

THE JESUIT COMMUNITY A SPACE FOR DISCOVERING OUR MISSIONARY IDENTITY

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The following reflection wants to shed some light upon the concept and practice of Jesuit apostolic communities, i.e., of Jesuits sharing house, liturgy, food, time and in sharing all this, living a twofold ministry: 1) a ministry *ad intra*: being together as companions of Jesus, sharing bread with him and together (the word “companion” contains in its roots “bread”); 2) a ministry *ad extra*: being men for others and with others, women and men (GC 35). The term “missionary identity” encompasses both aspects of this twofold ministry: discovering our individual self as member of a community and realising that we are sent as in the Lord’s vineyard, as brothers, instructed men and priests:

“A Jesuit’s identity and mission are bound together by community; in effect identity, community, and mission are a kind of triptych shedding light which helps us deepen our understanding of the fact that we are companions” (GC 35, D2: § 19)

1. Identity or soul-loss?

The term “identity” used in this contribution is, in fact, less clear than it seems at first glance. We may spontaneously “know” our identity which is checked when we cross a border and show our identity card or passport. When we lose those “identity documents”, an appropriate authority will deliver a double, still certifying the same, indestructible, unique and unlosable identity. The mystery of our “self” and of our identity is, however, more complicated than the possession, loss, or recovery of a passport. A major reason for the new and growing interest in this question is that we have become unsure about our sense of “self” and who we are (Zollner 2007). “Soul-loss” described in archaic cultures (Jung 1919/1967) as well as in the latin-american *susto* and in other indigenous psychopathologies (Glazer et al. 2004), threatens also the modern subject. Out-of-body-experiences, e.g., following cardiac resuscitation, may be at the origin of pre-scientific soul-theories (Metzinger 2005). In other words: being a “self” is much more linked with the threat of soul-loss than with “possessing” an identity.

The current quest for an “authentic self” (Taylor 1994) is incompletely understood if only considered as a search for identity, an affirmation or representation of a set of properties which I possess. This “possession of properties” may correspond to a gradual acquisition of my inalienable and incomparable tenets. In psychopathology, troubles of the “Self”, such as fragmentation, lack of self-esteem and disturbed delimitation of the frontier between the “self” and the “non-self”, are supposed to entail troubles of identity which may be provisional / temporary, linked to certain phases of human development or on the contrary, linked to certain personality traits.

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Loss of identity, of self-possession, or, said in a more archaic way, loss of the soul, are threatening to post-modern self-affirmation. The search for the self is an ongoing, life-long process. The individual Jesuit shares this

quest of post-modern and post-secular men and women of our time. Neither on the individual level nor on the communitarian one do we “possess” ourselves. Jesuit communities as well as the whole body of the Society undergo the threats, losses, and recoveries of identity. This identity is not only “missionary” for being sent, for stressing a crucial characteristic of our apostolic group. It is also and much more “missionary” given that this identity is *discovered* through the diverse encounters with the contemporary world and humankind.

2. Self-care and care for others

The challenge of self-care may be found in Plato’s dialogue *Alcibiades*. Socrates reminds this young politician as well as his other disciples that they have to care for themselves before taking social responsibility. Centuries later, in Christian Antiquity, the principles of an anti-egoist ethics will entail a new conflict between self-care and care for others (Foucault 1984, Foucault 1997). This is one of the beginnings of the Christian suspicion against (post-) modern self-realization and self-actualization.

When care for others, social commitment, abandon are privileged at the cost of self-care, a possible outcome may be burn-out of the most idealistic and committed helpers (Freudenberger 1974) who become less efficient, who brood in turn-over and who eventually become sick. When Ignatius evokes “helping souls” as the Society’s ultimate goal, this always presupposes the long process of “helping the helper” by Spiritual Exercises and the apostolic body’s conservation clearly described in the Constitutions.

In the SE, to help (*ayudar*) is a key concept, not only in the sense of ministry / service but also for helping the future helper making the SE. Having completed the Principle and Foundation and First Week, the retreatant enters the Second Week where he will ask for his vocation as a helper. This helping vocation (offering help) is, however, always intrinsically linked with receiving help.

“Prelude for making the election”

First Point. “In every good election, as far as depends on us, the eye of our intention ought to be simple, only looking at what we are created for, namely, the praise of God our Lord and the salvation of our soul. And so I ought to choose whatever I do, that it may help me for the end for which I am created, not ordering or bringing the end to the means, but the means to the end: as it happens that many choose first to marry — which is a means — and secondarily to serve God our Lord in the married life — which service of God is the end. So, too, there are others who first want to have benefices, and then to serve God in them. So that those do not go straight to God, but want God to come straight to their disordered tendencies, and consequently they make a means of the end, and an end of the means. So that what they had to take first, they take last; because first we have to set as our aim the wanting to serve God, — which is the end, — and secondarily, to take a benefice, or to marry, if it is more suitable to us, which is the means for the end. So, nothing ought to move me to take such means or to deprive myself of them, except only the service and praise of God our Lord and the eternal salvation of my soul” (SE 169).

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The same link between caring for others (ayudar las ánimas) and self-care (conservation of the individual and the collective body) characterises the Constitutions:

“For the preservation and development not only of the body or exterior of the Society but also of its spirit, and for the attainment of the objective it seeks, which is to aid souls to reach their ultimate and supernatural end, the means which unite the human instrument with God and so dispose it that it may be wielded dexterously by His divine hand are more effective than those which equip it in relation to men. Such means are, for example, goodness and virtue, and especially charity, and a pure intention of the divine service, and familiarity with God our Lord in spiritual exercises of devotion, and sincere zeal for souls for the sake of glory to Him who created and redeemed them and not for any other benefit. Thus it

appears that care should be taken in general that all the members of the Society may devote themselves to the solid and perfect virtues and to spiritual pursuits, and attach greater importance to them than to learning and other natural and human gifts. For they are the interior gifts which make those exterior means effective toward the end which is sought.” (Const 813).

3. Createdness: recognising that I am anticipated

In crucial texts such as the Principle and Foundation (SE 23) and the prelude for making election just quoted, Ignatius comes back to his anthropology of being created. It is exciting to see how modern thinkers such as J. Habermas and C.G. Jung understand and underline this biblical reference (Reder und Frick 2010).

During his whole life, Jung distinguished between the Ego or I-complex – which is the centre of our conscious perceiving and acting in this world – and the Self which transcends our Ego as a teleological stance: never reached but always origin and end of our perceptions and acts. In 1939/1940 Jung comments in a seminar given at the Federal Technical School at Zurich the Ignatian Exercises. He chooses the *theologumenon* “being created” of the Principle and Foundation for showing how we are “anticipated” by the unconscious Self:

“But if we leave general conclusions and seek out individuals with a long and ripe experience of life and ask them: “Do you feel you are the result of chance, or do you feel that something of some kind was at work in you, that created you as you are?” Astonishingly many of such individuals will reply that they have the feeling of something at work which led them, of an inner meaning, an inner guidance, which curiously enough has made them what they are. (Jung 1940)

Being led, discovering an inner organising centre evokes the experience of the I-Self-axis, in other words “turning myself to my Self”. But if we understand; “I am created” correctly, then we recognise that we are a product, that we were anticipated. We were and knew it not. It was, so to speak, known, but we must leave the question open who it was that knew it” (Jung 1940)

Jung tries to give an answer to the modern search for meaning and purpose of life. Being anticipated introduces a new perspective: I do not define my meaning of life, I discover, on the contrary that “I am meant”, that meaning lies in being created and anticipated:

If I discover that I have been anticipated it makes an enormous impression upon me; I could not in that moment clearly define the meaning of my life, but I feel it as something living. We could perhaps formulate it: "It must have a meaning". But what peculiar kind of meaning has it? A certain line of thought, for instance, is developed through a series of dreams; and I discover that I am the duplicate of my unconscious anticipation of myself; at the same moment I am filled with a sense of purpose as if a secret arrangement of my fate existed. One no longer asks "What meaning has my life", but one is filled with the meaning itself. [...] Ignatius formulates this purpose as the *laudare dominum*. [...], praising, doing reverence to and serving God. If you translate this into psychological language it means that Ignatius recommended an un-conditional submission to the unconscious mind. Put like this it arouses resistances, we think that the unconscious is only an idea, and forget that we are unable to speak the next word if the uncon-scious withholds it. And Ignatius recommends this for a definite purpose: that man may save his soul. If man does not reverence and submit to the unconscious which created his consciousness, he loses his soul, that is, he loses his connection with soul and unconscious. [...] (Jung 1940)

"Obedience" is a difficult word in our contemporary democratic context. It may raise the suspicion of disguised power abuse in the church and other institutions. Furthermore, the scandal of obedience becomes greater when referred to the unconscious. There is, however one big advantage in Jung's talk about obedience: It is, without doubt, risky to obey my unconscious, demanding trust and a long process for listening and for hearing God's voice in it. But it becomes urgent to take this risk because otherwise the human being may "lose his/her soul". Soul-loss is just the contrary of "saving one's soul", the Ignatian prerequisite of *ayudar las animas*.

4. The Jesuit – and "embodied" self

The recent dialogue between psychoanalysis, neurobiology, and phenomenology shows that the human self is not only a cerebral representation but a systemic quality of the whole body. This embodiedness links pre-reflexive subjectivity (first person experience of my own lived body, *Leib* in German) and physicality (third person perspective of my

body as part of the objectified physical world, *Körper* in German) (Frick 2009).

The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus speak about the individual body, e.g., when treating possible ascetic excesses (Const 300) but also of the metaphor between individual and corporative body:

“In the order our intention, the consideration which comes first and has more weight is that about the body of the Society taken as a whole; for its union, good government, and preservation in well-being for greater divine glory are what is chiefly sought. Nevertheless, this body is composed of its members; and in the order of execution, that which takes place first is what pertains to the individual members, in the sequence of admitting them, fostering their progress, and distributing them in the vineyard of the Lord. Therefore, our treatise will deal first with these individual members, through the aid which the Eternal Light will deign to communicate to us for His own honor and praise.” (Const. 135).

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The polarity of becoming and being an embodied Self concerns the members and the entirety of the Society's body. The intra-psychic conflict between possession of my identity and discovering it by ministry and obedience returns at the institutional level. The individual struggle – psychological as well as spiritual – paradoxically helps to finding the self in abandoning it:

My self then becomes increasingly my *own*, even though it still remains in part a mystery to me. Human maturity does not therefore mean that I reach a state in my life where I am no longer aware of any tensions and conflicts in myself. Rather, I become mature *precisely by* engaging in the psychological and spiritual struggle between my conscious reality and God, and between my wishes and needs (including those that are unconscious) and my ideals, and by attempting to give a form to this struggle. That means that it is possible for me to grow rather than be blocked, in the ongoing tension between the poles – between the losing of self and finding of self, between the self and others, between finitude and infinity. My concrete identity takes shape in the unique history of my transcendence

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and my vulnerability; this is the way in which I come to *myself, become* my self (Zollner 2007: 61-62).

The Constitutions' perhaps most important and uncontested strength is the interdependence between individual and corporate body, between the person's spiritual experience and the institutional aspects. The Constitutions describe a body for the Spirit (Bertrand 1974). This original Ignatian charism helps us address a crucial dilemma of modern society – the dilemma between quest of the self and institutional commitment:

Modern society is trapped in a dilemma. It encourages individualism and the abandonment of structures. At the same time, there is a quite evident and basic existential search for meaning and community, which seems to favour a new search for alternatives to individualism and merely subjective choices. For the insistence with which one advocates the abandoning of an integrated and stable sense of self makes one think also of the suffering and the loss of quality of life which accompany the attitude of '*anything goes*'. At first it appears as enticing and liberating to be able to exchange partners, friends, occupation, religion and anything else 'freely'. But many people still feel deeply wounded – particularly concerning marriage, priesthood or religious vows – if they have given up their commitments in a more or less frivolous way. In their heart of hearts the overwhelming majority of persons still yearn for a stable identity, although they feel less and less able to develop self that is strong enough for this. They find out that a coherent self, that has to be constantly 'worked at', has a high price. (Zollner 2007: 63)

A crucial challenge for the contemporary Society is that "we might turn ourselves into apostles without community" (Ruiz Pérez 2010: 33). Facing the risk of an apostolic life and spirituality prayed and lived solely privately, we need an "re-appropriation" of our mission by community life, e.g., by spiritual self-care, by relativising the pressure of apostolic tasks, and by discovering or limitedness and fragility (Ruiz Pérez 2010: 34-35).

5. "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it ..." (Mark 8:35)

Biblical anthropology assumes that the human being becomes a living *nefesh* (soul, larynx, being) by inflation of the divine breath: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his

nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living *nefesb*" (Genesis 2:7). The Septuagint translates *nefesb* in the majority of cases by *psychē* which means breath, self, inner life, one's inmost being; (physical) life; that which has life, living creature, person, human being. In Homer's pre-classical Greek, the term *psychē* is reserved for dying persons: *psychē* is what the dying warrior gives up and loses (Marinkovic 2009). This linguistic and anthropological background helps us understand a very dialectic sentence in Jesus' mouth: "Whoever has a desire to keep his *psychē*, will have it taken from him; and whoever gives up his *psychē* because of me and the good news, will keep it" (Mark 8:35).

A Christian spirituality deeply knows that we do not "possess" an individual or collective identity as we possess an identity document (or foundational group documents such as the SE or the Constitutions).

We receive the Creator's breath at the beginning of our existence, and as creatures we obey or disobey this original breath. Our spirituality is re-spirituality: Receiving and giving away the divine breath in every respiration, and eventually when we die. We hope that the divine breath will re-spire our dead bodies, resurrection foreseen by Ezechiel (ch. 37), and patiently anticipated by the life-long Spiritual Exercise of respiration. It is a prayer "by rhythm" (por compás), "with each breath in or out" (SE 258).

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