

# THE THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

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Ignatian synergies started by defining the theological framework in which Ignatian Spirituality has moved over the last fifty years, in order to glimpse a way forward. We began with the presentation of some suggestions developed by Santiago Arzubialde, professor of spiritual theology in Comillas (Madrid). The morning was dedicated to working and discussing his approaches in the absence of the author himself. The document was presented by Diego Molina, a member of the Ignatian Spirituality Group in the Southern European Assistancy and professor of Ecclesiology at the Faculty of Theology in Granada. This was followed by time for personal reflection on these approaches and later resonances, reactions and evocations were shared, first in smaller groups and then in a plenary session.

## *I. SUGGESTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS INDICATED BY P. ARZUBIALDE*

The proposed text was entitled «Ignatian Spirituality studies in relation to the evolutionary process of Post-Council theology from General Congregation XXXI (1965) to the present (2009)». Here is a summary of the contents as follows-

First there was a presentation of the evolution of theology throughout the last century focussing on six milestones -

1. The Salzburg Weeks in the 1937 with important papers by Karl Rahner and A. Stolz.

2. The apparition of *Nouvelle Theologie* with theologians Jean Daniélou, Karl Rahner, Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Baltasar. In the light of the common proposal to return to the Fathers they sought to enter into dialogue with culture, just as they responded to the need to unify spirituality and dogma.

3. The historical-critical method applied to the Scriptures promoted by A. von Harnack and Bultmann, and the need to return to the Word of God.

4. The influx of Russians from the Diaspora (Lossky, Meyendorff, Evdokimov) and the Saint Sergius Institute in Paris.

5. In the fifties, and beginning in the Gregorian University, Joseph de Guibert led a movement of renovation. However, starting from a traditional equation (purification-illumination-union), he did not manage to lead this to an adequate conclusion. He has left us his titanic legacy in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, with its three successive editorial teams and sixteen volumes of incalculable value. They are distinguished monographic articles, although lacking a specific unifying underlying structure, which was the original intent.

*the need to unify  
spirituality and dogma*

6. Finally, the Second Vatican Council (1965) and General Congregation XXXI.

Then he presented a series of Successive theological approaches to the book of the Exercises –

- The work of Erich Przywara (1889-1972), *Deus semper maior. A theology of the Exercises* (1933-35), written from his philosophical-theological presupposition of *analogia entis*, that is, discontinuity in the semblance between God and his creatures, or in other words, the Augustinian tension between God who is at the same time in us and very much above us.

- Gaston Fessard (1897-1978), who in *La dialectique des Exercices* (2 vols, 1956 and 1966) reread the Exercises considering the act of liberty from a Hegelian viewpoint.

- Karl Rahner (1904-1984), with his theme of divine self-communication and the transcendental experience and liberty.

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- Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) and his emphasis on the availability and obedience of Jesus to the Father, the theology of historic kenosis, considered from the viewpoint of intra-Trinity primogenitary kenosis.

- From another angle, the contribution of P. Arrupe (1907-1991) in his text "The Trinitarian inspiration of Ignatian charism" (February 1980).

Next, P. Arzubialde indicated the possible *risks and dangers* inherent to the study of Ignatian spirituality -

1. Separating Ignatian spirituality studies from current theological evolution can give rise to the danger of falling into the endogamy of an argot only we understand, self-citing ourselves without going outside our circle.

*reducing the Ignatian perspective exclusively to la Storta and disregarding Cardoner*

2. Reducing the Ignatian perspective exclusively to la Storta and disregarding Cardoner, that is to say, focussing on a mysticism of service which forgets creational mysticism. In other words, splitting the lineal Christomonism of the Exercises (Second and Third Weeks) from the Trinitarian diaphanousness of the Spiritual Diary and Contemplation to attain divine love.

3. He emphasised the need to integrate the theology of the incarnation with the process of return or reintegration of the created in God by means of the Spirit.

4. He stressed the need to overcome definitively the split between action and contemplation, like the dichotomy between liberty and grace, by means of the gift received from the Spirit.

The document made it clear that behind these challenges what is at stake are *the two great theological perspectives* or the lungs with which the Church has always breathed -

- A *creational-metaphysical theology* of a patristic Greco-Byzantine nature, apophatic, marked by the mystery of the infinity of God and the action of the Spirit in which the Word is revealed to us by the Father. In this theology, the human being is conceived as an image according to the first Image of the invisible Father, Christ resurrected. The human being returns, by means of the Spirit, from image to likeness. Salvation is considered in terms of interchange - incarnation and divinisation perpetuated in the

recapitulation in Christ of all Creation. Such is the Eastern key to the spiritual process.

- A *historical-salvational theology*, which is the Latin theology within which Saint Ignatius mainly moves. This is based on the humanity of Jesus and in his following as in the identification with his filial attitude. By means of the historic Christ the Kingdom of God will come to us. Salvation in this case is intended as expiation of sin (redemption), liberation from the injustice of the evil of history, and return to the original obedience. Everything culminates in the mystic theology of the cross, which, in fact, almost dispenses with the Resurrection. The anthropological key which unfolds here lies in the act of personal liberty – the Election.

P. Arzubialde advocates for the integration of both theologies – the *Greco-Byzantine theology*, of a more pneumatological, apophatic and divinising nature, and *Western Latin theology*, concerned with the confrontation with evil, injustice, sin and death in the world, a challenge we face today.

He made it clear that both currents are being integrated in theology today through the rediscovery of the theology of the Trinity. In this way the paradox that lowering (weakness) is exaltation (consummation of power) and difference is unity is increasingly integrated. The Trinitarian nature of God is the foundation of creation and its evolution and constitutes the key to human history. From this perspective it is no longer possible to separate the historic Christ from the Christ of faith, as Bultmann attempted to do in his time.

All of this implies important consequences. He has identified three–

1. In dialogue with monotheistic religions, the Trinitarian God contributes to the specificity of the Christian revelation.

2. In dialogue with other traditions, the specific consideration of Christ as mediator

3. In dialogue with contemporary science and culture, the need to incorporate the evolution of the species with its laws into theology and specifically into spiritual life.

Finally, Arzubialde defined a more adequate theological horizon from which to approach Ignatian texts. In other words, where should Ignatian spirituality be moving to in terms of current dogma? His proposal is to integrate the complete disclosing of the joint relationship between *Logos* y *Pneuma*, which reveals God as love without damage to the mystery of the Father, his infinite transcendence. It is from this theological background

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that the texts of the Ignatian corpus should be approached. These keys should be the basis of ecumenical dialogue with the Eastern Church, a religious dialogue specific to a globalised world just as the dialogue between faith and science, considering the unity of the evolutionary creation of the cosmos and salvation.

Effectively, Arzubialde proposes two points as hermeneutic keys to the Ignatian process – the pneumatological viewpoint and the Trinitarian perspective as the ultimate consciousness of all mystic happening in which everything tends towards the Father in the Son by means of the Spirit<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the identification with Christ through the long process of internal knowledge is the action of the Spirit in man in order to lead him towards the absolute of the love of the Father, the final reality and goal of contemplation to attain divine love. Life in the Spirit, which is the consciousness of the Father for the Son is in great measure, the mystical life of Ignatius exactly as he relates in his *Spiritual Diary*, expression of his experience in Manresa on the banks of the river Cardoner. As far as he is concerned, a text so apparently merely normative such as the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus also reveals this proposal of life in the Spirit in which the category of *discretio* appears as the ordination of love, as the road to the world, an Ignatian way of influencing history to bring it to the Father.

Arzubialde proposes *five moments in the dynamic of salvation* -:

1. The presence and participation of the Word and the Spirit in the creational event
2. The presence of the Spirit “in and above” the humanity of Jesus
3. The definitive revelation of the Trinitarian Being in the Paschal mystery
4. The Spirit, gift of the resurrected Christ, extending His mission
5. To conclude with apophatic theology and the kingdom of God, which is the consummation of the world through Christ in the Spirit in the direction of the Father.

These five points integrate a single reality of salvation in which the creational and historical-salvational perspectives converge as do the splendour of glory and the kenosis of the cross. In this way both perspectives are also integrated – the more inherently Western one based principally on the three synoptic Gospels and in the following of mankind and the kenosis of the cross, and the more inherently Eastern one, closer to the Gospel of St John, where the majesty of the Word and the infinite dimension of all creation is exalted.

Arzubialde notes that Ignatius knew how to integrate these two dimensions. The whole process of the approach to the humanity of Christ by contemplation of the mysteries of his Life remains framed in an origin and consciousness of everything, already present as a horizon in the Principle and Foundation [SE 23] and taken back *existentially* as the gift of the Spirit in Contemplation to attain divine love, where everything is discovered in an eternal eschatological return to the Father. [SE 230-237].

## ***II. REACTIONS TO THE DOCUMENT***

The reactions and reflections resulting from Fr Arzubialde's indications were varied. We will present them grouped thematically.

### ***2.1. Recognition of the polarity indicated***

One group of reactions recognised the polarity identified. The two lungs of the Church have followed different paths despite originating in a common body, and have developed two distinct dogmatic perspectives and two equally different spiritual experiences. The two great Traditions separated in a point of doctrine relative to the Holy Spirit which is the source of sanctity. The West demonstrates its faithfulness to Christ in the solitude and abandonment of the night in Gethsemane. The "heroic" attitude of the great Western saints towards the sorrow of a tragic separation from God, and the mystic night of Saint Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross as a way, as a spiritual need, is unknown in the East. The Eastern saints attain the certainty of union with God in the Light of the Transfiguration, in the Light uncreated by the Holy Spirit. It is undeniable that Saint Ignatius, and most Ignatian inspired theology, has followed this Western path, and only with difficulty can we disengage ourselves from the fundamental writings of our sources.

Also recognised was the importance of the challenge posed to Ignatian spirituality not to remain prisoner of a theological concept in which the exclusive element is Christ, with the consequent oblivion of the other two Trinitarian figures, the dynamism of the Spirit and the unfathomable mystery of the Father. It was noted that this oblivion has also affected other disciplines of Catholic theology - in Ecclesiology, producing a Church

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inclined to exclude all those who do not explicitly accept Christ; just like concentrated reflection on the role of the Vicar of Christ on earth to the detriment of the communion of the Churches in the Spirit; in the sacraments, giving excessive prominence to the action of the representative of Christ; in Eschatology generating a conception of the final state as a *beatific vision* of God, fundamentally intellectual, in detriment of the inaccessible mystery of God.

### 2.2. Moving from a dogmatic Trinity to an existential or radical Trinity

Arzubialde's direction to consider the new Trinitarian paradigm wherein the Christological and the pneumatological are complementary was recognised as important. We noted that those of us present belong to a generation already born into this new paradigm, even though at times we have not consciously conceptualised it. However we need to be conscious of the diversity of interpretations in approaching this theology of the Trinity (Pannenberg and Greshake being the best known authors in this respect, placing the emphasis on communion and communication) which has not yet reached maturity. For this reason the possible extent of the implications deriving from this are not

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clear. Some have pointed out however that a further step must be taken – to progress from a conception of a Trinity external and prior to creation to a Trinity constituting all reality, in which God, man and world are inseparably united. The communion between the three Persons of the Trinity is not found outside us but within us. In this sense, the dogmatic language presented seems a little strange and remote. There is a need to encounter new formulations of faith where this Trinitarian paradigm is assumed without the need to use such abstract language. The inter-relation of the three Persons of the Trinity in the heart of reality leads to formulations such as the radical Trinity (cf. Raimon Panikkar), in which reality itself is perceived in a Trinitarian or cosmotheoandric way. All these insights could not be developed more fully however this issues were raised thanks to questions from the floor.

### ***2.3. An exaggerated polarisation and an already assumed integration***

Another group of reactions expressed discomfort with such a dichotomous presentation of the experience of the Exercises between Christocentrism and Pneumacentrism. They did not identify with the Christomonism temptation proposed. It was suggested that perhaps they were the tensions of the previous generation but not of the present. They considered that nowadays the relationship between following Christ and the historic commitment to the gratuitousness of Contemplation to attain divine love is experienced in a much more integrated way. It was indicated that the same commitment to the poor emanates from this contemplation and the illumination of Cardoner and the vision at la Storta are part of the same movement, as expressed in many texts from Fr Arrupe and General Congregation XXXV itself. The fire to ignite other fires of the decrees of the last Congregation is exponent of this integration, in which are present as much the radicalism of following Jesus as the impulse of the Spirit, which implies commitment and, at the same time, joy and celebration.

### ***2.4. A more biblical and narrative theology***

Other reactions were concerned by the lack of a more biblical and less dogmatic approach, more narrative and less abstract. It was stressed the most ideal sphere of Ignatian theology is the story – in the first place, the story of the life of Jesus, then the life of the Pilgrim and, finally, the story of the life of each person as a theological place where God is manifest. In other words, it was felt that the sphere of spiritual theology is that of experience and such non temporal concepts caused some difficulty. It is believed that what really is at stake is the illumination and accompaniment of interior growth, which advances more by stumbling in the shadows, without the great formulations of dogma, perceived as a blazing sun which prevents the grass from growing in the fields.

*the most ideal sphere  
of Ignatian theology  
is the story*



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### *2.5. Enriching the theological approach with other disciplines*

Similarly, some felt the lack of a more anthropological approach, emerging from the personal process and consideration of the elements at stake, preventing or facilitating the experience of God. They recognised the importance of integrating other disciplines into theology and the opportunity to encourage integrations which are going to happen anyway, as much in the sphere of psychology as in the spheres of social sciences, humanities and the world of the arts, another way of approaching the spiritual dimension of being human. All this would be an extension of this new Trinitarian and pneumatological paradigm in which all reality is perceived as impelled by the dynamism of the Spirit.

### *2.6. The need to put theology in the first person*

Another question pondered the lack of testimonial theology and Ignatian spirituality texts - spirituality and theology which result credible and engaging when pronounced in the first person, when witnessing lives lived fully for God and confront the challenges of the moment. When theology is expressed with song and agony, cries and melody, it is listened to by more human beings. To this it was replied that those who live life intensely do not write theology. The theological task is a second step usually performed by others later on. Saint Ignatius himself did not write theological treatises, nor did Francisco Javier write missionary manuscripts. Neither did the martyrs of Canada or Japan, or more recently, Alfred Delph under the Nazis or the El Salvador martyrs suffering injustice, write tracts on martyrdom. They lived their lives authentically and others have reflected on them. It was pointed out that the important issue is to be connected to the apostolic commitment of other Jesuit and lay partner companions, in a way that the reflections we offer may nourish and engage their lives just as our reflections can illuminate them.

## **III. CONCLUSIONS**

All this made us more conscious of the fact that Ignatian spirituality does not face challenges only in the area of theology, but is also enriched

by other spheres – psychology, anthropology, history, literature, work with the sources... We need to undertake a deep and relevant theological reflection capable of integrating all these dimensions. The Trinitarian paradigm may be the most adequate framework in which to incorporate all this. We have to continue progressing and exploring all the possibilities, since the Trinitarian perspective is based theologically on interdisciplinary work, insofar as it leads to relations and spheres of action in relation to each one of the three Persons -

*In relation with the Father*, it keeps the Mystery permeable and allows inter-religious dialogue insofar as it recognises that most traditions are also paths to the unfathomableness of the real.

*In relation with Christ*, Jesus frames the guidelines in the mediation through which God revealed himself – the kenotic following which commits us to our contemporaries in a very determined way – in poverty and humility. This kenosis is the criterion of discernment to enter into dialogue with other mediations – all those mediations participating in this movement of donation are Christ-inspired.

*In relation with the Spirit*, it allows us open up to its silent and recognisable dynamism in the different spheres of our culture in its impulse to be eternally transcendental.

All this provides the hermeneutical framework as much in order to approach the Ignatian sources and writings as to ensure that *este corpus* is significant in view of the challenges currently ahead of us.

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<sup>1</sup> . La explicación que viene a continuación está completada con el texto recientemente aparecido en la segunda edición de su comentario a los Ejercicios. Cf. Santiago ARZUBIALDE, *Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio. Historia y análisis*, Colección Manresa nº 1 (segunda edición), Mensajero – Sal Terrae, Bilbao – Santander 2009, “Reflexión teológica conclusiva. En busca del horizonte hermenéutico adecuado” (pp. 951-1009).