

IGNATIAN LOYALTY, JESUIT OBEDIENCE

Précis: In his personal pilgrimage, Ignatius recaptured the early Christian spirituality recorded in St Paul. Basic Christian spirituality means "life is Christ" and interior freedom of spirit, soul, and body. His chivalry prepared Ignatius to give his total loyalty to Christ. For Christ, Ignatius loyally obeyed the Church but not without struggle. His confrontations with the hierarchical church were paradoxically liberating. For loyal obedience is psychologically sound, turning the person outward in self-transcending service. Here is the core of ignatian spirituality. In the earliest times, virginity, and in the middle ages, poverty, embodied spiritual freedom; with Ignatius, obedience becomes the clearest realization of spiritual freedom. This, then, is Jesuit spirituality: freedom of spirit in loyal obedience to the Church and the pope.

This essay addresses a query about the difference, if any, between Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit spirituality. It is just one person's view--very much coloured by his own experience and expressed in terms of his favourite frame of reference, which is the *Memoirs* or *Autobiography* of Ignatius.

As is well known, the *Memoirs* were composed reluctantly and la-bouriously, under pressure from devoted disciples led by Jerome Nadal, who wanted by all means to get what they called "a testament" as inspiration and guide to keep them faithful to the grace that had brought their fellowship into being. Today we would say that they were asking for an authoritative statement of the charism of the leader.

Nadal believed and affirmed with great conviction that God dealt with the followers of Ignatius the same way as he had with Ignatius, and that they must by all means respond as he did. Hence the crucial importance of having an authentic account of his spiritual pilgrimage. And in fact, when viewed in this light, what appears at first sight to be a haphazard narrative becomes excitingly revelatory of the dynamics at work in *Spiritual Exercises* and in the Jesuit *Constitutions*. This might well provide the clue to the object of our quest--which we will now pursue, trying to trace at least the salient features without pausing over details.

But before we venture on a journey of discovery, a preliminary hurdle must be cleared: It concerns the difference, if any, between Ignatian spirituality and what we might call basic Christian spirituality, such as we find it in the Gospel and such as is articulated by the first and greatest master after Jesus himself, Saint Paul.

In his various letters, Paul presents a coherent though not systematic account of the dynamics of the Christian life, which may be summed up as, *Life means Christ* (Phil. 1:21); and that means freedom of spirit, for "Christ has set us free, so that we should remain free" (Gal. 5:1).

It is our contention that subsequent Christian doctrine, working with concepts derived from Greek philosophy, does not do justice to the teaching of Paul; and that Ignatius, being innocent of philosophy when from his experience he composed the *Exercises*, has helped to recover the Pauline vision, because of his natural insight into fundamental psychological principles.

But he lacked adequate language to express himself, and had to make do with the current vocabulary; so it is only today, with the advance of psychology, that we can fully appreciate what he is trying to say. And the conclusion we ultimately arrive at is that the findings of modern psychology about human development are very much in line with the teaching of Paul as relayed by Ignatius. Hence the present popularity of Ignatian spirituality: it is in fact a homecoming to the original spirituality of the New Testament, in all its simplicity and force; and at the same time it is the most satisfying formula for being fully alive and effective as human beings in today's world.

St Paul: freedom in the Spirit

In his first letter to the Thessalonians--which is also the earliest text of the New Testament--Paul concludes by presenting an ideal of the spiritual life whose various aspects his subsequent writings will develop and complement; and at the end he prays:

May the God who gives us peace make you completely his own, and keep your whole being--spirit, soul and body--free from all fault at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you will do it, for he is faithful! (I Thess. 5:23,24).

Let us notice at once that for Paul our "whole being" is "spirit, soul and body". Elsewhere he refers to the spirit as "inner self" (Eph. 3:16; "interior homo" in the Vulgate), while soul and body together are "flesh" (Rom. 8:2; currently translated as "human nature"). Unfortunately, Christian theology adopted the Greek definition of a human being as a rational animal, made up of just body and soul, and thereby threw the Pauline model out of gear. The objective reality of the Christian life remained, of course, and flourished; but its proper understanding and cultivation suffered in the various attempts to elaborate a spirituality without the spirit, which is precisely the ultimate self, the unique person that each one is before God.

For Paul the spirit plays a key role. It has a mysterious affinity with the divine Spirit, which is what makes us be in the image and likeness of God; whereas the flesh or human nature makes us one with the rest of creation and subject to its pressures. In the resulting tension, of which Paul speaks so feelingly, "the Spirit joins our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16), and "where the Spirit of the Lord is present, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17).

*freedom of spirit
in the Spirit
of freedom*

We are all aware that the redemption wrought by Christ is absolutely central to our faith. But redemption means precisely freedom from slavery. And freedom is the basic characteristic of our spirit; our nature is not free--neither body nor soul are really free, and they tend to drag down our spirit. But "the Spirit is the guarantee that we shall receive what God has promised his people, and assures us that God will give complete freedom to those who are his own" (Eph. I:14).

The ideal of the Christian life, as indeed of all human life, is to attain to full freedom of spirit. And that is what spirituality is all about: freedom of spirit in the Spirit of freedom.

Ignatius: loyalty as liberation

Ignatius discovered the spirit in what the *Memoirs* call "his first reflection on the things of God" (*Auto.8*). He tells us that when convalescing in Loyola and reading pious books to while away the time, his mind entertained two very different series of thoughts, which nevertheless gave him equal satisfaction at the affective level. But little by little he became aware of a yet deeper level, hitherto unheeded, where his growing attachment to Christ brought him a quiet joy and deep satisfaction, while worldly ambition left him cold and dry. At this level he recognized the true Ignatius and encountered the real God. It was a supremely liberating experience, opening up a whole new world of reality with immense possibilities.

He stumbles on a paradox that is no different from the many paradoxes with which Jesus expresses the newness of his message, but that comes across to Ignatius in a manner consonant with his character and culture: he discovers loyalty as liberation.

In the *Memoirs* we see him as having a veritable genius for loyalty. In the best chivalric traditions he is in search of an object worthy of total devotion and is held captive by his extravagant dreams. But chance reading reveals to him the only possible object of unlimited commitment: it is Christ. Now loyalty is something that binds; but loyalty to Christ is a liberation, for it leads into the experience that Jesus had of the Father, of God as Absolute and all else as relative. That is the truth that sets us free.

*loyalty to Christ binds
our spirit...*

Ignatius realizes how much his true self has been dominated by the ideas and feelings of his more obvious but less authentic ego; and he reverses the process, so that an attitude of generous response to God at the deeper level influences his mental and emotional dispositions, and shapes his behaviour: "The household came to know from his exterior the change that had been wrought interiorly in his soul" (*Auto.10*).

We have here the basic and distinctive pattern of Ignatian spirituality in general, and of *Spiritual Exercises* in particular. The words "interiorly" and "interior" occur again and again in the text, but are unfortunately often lost in translation. They refer precisely to that deeper level of the spirit, of the real self, and Ignatius might well have derived

the words from the "interior homo" of Paul, referred to above. Today we could call it the personal levels as distinct from the mental and affective levels of soul and body. At this level there is direct contact between God and each one of us, and the Exercises are geared to ensuring that the contact is not disturbed, so that it is fruitful in freedom (*SpEx.* 45).

Here psychology steps in to throw light upon, and emphasise the relevance of, the dynamics of progress and fulfilment in the Pauline and Ignatian design: our nature, the body-soul complex that we have in common with all humans, is in-growing and can only develop and mature through a process of acquisition: we grasp facts, master skills, consume food and drink. But the person, the self that we uniquely are, moves in the contrary direction: by opening up and reaching out, by caring and sharing; for it is essentially out-going, ever transcending itself.

*... to the one true God
who sets us free*

And so we come to the core statement of *Spiritual Exercises*, located at the very centre of the text: "Let each one reflect that the measure of progress in what concerns the spirit is the transcending of self-love, self-will and self-interest" (*SpEx.* 189). It echoes the admonition of Paul to those who have attained to freedom of spirit: "You were called to be free; do not use your freedom as an opening for self-indulgence, but serve one another in love" (Gal. 5:13).

This is of course the teaching of Jesus himself, which the Gospel often expresses in paradoxes, like that of the grain of wheat (Jn. 12:24). All Christian spirituality accepts and promotes it. But traditional spirituality, operating with an inadequate model of human nature, cannot but present spiritual progress as a process of acquisition: we gain merit by an increase of grace through a reception of the sacraments and a growing credit of good works. This kind of language can be justified, but it tends to foster a pious selfishness. Today it is found less than satisfactory, and quite out of tune with current ideas about what it means to be truly and fully human.

To return to the *Memoirs*: the process of liberation comes to a peak point for Ignatius in the extraordinary experience at the Cardoner in Manresa, "with so great an enlightenment that everything seemed new to him" (*Auto.*30). This has always been recognized as a very special mystical grace; but it can and should be attained in a humbler yet effective form by every Christian. And so Paul prays for all, invoking the Trinity and asking

*the mystical grace comes
to every Christian*

the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give you the Spirit, to make you wise and reveal God to you, so that you will know him. ... May he, out of the rich treasury of his glory, strengthen you through his Spirit with a power that reaches your inner self. May Christ find a dwelling place, through faith, in your hearts; may your lives be rooted in love, and founded on love" (Eph.1:17; 3:16,17).

Jesus himself saw all reality in the light of the Father's love; and this is what the Exercises lead a Christian to, through "interior knowledge of the Lord" (*SpEx*. 104). We cannot enumerate all the steps here, but the goal is to respond to every experience as Christ did, finding God in all things, being contemplative in action.

For the simple but generous and very determined layman that Ignatius was, there came an irresistible urge to follow even externally in the footsteps of Christ: "the one thing he wanted to do was to go to Jerusalem" (*Auto*.9); "his firm intention was to remain in Jerusalem, continually visiting those holy places; and in addition to this devotion, he also planned to help souls" (*Auto*.45). Such would be the rest of his life and the full flowering of his spirituality.

Jesuit spirituality: loyal service in the Church

But at this point he meets destiny, at his very first encounter with the hierarchical Church in its stark reality: he is quite literally confronted with a papal bull (*Auto*.47). His reaction to the peremptory order, that he quit Jerusalem immediately and return home, was in an incalculable measure decisive: for himself personally, for the Society of Jesus, and for Jesuit spirituality. Without the slightest hesitation, or any sign of regret, a fondly cherished dream is summarily discarded. Ignatius begins a pilgrimage in reverse.

Some may find this strange. Heroic perhaps; but also too servile: he might at least have left under protest. He says nothing. But what is really strange, and significant, is that the whole affair is for him not a frustration but a liberating event: once again a vast new world opens up, with endless possibilities. "After the pilgrim realized that it was God's will that he do not stay in Jerusalem, he continually pondered within himself what he ought to do; and eventually he was rather inclined to study for some time so he would be able to help souls" (*Auto*.50). The whole world is aware of the momentous outcome of this very tentative plan, and of its impact on the history of the Church and of humanity at large.

Our own concern is that here Jesuit spirituality was born - before the Society of Jesus itself--as a distinctive manner of living that total adherence to Christ which is at the heart of Pauline, Christian, and Ignatian spirituality. For while it is universally true that "life means Christ" (Phil. 1:21), it can be lived in many ways and in a variety of services: "all these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills" (I Cor. 12:11). What the Spirit teaches Ignatius is that loyalty to Christ means obedience to the Church.

*L o y a l t y m e a n s
o b e d i e n c e ; o b e d i e n c e
m e a n s l i b e r a t i o n*

Loyalty as obedience, obedience as liberation

This might seem obvious; but serious questions were being raised at that time about the scope of that obedience. And even today, the implications of papal primacy are discussed. Now if there is one thing that comes across powerfully right through the *Memoirs*, from the very first lines, it is that Ignatius was never a man for half-measures or compromises: so obedience meant just obedience. The rest of his story, down to the last chapter, is punctuated with problems relating to ecclesiastical authority. Ignatius does not take things lying down, so to speak, as he seems to have done the first time; he represents, remonstrates, appeals--but he always obeys. However, he never surrenders his freedom of spirit, which seems rather to thrive on the exercise.

Once again, it is not a question of preconceived theories; rather, having accepted loyalty as obedience, he experiences obedience as liberation. In this case the climax comes when he is blocked in his second attempt to go to Jerusalem, and together with his "friends in the Lord" turns to offer his services to the pope. On the way, he has an experience comparable to that in Manresa. At La Storta, the *Memoirs* record laconically, "God the Father placed him with Christ his Son" (*Auto.*96)--unintentionally recalling Paul's ardent desire to gain Christ "and be given a place in him" (Phil. 3:9).

*obedience requires
attention to something
outside and beyond the
self*

Fortunately we have a more detailed account by one of the travelling companions, and in that account three words stand out: *Jesus--servant--Rome*. This becomes the mystical source of a three-point programme which defines the Society of Jesus in its foundational charter, the Formula of the Institute: "to serve the Lord alone and his bride the Church under the Roman Pontiff."

Just as ignatian spirituality has its "principle and foundation", on which *Spiritual Exercises* are built, so too Jesuit spirituality has the so-called fourth vow, which Ignatius labels the "principle and chief foundation" of the Society of Jesus, on which its *Constitutions* are built.

**Jesuit spirituality:
The freedom of spirit in loyal obedience**

So much has been written and spoken in the course of history for and against the Jesuit vow to obey the Pope, and about Jesuit obedience in general. Let us begin by noting, with regard to the three traditional religious vows, that in the early days virginity or celibacy was the privileged affirmation of spiritual freedom; in medieval times the mendicant orders exalted poverty as the path to freedom, on the premise that a free person is one that has nothing to lose; and with the dawn of the modern age, Ignatius, while in no way minimizing the value of chastity and poverty, extols obedience as the liberator of the spirit.

He writes a very long paragraph in the *Constitutions*, a sort of litany of exhortations like this one: "This is the ideal we must aim at in the Lord, with all the resources of our mind and heart: that holy obedience unreservedly embraces not only our performance, but our intention and our vision" [547]. Christ has set us free by his obedience unto death, and "our attitude must be that of Christ" (Phil. 2:5) if we want to carry on his liberating mission in today's world.

This is not just a highly theological consideration but makes very good practical sense. For the obedience promoted by Ignatius, besides its doctrinal and even mystical foundations, has a very simple psychological function: it prevents a closing in on oneself, since it calls for alertness to something that comes from outside--it keeps us on our toes, ready for action, open to every possibility. Properly understood and practised, it brings freedom.

*the Company's costly
loyalty has brought
freedom of spirit*

In its four hundred and fifty-seven years of life, the Society has time and again paid a heavy price for placing itself under the Roman Pontiff. The ways in which this has happened are many and varied. And the fact is that it has not failed to bring abundant returns in terms of freedom of spirit. This cannot be proved. Perhaps it makes no sense. It is certainly a paradox. But those who were close to the crisis of 1981 can bear witness that it is true.