

## IGNATIUS TODAY

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### *Our today, the today of our culture*

3 1 July: Ignatius, a holy founder, venerated more intensely on the anniversary of his death, at least since his canonisation in 1622. What does heightened reverence for a saint mean, especially that of a founder like Ignatius? Isn't it, fundamentally, bringing him up to date, 'aggiornamento'? - each generation's effort to pay attention, year by year, to the fact that the light of day, today's light, not that of the remembered past, allows us to discover our own lives as updating, the presence of a heritage that is fruitful now. Updating is renewed in each generation, we might say, by the projection of the light of day, that of today's humanity. This is the constantly active work of the Spirit of the Creative Son, who calls us and evokes from us a whole work of deepening. Not simply to enlighten today with the light of what Ignatius lived 450 years ago, but to understand at another level, today's depth, what he lived centuries ago; not in the light of the memory of a dead person, but in that of someone living today, as well as yesterday and tomorrow. It is the mystery of Ignatius' union with Christ, in his body, of which he is a living member with us. For him it is in the present closeness opened up by the adventure and trial of rising from the dead, and for us, present in another way, not just through the filter of a memory which transmits imperfectly.

Our today, that of our culture, of our piety, as people used to say, which is our living bond with the one who gives

us Life, that of our intellectual disciplines acquired and practised at length so that we can understand better the buried foundation which supports us and feeds our roots, reveals itself in our present experience. *This 'today' allows a reading, a perception of what has been transmitted to us from the past, deeper and more vigorous than the repetition of yesterday's readings. Their authentic value becomes superficial through our laziness as readers content to repeat yesterday's understanding.*

Let us rejoice, let us be proud not so much of Ignatius and his past existence as of what he enables us to live today in the Church in our relationship with him. After a good half-century, the development and the maturing of human sciences allow a renewal of our way of seeing this man, and putting into practice the heritage of his teaching. Essentially it is a teaching method: not knowledge, but a manner of proceeding in all matters, 'temporal as well as spiritual', to use his own terminology.

The light of contemporary culture, that of today, provided we are not afraid of it, and do not change what it needs to be, allows us to bring out from our basement riches as yet unknown.

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### ***The Memorial of Ignatius.***

How many examples have there already been in our past! Let us look at some of them, taken particularly from the French-speaking field. Once Ribadaneira's model life of Ignatius had been written, in the 1570s Francis Borgia withdrew from circulation the manuscripts of the *Memorial* given to Gonçalves da Camará. This text reflected an image of sanctity incomprehensible at that time. Jesuits gave up this document which is essential for us, some of them seeking inspiration elsewhere, for example in Teresa of Avila's autobiography. Already in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the laying of the first foundations of textual criticism had permitted the Bollandists' work in producing a first edition of the *Memorial*, very large in folio, produced by a very small number of scholars. In the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Society, renewing the Bollandist tradition, took up the German science of the critical edition of texts in beginning the collection of the *Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu*. This type of publication opens up the interpretation

of the writings to a larger number of readers, without spreading them to the general public. A first circulation of the *Memorial* became possible. Two generations later translations of Ignatius' most important works would spread. The relationship between culture and the now fairly desacralised text allows this. The techniques of scientific reading of texts and the critique which they presuppose and allow are thoroughly desacralising. Would it be dangerous to put them into practise, as it was once dangerous to make use of Aristotle to try to make theology an exact science? The risk was taken, and proved beneficial in the 20<sup>th</sup> as in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

How do matters stand today and in the recent past? The issue is rather on the side of the human sciences, particularly psychology, especially psychoanalytical psychology. The important rediscovery of the practice of revision of experience, the Examen, is not unrelated to contemporary psychology's insistence on analysis. *The vigour and the authenticity of the Ignatian method as a whole, rediscovered and practised more precisely, are becoming an instrument for conversion of the benefits brought by certain schools of psychology.* These in return allow a better understanding of the Ignatian contribution. This form of confrontation with the demands of the Gospel leads to the conversion of the more or less perverse things that these psychologies bring with them.

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Already, fifty years ago, the Jesuit psychoanalyst Fr. Beirnaert dared to rely openly on the genial and questionable contribution of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, whose work to some extent brought Freud's ideas into the Christian cultural field. This starting-point opened the way to a more precise interpretation of Ignatius' life according to the *Memorial*, a spiritual journey which ceased to be admirable because miraculous, and became admirable as a privileged witness to the humanising depth of God's action.<sup>1</sup>

The review *Gregorianum*, publishing the acts of a colloquium organised by the Gregorian institute of spirituality,<sup>2</sup> presents first of all a contribution from Fr. Kolvenbach, whose originality contrasts in tone with the pertinent but rather lifeless classicism of the other writers. A spiritual writer, Kolvenbach was formed in linguistics by Roland Barth, who was however an agnostic. Isn't linguistics a scientific discipline devoted to the study of language and word with an ambivalence which divided the different

schools, one after the other? Is it word or language which is the specific and primary object of the discipline? The temptation to give preference to language is strong; this option, less compromising, avoids having to confront the Christian affirmation. So the writer comes to present the need to keep the two poles in relationship without the one being the foundation of the other, but in their interrelatedness. The insistence on this need is probably one of the lights of our time, after centuries of exclusive oppositions between schools usually coming from the same source.<sup>3</sup> In the light of this discipline, certain aspects of the diary come into unexpected prominence. The diary makes little use of the poetical or other rhetorical figures; it is Ignatius' attempt to use the linguistic resources of writing as a means of expressing his experience of God in its originality. So the use of non-linguistic conventional signs, the interpretation of which is not given to us, allows him to express more accurately something of his experience of God. It is not indescribable for him, even if it always goes beyond the attempt to say it, bringing, through this effort in itself, distortions and excess in modes of linguistic expression. Ignatius, for example, calls a well-defined aspect of his experience *loquela*<sup>4</sup>; how can one try to define what this term describes? Everything suggests that it is rather a matter of sound, of voice, the use of it accentuating the dimension of signifiers rather than that of sense; this *loquela* has its autonomous being, and it is not properly speaking a linguistic phenomenon nor in the register of mental activity; it is linked with the word and so with the tongue, like a musical vocalisation which underlies a vowel or a syllable. Let us borrow a lapidary formula from one of the conclusions from Kolvenbach's contribution to another of his writings: 'God does not reply through discourse but through the body.'<sup>5</sup>

Denis Vasse's work is written in the same vein. An important part of his work as a psychoanalyst refers silently but firmly to Christian faith at the point when he comes to edit, as a psychoanalyst, a fundamentally theological work on St. Teresa of Avila.<sup>6</sup>

### *Diary of interior movements*

In the same perspective, the importance of a very recent work runs the risk of passing unnoticed in view of its austerity and the effort demanded for reading it. An edition has just appeared in French of

the pages preserved from the *Diary* of the revision Ignatius made of his prayer, accompanied by a photographic reproduction of a good number of pages of the original manuscript.<sup>7</sup> This text, currently called *Diary*, is almost illegible, because it is full of careful crossings-out traced by an energetic pen, and peppered with coded cabalistic signs intended, apparently, to mark the most affective aspects of the lived experience. First, this diary has been kept for more than three centuries, including time in a reliquary, practically inaccessible apart from a few manuscript copies of certain passages, communicated very sparingly. Our predecessors were incapable of making an intelligible reading of it, for lack of appropriate intellectual tools. It is only in the course of the last century that it has begun to be printed and given over to the public rather like a riddle to be solved.

Fr. Giuliani had already translated this text into French as the first work in the Christus collection in 1959<sup>8</sup>, without, to his great regret, really being able to take into account the crossings-out. When the time came to prepare the volume of 'works' of Ignatius for the fourth centenary of his birth, in 1991, this translation was repeated and considerably improved, taking the complexity of the manuscript into more account. This new edition had the originality of having been done under Fr. Giuliani's direction by recognised historians who were not Jesuits – already a sign of the times. For the diary, which at that point received the more exact title *Diary of interior movements*, Maurice Giuliani, who already had the strength of a rigorous university training and literary experience, was able to work in close collaboration with a younger researcher, not a religious. Formed in the science of signs, semiotics, Pierre Antoine Favre had done a thesis on the composition of place in Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises.<sup>9</sup> He knows the history and the archives of the early Society, especially Fr. Nadal, very well. Both men were very dissatisfied with their first work through lack of resources. So they undertook, with each other's support, to prepare an edition of the *Diary*, foreseeing – it was indispensable – a photographic reproduction of the original. The contribution of the expert in semiotics was valuable, indeed necessary, in support of the literary scholar and even the linguist, to assess this text which contains a number of signs not of the order of language. After seven years' work, continued by Pierre Antoine Favre after Maurice Giuliani's death, it was possible to translate and to enable the reader to understand better what this enigmatic text, full of crossings-out and non-linguistic signs, reveals to us of Ignatius' experience; including,

for example, the passages suggesting experiences of something like glossolalia, where the play of sounds over-rides grammatical meaning.<sup>10</sup>

The long process of enrichment of the scientific instruments of our culture, leading by progressive accumulation from the first critique of Renaissance texts to linguistics and finally to contemporary semiotics was necessary, then, for the richness of this text to be revealed further to our eyes as people of today. It conveys to us now aspects of the still-obscure message necessary for us in these times which are no longer those of yesterday. Further, this most recent interpretation puts into sharper focus a final message already perceived, but underlined with renewed insistence for our generation.

*A progressive unification of the believer's humanity*

What is perhaps the diary's most important contribution for us appears in all its vigour: *Ignatius wants to have signs of the confirmation of a choice already made concerning the poverty of the Society's churches.*

Then he is carried away in a tempestuous flow of crossing images which allow him to enter into separate relations with the persons of the most holy Trinity, then come at last to rest in presence to the movement of the Trinitarian circumincession. This astonishing journey leads paradoxically to the confirmation for which he asked, not in the expected form of a consolation or a divine favour perceived as such, but as confidence in his own certainty, which was present from the beginning as a result of his own evaluation of the reasons for and against; a certainty based now on the absence of signs and on renunciation of any seeking of that kind.

*the deepest and most authentic certainty of faith is a certainty which renounces any kind of sign*

In this way Ignatius conveys to us, men and women of modern times, that the deepest and most authentic certainty of faith is a certainty which renounces any kind of sign, including that of perceived consolation, to be content with that of existing as a human being in faith in God's presence, a presence not felt, but at the same time always perceptible through the

movements which, in each person, animate the cosmos in all its dimensions, a cosmos totally present to human beings, who are in solidarity with it.<sup>11</sup>

God hides himself completely in human beings, so that human beings may be truly themselves, fully united with God in obedience to the divine will: so that human beings may be human. This obedience is to a God who is completely interior in his very transcendence, and who therefore only allows himself to be visible in signs to the extent that the human person is not yet, or is no longer, humanly mature as a creature fully pardoned.

These suggestions may be shocking. Do they respect God's complete otherness, his transcendence? Formulated in this way, they are addressed to persons of sufficient maturity, to people formed by a serious practice, whatever the details of it may be. They have received elements of open formation which have allowed them, in one way or another, to discover that God's transcendence is not in any way outside his immanence. God's

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transcendence is completely interior as well as exterior to the human person. This presupposes that the believer has acquired a progressive unification of his or her humanity, assured by the different kinds of teaching on the growth of Christian life, though the Christian dimension is not always explicit. It is also necessary that

ways of teaching, and teachers, should not shut up into the preliminary stages those whom they help to form, because they themselves have not accepted sufficiently the freedom of Christian experience. In fact a large number of Christians have an understanding of transcendence which excludes immanence.<sup>12</sup> The manner of speaking of many believers, including ecclesiastics, reveals this more or less directly. A certain number of atheist or agnostic intellectuals affirm forcefully the transcendent dimension of human beings, and therefore deny Christianity because they understand the Christian concept of transcendence, and therefore the Christian concept of God, as an exterior transcendence.<sup>13</sup> Many people's lack of maturity in Christian experience may contribute to the atheism which surrounds us.

What this deeper understanding of the meaning of Ignatius' diary teaches us is not without consequence for our way of using the famous Ignatian discernment, and for the orientation of our commitment in mission.

This interior silence of the great mystic on which the diary ends, silence of a faith which goes beyond any sign and which in the image is always beyond the image, this silence joins that which we do not dare to live, even though it is given to each one of us in our own way. We do not dare to recognise the Presence in this absence, experience contradicting a whole tradition of piety closed in on itself. In the energetic and peaceful calm which carries our doubts without suppressing them, we can meet with so many of our contemporaries whom our moralising and still imaginary piety, too bound up with images, distances from the ways of God. There is no image of God except the human being. The image that human beings make of themselves and of God is an idol: an image of an image. *Do we dare to live our faith in God in the service of our neighbour, without any other certainty than this service and its seriousness in faith in Christ the servant?* This road might perhaps join with many of those of our agnostic contemporaries who refuse to be convinced by the game of images; at least they are not idolaters! Our still idolatrous theism might reinforce the atheist position. We who judge ourselves unworthy, and with reason, why stay paralysed by doubt? Let us stop judging ourselves, and allow God's pardon, imperceptible and limitless, to unite us fully with Him, just as we are, at the heart of our uncertainties which are very real and at the same time still imaginary, imaginary for Our Lord who is always in us, beyond images.

Ignatius' heritage invites us to take risks, not to be afraid of modernity, of its evident religious insufficiencies and of its refusals, including those with which we ourselves are imbued. God's Spirit works in it. In the school of Ignatius, the art of discerning which the ecclesial reading of the Scriptures teaches us allows us to read this paradoxical way in which the Spirit of the Father and the Son works for good, even in impiety and agnosticism: this impiety and pretended ignorance by which our contemporaries are shaped, and which affects all of us in one way or another.

This is the first rule of action: Trust in God as if success depended entirely on you, and not at all on God. But at the same time work as if God alone were to do everything, and you nothing.

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<sup>1</sup> *Au Frontière de l'acte analytique*, Seuil, 1987, especially p.205-217. Beirnaert was not properly speaking a disciple of his contemporary, Jacques Lacan; it was rather that he had ties of friendship with him.



<sup>2</sup> *Langage et anthropologie, le Journal spirituel de saint Ignace*, Gregorianum 72,2 (1991), p.211-221

<sup>3</sup> These phenomena are still current, but we should be better equipped to take a position.

<sup>4</sup> From 11 to 28 May in the diary.

<sup>5</sup> *Maître Ignace Homme de Parole*, CIS 1994, 3, 77, p.5-24

<sup>6</sup> *L'Autre du désir et le Dieu de la foi*, Le Seuil, 1991. One notices the final statement about the Other in Lacan, which contains this affirmation: 'God is not the Other. He has made himself the Other.'

<sup>7</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *Journal des motions intérieures*, critical edition and new translation of the autograph manuscripts by Pierre-Antoine Fabre – Prologue by Maurice Giuliani, Lessius, Paris, 2007, 286p.

<sup>8</sup> Saint Ignace, *Journal Spirituel*, translated with a commentary by Maurice Giuliani sj, Collection Christus, Textes no.1, DDB, Paris 1959, 146p.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Antoine FABRE, *Ignace de Loyola, Le lieu de l'image. Le problème de la composition de lieu dans les pratiques spirituelles et artistiques des jésuites dans la seconde moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Ed. Ecole des Hautes Etudes en sciences sociales, Vrin, 1992, 364p.

<sup>10</sup> So it is not only a question of 'loquela'.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the second point of the contemplation for attaining love, Exx.235

<sup>12</sup> Whether they express themselves in this learned vocabulary or in another way, according to their own culture.

<sup>13</sup> As does Claude LEFORT in *L'invention démocratique. Les limites de la domination totalitaire*, Fayard Paris, 1981, and more recently Jean-Pierre Lebrun, in *La perversion ordinaire*, Edition Denoël, Paris 2007, 436p.