

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND THEOLOGY

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There certainly must be an “Ignatian” way of doing theology. Of course it would not be the only way and other spiritual families have been inspired by other “ways of proceeding.” In these pages I would like to allude to the method that seems to me to be based on the spirituality of St. Ignatius and are illustrated by several great Jesuit theologians of the 20th century.

Ignatius of Loyola and theology

St. Ignatius never was a theologian by trade. He only became a student himself late in life. But he took his theological formation in Paris very seriously, because he was convinced that he could not “help souls” without first doing the necessary studies. He studied during troubled times in the context of the early Reformation in Paris.¹ Ignatius and his companions sided with moderates who sought to reconcile the desire for a faith that was more interior and personal with the doctrinal authority of the Church. They were open to the progress of the Renaissance; they favored the study of the “three languages,” Hebrew, Greek and Latin. But they wanted to preserve classical references to scholastic theology as found in its better representatives. Ignatius was very vigilant in what concerned orthodoxy and “feeling with the Church,” but at the same time he advised his companion Bobadilla to combine

positive theology with scholastic theology, which involved the study of languages. We find in his attitude, at once traditional and open to the new currents of thought, the sense of discernment which he bequeathed to the Society. He will introduce later this same equilibrium in the rules “for thinking with the Church”:

We ought to praise both positive theology and scholastic theology. For just as it is more characteristic of the positive doctors, such as St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Gregory and the rest to stir up our affections toward loving and serving God our Lord in all things, so it is more characteristic of the scholastic teachers, such as St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, the Master of the Sentences, and so on to define and explain for our times the matters necessary for salvation, and also to refute and expose all the errors and fallacies. For the scholastic teachers, being more modern, can avail themselves of an authentic understanding of Sacred Scripture and the holy positive doctors. Further still they, being enlightened and clarified by divine influence, make profitable use of the councils, canons, and decrees of our Holy Mother Church.”²

This text hides within itself a small paradox, in that those it presents as “moderns” are in fact the already-ancient great scholastic masters, while

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the “positive doctors,” although even more ancient, were at his epoch those who had the wind in their sails and whose study required a knowledge of the languages. Scholasticism was the object of critique and the return to the

ancient text restored in esteem the teaching of the Fathers of the Church. Ignatius was not opposed to scholastic theology or to positive theology, but he remained equally positive about both methods and their respective contents. He saw in the Fathers the great witnesses of a spiritual theology,

capable of touching the heart. But he knew that one cannot go backwards and that theology ought to remain alive and adapted to “our times.” This is why he believed that theology needed to know how to argue, define and explain, and so hold its ground in contemporary debates. He made himself the apostle of a living theology which knows how to confront new questions. In these few lines there is a complete indication for a balanced way of doing theology.

His foundational project was, in effect, to give to the Church reformed and educated priests. His first companions were proud of their diplomas as “theologians of Paris” Ignatius will later recommend Paris as the place where one can do the best studies. Based on this conviction and his own experience he will later make the decisive apostolic decision to found colleges and thus leave to the Society a privileged orientation towards teaching. The manner of teaching of the Jesuits was to conform to that of the “Academy of the Parisians.” These foundational orientations will be later codified in the *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599. This theology was to be apostolic and missionary, traditional and open, but always spiritual.

***From Léonce de Grandmaison and Pierre Rousselot
to their disciples Henri de Lubac and Yves de Montcheuil***

Let us now review the lives and work of several great Jesuit figures of the 20th century. At the beginning of that century, two great personalities make themselves felt, Léonce de Grandmaison and Pierre Rousselot. At the center of the theological plan of Fr. Léonce de Grandmaison (1868-1927) is his shedding light upon the *christocentrism* coming directly out of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. Already as a young religious, he had received from his master, Fr. Longhaye, a spiritual testament which is one of the keys to his work. Here are some particularly significant extracts:

As to the basis of all things and objects to study, above all, may the Society and you along with it, have your eyes always turned towards the supreme object who is Jesus Christ. There is all in all, you already know this without my saying it, and this crucial lesson has fallen already on a sown and fertile soil. You will repeat this lesson to others, but above all you will accomplish

it yourself to the letter. If this testament were to have—which it does not—an obligatory force, I would enjoin upon you one thing, only one thing: strive to find in any object of study its relationship with Jesus Christ. You will find this to be the most direct and sure way of making any understanding you have achieved a witness to Jesus Christ. All the rest is more or less vain curiosity, because it would only be incomplete or neither here nor there. And even if God gives you another forty or fifty years of intellectual vigor, this will still be too little to study Jesus Christ himself and the relationship with all things, divine and human, to Jesus Christ.

[...] This is my second wish, my supreme wish. Love Jesus Christ, my brother Léonce; strive to love his adorable Person passionately every day more and more even to your last breath. Study, scrutinize, dig, bring to light without ceasing both for yourself and for others his unfathomable riches. Gaze upon him stubbornly until you know him by heart; better yet, until you become him, absorbed in him. May he always be more and more the center of your thoughts, the link between all your understandings, the practical goal of your studies whatever they may be. Make him the morally unique aim, the overriding argument, the triumphal arm of your apostolate. Professor, preacher, writer, missionary, who knows what?... may you have, if it please God, and for his glory alone, a great and noble renown; but obscure or celebrated, occupied in the greatest of ministries or the most humble, at least be known in your sphere of action as a man filled and possessed by Jesus Christ, as a man who, when it seems appropriate and even when it doesn't—if that is possible—speaks unceasingly of Jesus Christ, and speaks of him out of the abundance of his heart.³

' [...] Jesus Christ contemplated, Jesus Christ known, Jesus Christ loved with an ever growing passion: this will be everything for you [...]

This passionate text was manifestly a source of inspiration for the author of the great book on *Jésus-Christ*. Grandmaison was a professor of fundamental theology at Fourvière, and was later in exile in England at the

height of the Modernist crisis. During this crisis he refused to enter into the growing polemics that flourished on all sides. He was content with a sober and true analysis of the issues at hand. Alfred Loisy said that he was the only one with whom he would have agreed to discuss these matters, because he had been “well brought up.” He contributed to the renewal of apologetics, as did his junior, Fr. Jules Lebreton (1873-1956), professor at the Institut Catholique of Paris, and the author of the *Histoire du dogma de la Trinité [History of the Dogma of the Trinity]*. Both of them are renowned for their works on the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. Grandmaison was also the founder in 1910 of the journal

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Recherches de Science religieuse. By design he did not chose the term “theology” with the idea of setting in intellectual motion a journal that would be authentically scientific and capable of treating religious problems beyond that of Christian theology. He had the intention of engaging in dialogue with the universities and of opening his review to a positive approach to other religious. He remains a witness to a very “christique” spirituality as a theology open to scientific and historical modernity. Is this not the transposition of the intentions of Ignatius from the 16th century?

Fr. Pierre Rousselot (1878-1915,) who died prematurely in the fighting of the First World War, tried to renew the study of St. Thomas and had the intention of throwing himself into a great work on the theology of love. He became celebrated for his articles on the “eyes of faith” which renewed apologetics by demonstrating that the act of faith itself gives the eyes to see. He was the teacher of Fr. Joseph Huby, who will be in turn the intellectual anchor of the following generation, that is, of Henri de Lubac and Yves de Montcheuil. These last two refer constantly in their correspondence to Rousselot and ask them selves what “le Père Léonce” would think about certain points.

The place, the role and the itinerary of Henri de Lubac in the theology of the 20th century are widely known. He also was an heir before becoming a master. Yves de Montcheuil, four years younger than Henri de Lubac and who became his good friend, will himself bestow a theology at

once speculative and rigorous and, at the same time, completely engaged at the service of the Kingdom. He sealed this engagement with his death, given that he was executed by a firing squad at Grenoble on August 12, 1944, for having wanted to respond to the appeal of former students and to be “with them” in the underground of Vercors. In his too-brief career, he knew how to advance diverse delicate points of theology in the line that would lead to Vatican II.⁴ He was, at the same time, an authentic “spiritual master, helping a number of students apply in faith the most crucial discernments which confronted them in the time of the German occupation in France. His book published posthumously, *Problèmes de vie spirituelle* [*Problems in the Spiritual Life*] was a sort of breviary for an entire generation of students, seminarians, male and female religious. Yves de Montcheuil maintained throughout his life the most limpid coherence between his words and his actions.

***The theology of the Exercises
from Erich Przywara and Hugo Rahner to Gaston Fessard***

We come to the middle of the century. It is the moment to hurriedly evoke the great figure of P. Teilhard de Chardin. He died on Easter Day 1955. His work belongs thus to the early 20th century, but it was not published until after his death. For this reason his influence was felt more in the years which followed, both within and outside the Society of Jesus. His theological intuitions certainly are fascinating, but so also is his spiritual personality expressed in *Le Milieu divin* [*The Divine Milieu*] and in his correspondence.

After the same epoch, the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius were the object, not only of spiritual commentaries, but even more so of theological analysis and interpretation. The first to throw himself into this effort was the German Jesuit Erich Przywara (1889-1972,) philosopher and theologian of high standing, who, beginning in 1938 published a theology in three tomes of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Later, Hugh Rahner (1900-1968,) the elder brother of Karl, will investigate the origins of the same *Exercises* and will emphasize the christocentrism of their theology.⁵ Ignatius adhered to the Franciscan perspective which, in the light of the hymn of *Ephesians* 1, holds that the Christ is at the center of the divine intention for man. The design of God, such as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures, gives a central place to Christ, the Word Incarnate, present since before the foundation of

the world in the creative intention. Thus the Christ came not only to free us from sin, but also to establish the perfect line of communication between God and humanity, that is to accomplish our divinization.

On the French side we must highlight the work of Fr. Gaston Fessard, and his *Dialectique des Exercices spirituels* [*The Dialectic of the Spiritual Exercises*] a work edited in the 1930's and published in 1956. Many of the complements on this work were published after the death of the author. This book is at once spiritual, philosophical and theological. For his part, Fr. Maurice Giuliani launched the review *Christus* in 1954, a journal of Ignatian spirituality and theological reflection.

Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar

It is not an exaggeration to say that the most speculative thought of Karl Rahner is the theological thematization of the spiritual experience of the encounter with God, as it is proposed by Ignatius. The theologian confided at the end of his life that Ignatian spirituality had had an influence upon him greater than the philosophy and theology of the period of his formation. This is expressed most clearly in the *Discourse of Ignatius of Loyola to the Jesuits of Today*⁶, where Rahner has an “Ignatius” speak which resembles him without a doubt but is in no way out of character. The immediate experience of God, repeated again and again in these pages, is one of the sources of reflection on the transcendental experience:

*Following Ignatius, Rahner
has chosen to follow Jesus poor
and humble*

When I claim to have known God at first hand, I do not intend here to add to my assertion a theological treatise on the nature of such a direct experience of God [...] All I say is I knew God, nameless and unfathomable, silent and yet near, bestowing himself upon me in his Trinity, I knew God beyond all concrete imaginings. I knew Him clearly in such nearness and grace as is impossible to confound or mistake.⁷

These repetitions speak of the inability of discourse to say anything other than the thing itself. Rahner is thinking of the texts where Ignatius speaks of the Creator and Lord who embraces his creature in his love and his praise. It is in the sanctuary of the “original pole of the conscience” that Ignatius was able to have such a strong experience of God and of grace. He considered his spiritual writings as the best introduction to the understanding of his theology, in particular the text entitled: “Logic of the Existential Knowledge in Ignatius of Loyola”⁸, that is, the “authentic, original” experience of God, which precedes theological verbalization and can never be totally expressed by language. We are at the heart of what he calls “the transcendental experience.” In the same spirit, Rahner indulges in an extended analysis of the “consolation without cause.” He passes spontaneously from this consolation without cause to the transcendental experience.

All this remains intimately tied to “devotion to Jesus,” proposed in the *Exercises* for the contemplation of the retreatant. Following Ignatius, Rahner has chosen to follow Jesus poor and humble. He has even written a little spiritual book translated under the title *Aimer Jésus [Loving Jesus]*:

*In truth, you see, it must be said all the same: one still has nothing to do with Jesus unless one jumps onto his neck, when one realizes, in the depth of one's own existence, that something like this is possible even today.*⁹

Hans Urs von Balthasar was the great friend of Karl Rahner during their youth. Their itineraries separated later on and they indulged themselves in small theological polemics. As far as we are concerned, Balthasar is equally an example of a theologian heir of Ignatius, of whom he always said the latter was his spiritual homeland.

Translated by: Robert E. Hurd, SJ

¹. Cf. Ph. Lécrivain, *Paris au temps d'Ignace de Loyola (1528-1535)*, Ed. Facultés jésuites de Paris, 2006, p. 141-166.

². Ignace de Loyola, *Exercices spirituels*, « Règles à observer pour avoir le sens vrai qui doit être le nôtre dans l'Eglise militante » n° 11 ; trad. F. Courel, DDB, Paris, 1960, n° 363.

³. Dans J. Lebreton, *Le Père Léonce de Grandmaison*, Beauchesne, Paris, 1932, p. 39-42.

⁴. Cf. B. Sesboué, *Yves de Montcheuil (1900-1944), précurseur en théologie*, Cerf, Paris, 2006.

⁵. H. Rahner, *La genèse des Exercices*, DDB/Bellarmin, 1989.

⁶. K. Rahner, *Discours d'Ignace de Loyola aux jésuites d'aujourd'hui*, trad. Ch. Ehlinger, Centurion, Paris, 1979.

⁷. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸. Traduit dans *Eléments dynamiques dans l'Eglise*, DDB, Paris, 1967, p. 75-133.

⁹. K. Rahner, *Aimer Jésus*, Desclée, Paris, 1985, p. 38.