadal, they in fact occur relatively infrequently.

It has never been established that Nadal ever read Luther, and, like practically all the leading Jesuits of his generation except Canisius; he was surely incapable of doing so in German. His occasional sketches of Luther's teaching were suspiciously brief and repeat the usual Catholic distortions. Nadal is particularly important for our topic because he directly instructed most of the Jesuits in Europe about the meaning of their vocation. Other leading Jesuits of the period like Laínez and Alfonso Salmerón, and most certainly Canisius, read some of the Protestant writings, but most of the others, if they had any interest in the matter, seem to have derived their knowledge from Catholic polemicists. As far as we know, Ignatius never read any of the Protestants with the possible exception of Bernardo Ochino, whose writings he expressed a desire to see in 1545 in order that he might help him be reconciled to the Catholic Church.[23]

In any case, Nadal did not invent the bad-monk interpretation of Luther. It had been in circulation for decades among Catholic polemicists before he adopted it. Besides being an example of the

vituperative rhetoric common to all parties in that religiously disturbed period, it helped promote among Catholics thenceforth a persistently moralistic reading of the Reformation. Furthermore, if immorality—first of all their own and then that of various Protestant leaders—had been the cause of the Reformation, a more devout and morally upright life would be its cure. When the Jesuits took it into their heads to counter the Reformation, whether they were dealing with Catholics or directly with Protestants, they believed that it was towards that cure that they best direct their efforts. This belief happened to coincide with what the *Exercises* had in any case indicated as their goal for anybody unto whom they ministered.

A passage from one of Laínez' Roman lectures in 1558 illustrates the point well. He said: 'I am not a Lutheran, but I believe that we have given occasion for the trouble by our pomp, sensuality, avarice, simony, and by usurping for ourselves the goods of the Church. And now what? We can now restore what we have ruined and scandalized, but how do we do it? In my opinion we cannot do it with beautiful words alone or with conferences and similar things without accompanying them with deeds, because it was with the deeds of a bad life that we did evil. All right, now we want to do better? Contraries are cured by contraries. We must therefore lead good lives.'[24]

Laínez prefaced these words with a condemnation of even a 'just war' because of the great damage it inflicts on the innocent, especially to women and children. This seems in context to be an obvious allusion to the war just ending that Pope Paul IV had waged against Philip II of Spain, but it would seem to apply to wars against heresy.

The doctrinal issues of the day were, in any case, to a certain extent a somewhat secondary concern to the early Jesuits. Not that they thought them unimportant but that they were best not addressed in the first instance. Ignatius' most consistent advice on the way to deal with doctrinal controversies was to avoid, whenever possible, polemics and direct confrontations, especially in the pulpit, and be content with a positive exposition of Catholic teaching.[25] Faulty though Nadal's understanding of Luther may have been, he had a masterful grasp especially of the best Catholic theology of grace and was skilled in speaking about it. Even he underscores in his first *Dialogue* that avoidance of contention, which leads only to bitterness and hatred, was meant to be characteristic of the

Jesuits' general way of proceeding concerning controverted doctrines.[26] The overheated religious situation of the sixteenth century, however, did not suffer the sage principle always to prevail.

Much more could be said about the attitudes of the early Jesuits towards Protestants, but we must move on to a hasty glance at their attitudes towards two other categories of misbelievers for whom they had concern—Jews and pagans. Regarding the first category, we must recall that most of the leading Jesuits of the founding generation were from the Iberian peninsula where anti-Jewish sentiment raged and had found its most virulent expression in the decrees of expulsion from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1496.

These decrees had repercussions in Italy, where new restrictions began to be imposed on Jews within a few decades. In 1516, for instance, the Republic of Venice forced Jews to live in a designated quarter of the city. Pope Paul IV imposed a similar ghetto upon them in Rome during 1555 and enforced some of the most stringent restrictions on their freedom in all of Italy. Since most of the first Jesuits were concentrated in Iberia and Italy, they could not avoid the issue.

Ignatius not only seems to have approved of the papal bull of 1555 but actually helped propagate it.[27] He had strong feelings against the Jewish religion and all who practised it. As with the Protestants, this bigotry had an epistemological root: the truth of Christianity was clear; only moral perversity could explain failure to embrace it.

If we distinguish between race and religion, however, Ignatius notably transcended most of his peers in his open-mindedness towards the Jews as a race of people. He on several occasions severely shocked people by saying that he would consider it a great grace from God to have been born, like Jesus, from Jewish lineage.[29] He warmly welcomed into the Society Italian converts from Judaism.

This attitude is illustrated most dramatically in his insistence on allowing so-called 'New Christians' in Spain to enter the Society. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the major and most influential religious orders in Spain refused to admit novices who could not boast of *limpieza de sangre*. The pressure on the young and fragile Society of Jesus to follow suit was almost overwhelming, but Ignatius refused to budge.

Nadal, who often had to bear the brunt of Jesuit policy in Spain, faithfully implemented it in this regard and defended it to both clergy and laity. When in 1551 the formidable Archbishop of Toledo, primate of all Spain, forbade Jesuits to do ministry in his diocese, the principal reason for his animosity seems to have been their practice of admitting New Christians into their ranks.[29] Not all Jesuits agreed with Ignatius on this policy, but the best indication of support for it was the election of Laínez as his successor as general. Laínez' great-grandfather had been a Jew, and therefore Laínez himself was considered one.

The early Jesuits' attitudes towards the indigenous populations of India, Brazil, and elsewhere was as complex as their attitude towards Protestants and Jews. They were of course intent upon conversion to Christianity, with all that that implies about their attitudes towards certain aspects of the indigenous culture.

Deserving emphasis, however, is the consistently positive assessment of the peoples themselves. Their talents and their inherent goodness often elicited praise from them, as well as unflattering comparisons to their European counterparts.[30] The Jesuits were highly critical of the 'military' mode of evangelization of other European missionaries.

The advanced culture of the Japanese presented special problems. When Francis Xavier arrived there in 1549, he eulogized their virtues and intelligence.[31] His successors there recognized that to win converts they would have to emphasize how Christianity was consonant with 'reason'.[32] Although the first Jesuits in Brazil were gratified to learn that idolatry was unknown among some of the Brazilians, they were soon dismayed to realize that this meant they had no concept of God whatsoever.[33]

For boys and girls in India and Brazil they tried to provide a catechesis, a basic education in reading and writing, and training in basic skills the equivalent to what they provided in Europe, and in their schools accepted boys into classrooms with the sons of European parents, often over the objections of the latter.[34] When they taught catechism to children in India, they also taught them Portuguese, while at the same time the children taught them their language.[35] They immediately recognized in certain sections of Brazil the extraordinary musical talent of the people, taught and themselves learned songs in the native languages, tried to develop native talent in other imaginative ways and, of course, to capitalize on it for their own evangelizing purposes.[36]

While to twentieth-century minds these efforts may smack of paternalism and a misguided sense of European cultural superiority, they were not engaged in by the Jesuits without some feeling of mutuality. For all their problems, they surely contrast positively with the attitudes and practices of many other Europeans who settled in those places. As was true for them regarding Protestants and Jews, they often evince prejudices that are foreign to us today and repulsive. They also sometimes managed to rise above them in significant ways.

NOTES

[1] *Formulae Instituti*, in *Constitutiones Societatis Jesu* (Rome: *Apud Curiam Praepositi Generalis*, 1937), p xxiii.
[2] *Epistolae*, in *Monumenta Ignatiana* (MHSJ), 12:259.
[3] *Monumenta paedagogica* (MHSJ), 3:335.
[4] *Fontes narrativi*, in *Monumenta Ignatiana* (MHSJ), 2:5.
[5] *Monumenta Nadal* (MHSJ), 5:607.
[6] *Ibid.*, 780.
[7] *Ibid.*, 5:315–21.
[8] See Ignacio Iparraguirre: *Historia de la práctica de los Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio de Loyola*, 2 vols (Bilbao and Rome: *Institutum Historicum Societatis Jesu*, 1946–55), 1:83–117.
[9] See John Van Engen: 'The Christian Middle Ages as an historiographical problem', *American historical review*, 91 (1986), pp 519–52.
[10] *Monumenta Nadal*, 4:849–52.
[11] Iparraguirre: *Historia*, 1:136.
[12] See Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle: 'Angels black and white: Loyola's spiritual discernment in historical perspective', *Theological studies*, 44 (1983), pp 241–57.
[13] See my 'The fourth vow in its Ignatian context: a historical study', *Studies in the spirituality of Jesuits*, 15/1 (January 1983), pp 8–21.
[14] *Epistolae*, 1:386–89, and Polanco, *Chronicon* (MHSJ), 1:177–83.
[15] *Exercitia spiritualia*, in *Monumenta Ignatiana* (MHSJ), 2:292.
[16] *Monumenta Fabri* (MHSJ), p 502.
[17] *Ibid.*, pp 107, 507.
[18] '*De oratione*', in the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus, cod. 73, fols. 151–52.
[19] *Monumenta Fabri*, p 674.
[20] '*De oratione*', fol. 74.
[21] See James Brodrick: *Peter Canisius* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1935), pp 72–74.
[22] *Monumenta Nadal*, 4:773; 5:317, 321.
[23] *Epistolae*, 1:343–44.
[24] '*De oratione*', fol. 202v.
[25] *Epistolae*, 1:386–87; 10:690–91; 11:359–65, 372, 541.
[26] *Monumenta Nadal*, 5:576.
[27] On this issue and his general attitude, see James W. Reites: 'St Ignatius of Loyola and the Jews', *Studies in the spirituality of Jesuits*, 13/4 (September 1981).
[28] *Fontes narrativi* (MHSJ), 2:476.
[29] *Epistolae mixtae* (MHSJ), 2:625–26.
[30] See Polanco's *Chronicon*, e.g., 1:200; 2:383; 394; 3:463; 5:618, 656.

[31] *Ibid.*, 1:461–64.
[32] *Ibid.*, 4:649.
[33] *Ibid.*, 5:632–33.
[34] *Ibid.*, 5:657.
[35] *Ibid.*, 1:474.
[36] *Ibid.*, 4:640.