



# A Mystic Treatise rooted in Missionary work: Ruiz de Montoya's *Silex of Divine Love* (1640)

by JUAN DEJO S.J.\*

## Introduction

Talking about mysticism in Jesuit language has always been a controversial topic<sup>1</sup>. Ignatius of Loyola's spiritual style proposes the image of "pilgrim" to express another way of living an intimacy with God. Saint Ignatius autobiography refers to two experiences that can be understood as properly mystical (if we follow a model of supernatural experiences associated with the so-called "visions"): first at the Cardoner River, when "the eyes of his soul were opened. He did not have any special vision, but his mind was enlightened on many subjects, spiritual and intellectual."<sup>2</sup> and finally on his way to Rome at the small chapel of La Storta, where he experienced something foundational for the Institute of the Society when he saw God the Father "placing him with the Son". Amidst the rescued remains of his Spiritual Journal, we find his discernment to scrutinize if Jesuit Churches should have or not have income -a crucial issue to define the coherence between professed Jesuit houses and their mission. His Journal records constant sensitivity and bodily weariness, experiences similar to those of other mystics in the History of Spirituality.

However, Jesuit missions have not been not associated with the mystical tradition; moreover, there was a certain reserve, at least at the beginning, toward everything that could be identified as monastic or conventual life. Members of the Society realized that they should adapt to a new religious style in which union with God was experienced through concrete action for the sake (i.e., *salvation*) of others. In other words, if we seek to identify a mystical dimension in Ignatius of Loyola's spirituality, we should study

\* JUAN DEJO S.J. is a theologian and historian specialized in history of spirituality. He is Professor of the Program of Humanities at the University Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, in Lima, Perú and responsible of Jesuit Archives & Patrimony of the Peruvian Province, [juan.dejo@uarm.pe](mailto:juan.dejo@uarm.pe)

<sup>1</sup> E. Pacho, Pacho. *El apogeo de la la Mística cristiana*. Burgos, Monte Carmelo. 2008; Joseph de Guibert SJ, prefers the concept of "mysticism of service" rather than of "union" (*La espiritualidad de la Compañía de Jesús*, Santander, Sal Terrae 1955); Giuliani, Maurice. "Une histoire de la spiritualité de la Compagnie de Jésus". *Christus*, 2004, 202, p. 28-38.

<sup>2</sup> San Ignacio de Loyola, *Obras*. Madrid: BAC, *Autobiografía* [30], p. 119.

apostolic activities and not expect to find what was understood hitherto as mysticism's *sine qua non* condition, an *isolated* life.<sup>3</sup>

I do not believe that the debate has been adequately settled, perhaps because we usually tend to correlate mystical experience with altered states of consciousness, linked to a holistic perception, distinct from the common uses of language and consciousness. Psychological analysis of mysticism tends to make parallels between the experience of being united with God and an altered state of consciousness, generating the prejudice that the latter might be intrinsically attached to mystical experience.<sup>4</sup>

In this article I will try, rescinding from this prejudice disseminated even among scholars<sup>5</sup>, to present some ideas that contribute to this discussion, not only with regard to what we assume about mystical experiences, but also how union with God, understood from the perspective of Ignatian spirituality, places Jesuits in a tension they have tried to resolve by means of different dynamics of self-interpretation. I will aim to do this through the analysis of Antonio Ruiz de Montoya's spiritual goals, showing some aspects of these complex crossroads revealed in his only remaining unpublished treatise, the *Silex of divine love*.

## 1. The context of the Jesuit mission within aboriginal cultures in South America

The purpose of "saving souls", as described in the *Formula Instituti*, was not easy to accomplish in American territory, at least in the way it was expected during the first years of the expansion of Jesuit missions. After a first territorial exploration of apostolic possibilities, which took longer than imagined, in Peru Jesuits were able to establish a system in conformity with European standards, shaped by the pace of their expansion. Schools were the core of their activities, milestones in their territorial advances and in turn, starting points for consequent explorations, providing sustainability through the further foundations of new schools.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Simon Decloux *La Voie ignatienne : à la plus grande gloire de Dieu*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1982; Jacques Jouitteau *Une spiritualité pour l'homme d'action*, Paris, Cahiers du CFPC, 1997; Rahner *L'Esprit ignatien : Écrits sur les Exercices et sur la spiritualité du fondateur de l'Ordre*, Paris, Cerf, 2016; Janet Ruffing RSM. "Ignatian Mysticism of Service". In: J. Ruffing RSM (ed) *Mysticism and Social Transformation*. Syracuse University Press, 2001, pp. 104-128.

<sup>4</sup> Etzel Cardena, Steven Jay Lynn, and Stanley Krippner. *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence* American. Washington DC, Psychological Association, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Evelyn Underhill *Practical Mysticism*. NY, Penguin Random House, [1914] 2003; David Turner. *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1995; Carl J. Arico *A Taste of Silence: A Guide to the Fundamentals of Centering Prayer*. New York, Continuum, 1999; Bernard McGinn. *The Foundations of Mysticism. Origins to the Fifth Century*. New York, Crossroad 1991, especially the Appendix "Theological Foundations: The Modern Study of Mysticism".

<sup>6</sup> Juan Dejo SJ. "La misión jesuita en el Perú (ss. XVI-XVII)". In Juan Dejo SJ, Luis E. Wuffarden, Ramón Mujica (eds). *San Pedro de Lima*. Lima, Banco de Crédito del Perú, 2018.

Approximately thirty years after their arrival in Peru and having already explored the heart of the Andes, Jesuits went beyond those borders, opening the way to the northern and southern territories, establishing new settlements in what is now Ecuador, Chile and Paraguay.

Jesuits who arrived in such geographically complex territories had to face difficulties in organizing their regular religious life. In addition, the challenges of “accommodation” with new cultures meant drew the attention of their Metropolitan peers who expressed great surprise about what they saw as the excess flexibility of Peruvian Jesuits regarding adherence to religious customs<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, another difficulty was the way the Americans interacted with aboriginal cultures, whose beliefs and practices others understood within the Western European Christian conceptual framework. Hence, engaging in dialogue was difficult, unless it was similar to one that Jesuit missionaries posed in Asia, as in China, where Jesuits tried to build bridges to attract Chinese scholars to Christian worship. However, the tendency to understand religion based on the paradigm of transcendent divinities and the prejudice of to identify concrete objects of worship and representation of divinities as “idolatry”, did not permit an understanding of the special connection of local American people to nature. Therefore, the perception of “animism” as *idolatry* made it very difficult, if not impossible, to promote what we now call nowadays an “interreligious dialogue.”

From the beginning, the Jesuits in Peru tried to communicate the foundations of the Christian faith and to eradicate native beliefs that were almost immediately interpreted as idolatry. Towards the end of 16th century, printed grammar books and vocabularies circulated. In addition, handwritten copies of books in a variety of languages accompanied Jesuits in their journey over the Andes. According to stories about one of the most famous of these missionaries, Alonso de Barzana was able to speak eleven languages that were eventually turned into grammars and dictionaries; however, all of them have been lost.

This effort to communicate Christian faith in native languages, unfolded in a relatively peaceful way until 1609, when the infamous “eradication of idolatries” was launched in a region (Huarochirí) that was also the site where Jesuits tried their first stable doctrinal work (‘parish of Indians’) shortly after their arrival in Peru. The experiment failed, but 40 years later, in that same place, persistence of “idolatries” was still at stake.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Juan Dejo SJ. *Mística y espiritualidad en la misión jesuita del Perú y el Paraguay (siglos XVI-XVII)*. Two volumes. Lima, Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya-Biblioteca Nacional del Perú, 2018b

<sup>8</sup> We must interpret them not necessarily all as religious cults around divinities, but as patterns of devotions and reciprocity toward forces of nature, to certain extent, “sacralized”. Pierre Duviols has raised questions about the interpretation of religious animist patterns among ancient peruvians: “Camaquen upani: un concepto animista de los antiguos peruanos”. In: *Escritos de Historia andina*, Lima, Biblioteca Nacional del Perú-Institut Français d’études andines. p. 147- 173. Reciprocity was (an still is) a common mechanism among Andean people that has been object of an abundant “ethnohistorical” peruvian historiography not sufficiently applied to understand andean religious patterns and that could help to analyze in different manner the way Missionaries were confused by their western lenses : E. Mayer & G. Alberti (1974). *Reciprocidad e intercambio en los andes*, IEP, Lima; Franklin Pease (1973) *El dios creador andino*. Mosca Azul Editores, Lima; John Murra (1975). *Formaciones económicas y políticas*

During the same time a number of Jesuits started to move to the southeast, where they founded a new province in Paraguay. In the first group, which arrived at present-day Córdoba, Argentina, was the first Father provincial, Diego de Torres, and a young novice, Antonio Ruiz de Montoya.<sup>9</sup>

It is interesting to notice that Diego de Torres was part of a generation that was under the influence of mystical currents of *recollected* origin. In fact, his novice master was Baltasar Alvarez, Saint Theresa's confessor and a passionate promoter of an affective method of prayer which fell under suspicion along with that of Antonio Cordeses<sup>10</sup>. Those were the times when Jesuits still felt threatened by the strong influence of older monastic practices, urging important authorities as Jerome Nadal to reinforce the institutional identity of the Society, especially for the newer members. General Aquaviva had to settle this concern towards the end of 16th Century insisting on faithfulness to distinctiveness of prayer within the Society<sup>11</sup>. It is not easy to imagine how these debates were experienced by the new generations that were already serving as missionaries far away from European territories. Nevertheless we can read between the lines of Ruiz de Montoya's manuscript, how that atmosphere certainly influenced his personal and communitarian spiritual experience.

## 2. Reconciling mystical and Ignatian tradition as an ascetic endeavor in Jesuit Mission

"*Silex* of divine love" brings an old image of Flemish mystical tradition -going back to Saint Jerome and also Albert The Great: the *scintilla*, a spark ignited from *Silex*, a

*del mundo andino*. Instituto de Estudios Peruanos. Lima; María Rostworowski (1983). *Estructuras andinas del poder: ideología religiosa y política*, IEP, Lima; Cáceres, Efraín 1986. "El agua como fuente de vida: Traslación y escape en los mitos andinos". En *Allpanchis Phuturinga* N° 28. Instituto Pastoral Andino. Cusco; Demarest, Arthur. *Wiracocha: The Nature and Antiquity of the Andean High God*. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Harvard University. Cambridge, 1981.

<sup>9</sup> His life has been recovered recently by José Luis Rouillon SJ, Introducción a la edición del *Silex del Divino Amor*, Lima, Pontificia Universidad Católica. 1991; *Vida de Antonio Ruiz de Montoya*, Lima, Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, 2001; Juan Dejo SJ (2018b). *Mística y espiritualidad en la misión jesuita del Perú...* op. cit., Vol. 1, introducción, P. I.

<sup>10</sup> One of the concepts used by Baltasar Alvarez, extracted from mystical tradition, was the "entrance in *caliginem*", to denote the mystery accessed by contemplative prayer. Ruiz de Montoya used many times this notion in his treatise. Had he heard it through his master of novices, a former Baltasar Alvarez disciple? Cf. De la Puente, Luis *Vida del padre Baltasar Álvarez*, Red ediciones S.L., Madrid, [1615] (2020), p. 403.

<sup>11</sup> "Instructio R. P. C. Aquaviva pro Superioribus ad augendum conservandumque spiritum in Societate : De spiritu et oratione" In: *Institutum* 1893, p. 330-331; "De spiritu renovatione procuranda, deque disciplina religiosa augenda", chapter 1: "Ad orationis et devotionis studium excitandum", *Ibid.*, pp. 368-369; "Sobre la práctica de la oración y la penitencia según el Instituto" (1917 [1590]), *Cartas selectas de los Padres Generales a los Padres y Hermanos de la Compañía de Jesús*, pp. 56-67. Oña, Madrid.

stone that served as the first human prehistoric tool. In the Church's tradition there was also another idea that has fallen nowadays into obscurity: *synderesis*. Saint Thomas Aquinas refers to it metaphorically as *scintilla conscientiae*<sup>12</sup>. Mystics mentioned it as a spark arisen thanks to God's inhabitation in soul; Richard of Saint Victor and other European spiritual writers did the same through their speculative mysticism. Although Ruiz de Montoya did not associate this "spark" as *synderesis*, he indeed preferred the image of an "eye" to recall the importance of a mind fully committed to focus on God. This state of mind was in Nordic mysticism highlighted as the peak of union with God. Therefore, the title of Ruiz de Montoya's treatise contains a clear epistemological statement.

The *Silex* works as a mosaic of European ideas interwoven with an intentionality given by the missionary's experience in a completely different cultural background. The most remarkable fact, the purpose of advocating for this type of prayer, accounts for a constant discernment on issues that have been (and continue to be) fundamental to Jesuit spiritual practices, absence of a regular and communitarian rhythm of prayer. In other words, the *Silex* is a narrative that promotes effectiveness of active prayer as well as a suggested methodology to be experienced within any apostolic effort. It is not surprising that conventual orders, in their traditional or observant lines, appreciate the prayer that was gradually defined as "mental" as much as choral. Mental prayer, being part of personal friars and monks' spiritual exercises, shifted to non-consecrated lay people, becoming an attractive subject for spiritual exercises incorporated into everyday life.

By 14th Century personal prayer seems to have reached sufficient maturity to give rise to treaties such as Hugo of Balma's, a landmark in the process of methodological elaboration and analysis of prayer; his Spanish translation as "Mystical Theology" qualifies for being part of this new paradoxical epistemology that is Mysticism. A meticulous structure to improve personal self-awareness was inspired by *Devotio Moderna* thus granting knowledge of the truth itself, that is, God. In another work I developed the archeology of mental prayer behind the *Silex*.<sup>13</sup>

Thanks to Ignatius of Loyola, mental prayer evolved from a mere list of advice on how to meditate or contemplate Jesus' life, to a concrete methodical practice aimed at strengthening empathy with Him, pursuing a closer identification (*Imitatio*) with Christ. This method focused on a "semantic void" at the peak of deep meditation, eventually losing awareness of the essence of Christian prayer, as an encounter with the Absolute Other that welcomes and guides all the creatures. However, the idea of being a pathway towards the highest state of an encounter with God, that is, a state of high stillness of consciousness, exerted an enormous influence on devout spirits of that time. From Bernardino de Laredo onwards, authors already referred to that state as *Contemplation*. In turn, it was understood as the moment when consciousness reaches a superlative knowledge that scholastics and spiritual writers agreed to call *mystic*.

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Madrid : Editorial Católica. *De veritate* 1978, 16, 1, obj 1; 17, 2 ad. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Juan Dejo SJ, *Mística y Espiritualidad...* op. cit., Vol.1 Chap. 7.

Whenever in this book we will say hidden or secret infused science or wisdom or mystical theology or aspiration exercise, it should be understood as a sudden, temporary mental elevation, in which the soul, by divine teaching, is suddenly elevated to unite by pure love and the only affective way to his most loving God, without any thought in which no intellectual cause intervenes, either by understanding, or by natural reason.<sup>14</sup>

These ideas influenced many Jesuits for whom Ignatian methodology was less easy to understand because of its uniqueness and innovative character with no similar precedents. One of the first Jesuits trying to integrate traditional mystical understanding of mental prayer with Ignatian practices was Antonio Cordeses<sup>15</sup>. When Jesuit institutions were expanding all over Europe (1540-1570), traditional practices of mental prayer were perceived as opposed to apostolic purposes, because of their affinity with monastic life. Some years later Jesuit authorities started to tolerate and accept these practices (Leturia 1955: 27-29), considering them as something not entirely foreign to the Society of Jesus's methods (with a special care to highlight the differences, however). In any case, the truth is that visions, ecstasy or rapture, ("arrobos"), remained as signals of special graces "obtained" by practitioners. In fact, representations of Ignatius, through Ribadeneyra's Ignatius biography and its Barbe's engravings, clearly showed the Society of Jesus's founder as a saint *due to* special graces given to him, highlighting a mystical character that was far from being encouraged by the first generation of Jesuits.

Almost eighty years after Cordeses (or Alvarez) first attempted to conciliate mystical mental prayer and Ignatian spirituality, Ruiz de Montoya wrote his treatise in Peru. Some years after his death, another Peruvian author, the Dominican Juan Meléndez, went even further, making references in his *Menologium*, to "pure love", a concept later developed in Molinos' *quietism*<sup>16</sup>. In other words, when Ruiz de Montoya wrote the *Silex*, "mental prayer" was identified almost exclusively with recollection of the senses and this in turn as the only mystical path. Therefore, despite (or thanks to) the open dialog by Ignatian followers with mystical traditions, some confusion remained unexplained and in need to be resolved. In this narrative, Ruiz de Montoya's proposal is

<sup>14</sup> Bernarndino de Laredo. OFM., de. *Subida del Monte Sión*. Madrid, BAC. 1998 [1535], p. 185.

<sup>15</sup> To understand the evolution of Society of Jesus's attitude towards mysticism, I recommend Joseph de Guibert SJ. *La Espiritualidad de la Compañía de Jesús...* op.cit., chap. 5, especially regarding the roles that Cordeses and Baltasar Álvarez played as a complex knot unleashed some years after under Fr. General Mercuriano's government, with the systematization carried out by Acquaviva and finally then, with Fr. Vitelleschi.

<sup>16</sup> Some Spanish authors were already in the same way before Molinos disclosure. An author like Antonio Rojas or López Navarro worked some concepts very similar to Ruiz de Montoya's, like *act of faith*: Rojas 1621 quoted by Gabriel María Verd Conradi, SJ. Antonio de Rojas, sus obras, su condena, sus «poesías místicas» y el soneto «No me mueve, mi Dios, para quererte», *Archivo Teológico Granadino* 80, 2017, p. 79-171 ; Gabriel Lopez Navarro OM. *Theologia Mystica. Vnion y Ivnta perfecta de la alma con Dios en este destierro por medio de la oracion de contemplacion en vista sencilla de fe. Recogida de la Divina Escritura, Padres de la Iglesia y Doctores Mysticos*. Madrid, Imprenta Real, [1640] 1651 ; also: Melquiades Andrés *Historia de la mística del siglo de oro en España y América*. Madrid BAC, 1996, p. 326-329; Juan Dejo SJ, *Mística y espiritualidad...* op.cit., Vol. 1, P. III, chapters 6-8.

analogous to his contemporary colleagues in Spain, sustaining that union with God was possible to attain in the midst of apostolic action.

The challenge was launched by Ignatius of Loyola, who in his so-called “Autobiography”, asserted to have experienced an ease to see God in all things. Making an act of “presence of God” is crucial to understand how the spirituality founded by Ignatius could influence spiritual searches of his followers a century later in a very different cultural context. Enthusiastically attracted to follow these indications, some Jesuits from the second generation like Baltasar Álvarez started (though ahead of his time) to reconcile traditional mysticism with Ignatius’ path. In the decade of 1560-70, seeking to justify his method (closely connected with the withdrawal of senses, rejected by many important authorities of the Society), he said:

And this is according to what our father Ignacio experienced, that having used a lot of time, and well, the instruction of meditations that he left us, then he came to a different and higher position, as an end of the former, part of which God gives to others in their beginnings; this is the path of silence, the presence of God, and to hear him, as people say, in his life, because *in oratione se habebat passive*, enjoying what he was given, and receiving in silence and hearing, *quam active*, working with mental discourses...<sup>17</sup>

The extreme caution of the institute regarding the prevalence of silence and recollection as privileged access of mystical life, thus, a real union with God, leaves the impression that prayer did not cease for Jesuits to be a matter of inquiry and experimentation. Diego Alvarez de Paz, who became provincial of Peru, spent his youth tormented by scruples due to his tendency to recollection<sup>18</sup>. Despite his initial anxieties, years later, as he grew in the Society of Jesus, he incorporated the concept of “affective prayer” in his *Inquisitione pacis et studio orationis* (1623), in which he concluded that powers of the Soul, Understanding and Free Will, are totally simplified and united in the contemplative’s mind.

Almost at the same time, in Spain, another Jesuit, Luis de la Palma established a concordance between the four weeks of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* with the traditional mystical path divided in three ways (“*vías*”), determining that contemplation does

<sup>17</sup> B. Alvarez, *Escritos espirituales Introd. biográfica y ed. Camilo Ma. Abad y Faustino Boado*, Barcelona, J. Flors, 1961, p. 243-244. The idea of making a mental image of God’s presence will have a development related with ignatian spiritual practices. After Alvarez first essays, Francisco de Arias went further with *Aprovechamiento espiritual : va dividido en dos partes...* (Impresso en Valencia : en casa de Pedro Patricio Mey, 1588), the second one was dedicated in part to propose an “exercise of the presence of God”. The idea was enthusiastically followed by those who started to write about a spirituality of “the mixed way (*la vía mixta*)”: Diego Alvarez de Paz for example. Ruiz de Montoya propose his “act of faith” provided the awareness of the presence of God, *vide infra*. Juan Dejo SJ., *Mística y espiritualidad...*, op. cit, Vol. 1, Chapter 7-8.

<sup>18</sup> Fr. General Aquaviva answered to Fr. Provincial Atienza regarding young Fr. Alvarez de Paz, “...whose spirit seemed retired to others and, even he informs me, is believed not to be suited for the Society (...) Your reverence please console and encourage him on behalf of me, making him to see that our Society will be pleased if he focuses on his lectures and studies for God Our Lord has given him those talents”. F. Egaña SJ (ed), F. (1586). *Monumenta Peruana*, vol.4, Letter of Fr. General C. Aquaviva SJ to Fr. Juan de Atienza SJ, February 24th 1586: p. 156.

not verify its achievements through divine consolations, but in coherence with individual behavior after a transcendental experience occurs. Criteria for discerning this integrity comes from Jesus Christ, our role model, who pursued union with neighbors as an analogy to closeness with God. Those who reach the heights of contemplative consolations, but without perseverance in their spiritual exercises, are threatened to fall into the sin of pride because of “the harshness of judgment and love of their own interest, rather than the love of service and of divine glory”<sup>19</sup>. The importance of discernment is key to sustaining closeness with God. Service, that is, action for the sake of the neighbor’s good, as an indicator of consistency of contemplation, was assumed in Jesuits’ corporate identity as a form of asceticism lived in *praxis*: action for the common good.

... it is concluded that virtuous deeds are the proof of true love, and those that help the spirit to rise above itself in true contemplation: and that when these works are lacking, one can fear that love is only words, and feigned affections and feelings, which seem to raise wings to fly high, remain on the ground, because they do not seek God with love of charity, but with the crooked intention they seek themselves”<sup>20</sup>.

La Palma was one of the first who put into perspective the amount of time spent in prayer. Speaking of mental prayer, La Palma says there are two ways to practice. One is reserving a special moment, with cessation of activities and external senses. The second is

... when inside the same occupations and in the midst of business, attention is stolen for a moment to raise it to God asking for forgiveness of sins by offering me and my actions for his greater glory, by examining my thoughts, words and deeds to see if they go according to the rule of his most holy will, giving thanks or asking for thanks, or in any way, because there are innumerable ones there, to lift the heart to God.<sup>21</sup>

He will later say that this mode is the easiest one since no occupation can be so onerous that it can block “these brief absences to enjoy, even without any kind of display, the presence of God.”<sup>22</sup>

We have little research about how these spiritual hegemonic theories from Europe were transferred to Jesuit missions abroad, where they faced other cultures with different spiritual sensitiveness. In addition to this process, institutional rhetoric about ascetic spirituality was bound to exhaust apostolic duties accomplished by Jesuits. Impressive roles played by their martyrs attracted much attention, leading Jesuits to a self-awareness of being grounded in their blood, something only comparable to the Church’s origins. One of the letters sent by Fr. José de Acosta, then provincial of Peru to Father General, suggested that Fr. Juan de Zúñiga’s recent death, was not only an outcome of

<sup>19</sup> Luis La Palma. *Práctica y breve declaración del Camino espiritual de la manera que lo enseña el bienaventurado Padre San Ignacio en su libro de los Ejercicios*. Barcelona, Jaime Subirana, 1860 [1627] II, p. 62.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*

his intense missionary work, but also as an example, that caused “great edification” and “a new desire to serve the Lord who provides such end to his people”. Acosta, along with Father General Aquaviva, understood suffering as a “prize” for a life fully devoted to apostolate. Mission as a *purgative* (ascetic) space, while allowing *union* with God, meant an evolution for Jesuit spiritual representations, because until then, only recollected life had the prestige of providing a real union with Divinity.

The reinterpretation of Mission as an ascetic space characterized the Peruvian spiritual narrative in the annual letters, opening to experience a new spirituality, out of stability provided by the scholastic theologians. Then, Jesuits could expand their missions into exceptionally vulnerable places, giving them the opportunity to sacrifice their whole life allowing them to compare their era with the ancient times of the Early Church’s martyrdom. This is the background of ideas supporting Ruiz de Montoya recommendations in his treatise.<sup>23</sup>

Mission’s extreme vulnerability of engagement in continuous activities will be presented as a privileged condition to support effectiveness for a “contemplation in action”, launched by an “act of faith”, symbolically represented through the image of the sparks fired by a *Silex*.

### 3. Ruiz de Montoya’s reinvention of *Contemplation as an act of faith*

Theories on Contemplation date several centuries back before the Spanish Golden Age of Spiritual Theology; Richard of Saint Victor was one of the main supporters of Contemplation as a “free and penetrating gaze of mind (*mens*), suspended in admiration of manifestations of wisdom.”<sup>24</sup> In his treatise, Richard the cleric distinguishes this activity as differentiated from Meditation and Cogitation, both belonging to the same movements of the mind, culminating in contemplative stillness. Years later, Saint Thomas Aquinas, focusing on the contemplative “way” (as a way of life), declared:

We are now speaking of the contemplative life as applicable to man. Now according to Dionysius (cf. *Divine Names* VII) between man and angel there is this difference, that an angel perceives the truth by simple apprehension, whereas man arrives at the perception of a simple truth by a process from several premises. Accordingly, then, the contemplative life has one act wherein it is finally completed, namely the contemplation of truth, and from this act it derives its unity.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> We must hear the echoes of daily and exhaustive work at the missions behind Ruiz de Montoya’s spiritual recommendations. His biographer Francisco Jarque shows clearly this relationship: Francisco Jarque *Antonio Ruiz de Montoya en las Indias*. 4 vols. Madrid, Victoriano 1900 [1661]; Suárez, [1661] 1900, Vol. 2, Lib I, Cap. XXVI: p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Richard de Saint-Victor. *The Mystical Ark*. New York, Paulist Press. 1979, IV, p. 157.

<sup>25</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, op.cit., II-II<sup>ae</sup> q. 180 art. 3.

Aquinas amplified Richard of St. Victor's image of *gaze* and understood that the contemplative act is, ultimately, a contemplation of truth. Epistemological interest placed on this purpose cannot be denied. Not surprisingly, Aquinas wrote a Theological *Summa* that was at the same time a philosophical as well as an anthropological study framed by the religious quest for God, identified (confused?) with gnoseological truth. With him, the notion of "contemplation" (as prayer) obtained the meaning of being the summit of religious life as a result of theoretical inquiry, but without closing the doors to its precedent signature: life's achievement experience. Under the influence of the Dominican Saint, scholasticism "appropriated" contemplative experience to take it into a specific hermeneutic direction, giving birth to a specialized bibliography elaborated by monks, convent friars and clerics; some were more or less influenced by scholastic language, exonerating them, to certain extent, from the suspicion of *alumbadismo*. During 16th to 17th Centuries we find at one side, Saint Teresa of Avila, whose great merit was to speak about her encounter with "truth", as a mystical encounter with God; at the other extreme we find many scholastic authors following up these indications so as to devise more and more complex arguments, contradicting the simplicity that defines this act, as a mere "gaze".<sup>26</sup>

This evolution of spiritual literature stemmed from some dilemmas that included the fear of a revelation exclusively based on individual's experiences without a real awareness of its intrinsic state-of-grace nature, that is, a total gratuity originated in the Divine Will. That is why monks' meditations were placed within a scholastic interpretation, generating a hybrid specimen called "Mystical Theology". Paradoxically at the same time (circa 17th Century), this genre gradually weakened, leaving a trace of spiritual treatises for laymen and *connoisseurs*, whose instrumental character was meant to collaborate in attaining "perfection" of their devout souls.<sup>27</sup>

Part of the success lay in the association of spiritual perfection with supernatural events, which devout people imagined as an effect of their spiritual exercises, increasing at the same time curiosity to live in the flesh those experiences profusely portrayed in mystical iconography and spiritual representations of the time. Theoretically, the scholastic definition of this experience was a "*simple view / gaze of understanding*". It was the pivot of many spiritual theories. Within these essays, we cannot ignore some authors' concern -as the aforementioned La Palma, Luis de la Puente or Alvarez de Paz- to discern these practices out of the framework of "recollected" life. "Simple gaze of understanding" led to some stumbling blocks, such as the dangerous interpretation of "suspended understanding" (due to the process of simplification), with harmful consequences of deviation into *quietism*. On the other hand, basing prayer in affection, also appeared as risky, since it gave the impression of being result of an individual's "pure love", a sort of Free Will radical expression thus diminishing God's grace.

<sup>26</sup> V.gr. Thomas De Jesús, *Práctica de la viva fe de que el ivsto vive y se svstenta*. Brussels, Huberto Antonio, 1617; Fray José de Jesús María Quiroga. *Apología Mística. En defensa de la Contemplación, Madrid, Anejos del Boletín de la Real Academia española*, LII, 1992. Chapters 9, 17.

<sup>27</sup> To this respect: Michel de Certeau, *La Fable mystique*. Paris, Gallimard, 1982: chapter 3.

This context at the beginning of 17th Century and within Spanish Carmelite circles, elicited a difference between “infused” and “acquired” contemplation, reflecting new interpretations of the old dilemma between work and grace. Thomas de Jesús OCD, author of *Tratado del conocimiento oscuro de Dios afirmativo y negativo y modo de unirse con Dios por amor*, mentions that acquired contemplation is realized through our own efforts. The path of contemplative prayer reaches a greater abstraction of understanding when the mind fixes its attention on faith mysteries, preparing for God’s intervention. This latter action is experienced as grace, and consequently, it is called *infused contemplation*. Although Thomas de Jesús was the first to make this differentiation, its origin can be traced to practitioners of Nordic Mysticism, such Heyndrick Herp, who said that the Soul “exercises its Will to reach God, and in response, God sends light”<sup>28</sup>. Most authors of Hispanic origin during the first half of 17th Century agreed to consider contemplation from these two aspects. Certainly, not everyone stresses the same way on how to deal with dilemmas caused by interaction between works and grace in prayer. Thomas de Jesús was worried that “infused” contemplation could be perceived as impossible to attain by a common man’s faith. That is why he strives to enhance his notion of “acquired contemplation making a negative speculation - that is, through denial of concepts, ideas and images - a way to meet God as a path of faith. Therefore, speculative reason through denials could not be confused with suspicious quietism but led to a profound consciousness, transcending ordinary mechanisms of understanding, and providing a dark knowledge, typical of faith, a “general” (i.e., universal) and pure love, as proclaimed in his *Práctica viva de la Fe*:

First, to enliven the virtue of faith (provided that divine supernatural mysteries are offered and exceed our capacity) is to surrender and captivate our understanding with promptness, certainty, obedience and truth of what we cannot understand. Remembering what the apostle says: “*Oh depth of wisdom mysteries of our God, how incomprehensible are his judgments and how high his ways?*” and what Isaiah said: *Quis nouit sensum Domini?* Who could ever know what God feels? Thus, they have to see if the articles of our faith (as ineffable mysteries and incomprehensible as is God himself) and that faith itself threaten ruin to those who want to scrutinize them. And that is why they are of faith, because we cannot reach or understand them, nor force them, nor delight in having faith in things that exceed our understanding, to have more to offer God, and together, to have such a great and wonderful God. His works and mysteries are also equally wonderful and his greatness exceeds our capacity.<sup>29</sup>

Thus “acquired” contemplation limits “infused” but does not necessarily determine it. It is a process of total Ego detachment and thereupon prepares the subject’s receptivity to God’s grace. Being aware of God’s presence, Ruiz de Montoya’s idea of “act of faith”, took the place of the former scholastic definition of Contemplation as *simple gaze of understanding* and became a statement to overcome opposition between work and grace, with a different and simplified methodology to contemplate God in an active daily basis.

<sup>28</sup> Teodoro Martin, Introduction to Enrique Herp. *Directorio de contemplativos (espejo de perfección)*. Salamanca, Sígueme, 1991 [1595], pp. 11-52.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas of Jesus, OCD. *Práctica de la viva fee ... op. cit.*, f. 200- 222.

Still, his interest in proving the contemplative nature of this method in regular routine, resumed the tradition of negative theology. Ruiz de Montoya's *Silex* gathers many arguments and recommendations from authors already then defined as "mystical". He quoted indirectly Tauler, and specifically, Ruysbroeck<sup>30</sup>. Saint Teresa is equally present<sup>31</sup>, as well as Saint Thomas and certainly, Pseudo Dionysus. Contemporary European bibliography at that time holds similarities with Ruiz de Montoya's text. Debate about the relationship between work and grace, already mentioned, behind his argument, prompts us to three types of interrogation: one, soteriological: *what is more determinant in human salvation, task or grace?* Another one is ecclesiological: *can we consider it worthy to name as "religious" ("consecrated") a life without the community routines of daily prayer but instead involved in constant apostolic activities?* Finally, from a Spiritual Theology perspective: *is the practice of prayer of union with God only linked to contemplative and recollected life, or is it possible to achieve that union in the midst of an active life?* I believe these questions are fundamental for believers and for the evolution of Catholic Imagination; they reached a certain maturity in 17th Century but nonetheless, they have not found until today a theological explanation correlated and able to solve the aforementioned dilemma. On the contrary: responses fluctuate from one extreme to the other. There has been much discussion in the past years about charisms; behind the analysis of a work such as Ruiz de Montoya's, which includes both ascetic and scholastic tradition, underlie many questions opened by St. Ignatius of Loyola's charism. Ruiz de Montoya's interweaving of spiritual theories was made at the same time as his restless work in daily contact with a culture of very different origins than his. *Silex's* theoretical design defines his spiritual practice as a Jesuit, unfolding a collection of knowledge not all coming from institutional documentation or authors, but also from many other sources of that time; his reflection vigorously echoes European Christian humanism in "the Indies"; he is up to date with academic discussion, also paying close attention to scholastic style. And certainly, he is a great observer of Nature. Methodically, he navigates between two poles, one linked to traditional mental prayer, avoiding the proliferation of thoughts and the other one, associated with the act of faith, looking to tune everywhere with God's presence. These two "practices" synthesize to make contemplation in action more concrete, a paradoxical definition that finally, ends up being a mystical one.

Withdraw your understanding of every creature, whatever it may be, and rigorously abstract your thinking from it, in the manner of a beast of burden; God unites you with him and *ego semper tecum* and you will be, if in faith alone, you have a fixed and invariable thought, and your will be enlightened by the first cause. This was explained by the great Dionysus, that we get rid of the senses and the understanding of all intelligible creation was

<sup>30</sup> Antonio Ruiz de Montoya. *Silex del divino amor* ... In: Juan Dejo SJ. *Mística y espiritualidad*... op. cit. Vol. 2, f. 76v.

<sup>31</sup> Aviso 20", *Silex*, In: *Ibid*, II. f. 42r. From now on I will quote Ruiz de Montoya with the "*Silex*" reference, following its last transcription published in Juan Dejo SJ. *Mística y espiritualidad*... Op. cit., Vol. 2.

to be banished, being attentive only to the clear rays of divine darkness of faith, in which the divine truth inhabits, warning that in all that we discuss here, it is not about passive abstraction - which you will find ahead- but an active and supernatural one, to which your *industry* can withdraw in the company of divine grace.<sup>32</sup>

Here we see Ruiz de Montoya employs two similar concepts to “acquired” and “infused”: “active” and “passive”. In other words, he suggests that the practice of “acquired” (or “active”) contemplation is “supernatural” because it is a co-activity with Divine grace: the *industry*, that is, the individual work, *withdraws* (ambiguous term denoting coactivity here) by his own will, to let divine grace to operate over subject’s will. In other words, human action is co-performed with God.

Another term we should highlight is “abstraction”, because it shows an affiliation with the tradition of speculative mysticism or negative theology, relative to detachment of any thought or idea leading the practitioner to mystical nakedness of understanding. This process drives the individual to the *excessus mentis* referred by Ruiz de Montoya<sup>33</sup>. Another horizon to understand reality opens up to the individual, and if he/she remains concentrated on his daily activities, this is, properly speaking, a contemplation in action.

As we can see, it is a conceptual transfer of the simple idea of understanding as an intuition of truth, into the act of love and faith. Indeed, knowledge becomes intuition. Beyond the concept, he understands an act of faith as an act of love embracing the presence of God. The “gaze/sight” of understanding acquires the connotation of an act of faith before the presence of God being at the same time, communication of Mystery. This defines the communication that arises out of love as the highest stage of contemplation

... love consists of an interchange between the two parties; that is to say in the lover’s giving and communicating to the beloved what he or she has or out of what one has or can have; and so also the beloved to the lover. Thus if the one has knowledge, one gives to the other who lacks it. The same is true of honors, of riches; and so the one to the other<sup>34</sup>.

This communication, occurring at this high state of contemplation, concludes the Spiritual Exercises with a “simple gaze”, finally taken as an epistemological vehicle for intuition according Ruiz de Montoya.

Through the understanding to find, believing that in the immense chaos in which God is present, and do this without comparisons or figures, or sensitivity of any kind, but with a very simple view, with which he knows that he cannot know; and with an insightful intuition which he sees that in no way can he see something from which understanding comes out, that what he cannot neither know nor see is the first and most non-created entity.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Silex*, f. 71v.-72r.

<sup>33</sup> *Silex* 143r. Undoubtedly there are precedents in Jesuit ascetic literature: Luis La Palma speaks about God’s charity that *stresses us to mental excess in our relation with God* (“Aprieta para tener excesos mentales en el trato con Dios” ...): Luis La Palma, *Camino...* op. cit., II, p. 91.

<sup>34</sup> Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercise*. In: Op. cit., [231], p. 272.

<sup>35</sup> *Silex*, f. 85v.-86r.

Intuition requires an individual's extreme concentration (that of the simple gaze) to allow and sustain the contemplative act:

... if you descend to particularize the things you are giving up, you will be distracted from that intuition to whom the soul must be attentive, with only Will and Mind, because the understanding must not operate in passing, diffusing, arguing or knowing what it cannot, being incomprehensible.<sup>36</sup>

Hence, the act of contemplating love involves the realization of individual love, while reaching its origin or source. To the extent that the body and, especially, the mind — involving the language or discursive cogitation— interfere with the process, Ruiz de Montoya felt inclined to follow the Nordic tradition and 16th Century Spanish mysticism, promoting him to flee from any mental operation.

#### 4. The *Silex* as an interpretation of “contemplation in action”

Up to this point we could say that Ruiz de Montoya denied the substance of Ignatian contemplation. But it would be more convenient to remember Jesuit sensitiveness at that time and how they understood Ignatius of Loyola's contemplation. Jesuit authors already cited such as de la Puente or La Palma took the “contemplation to attain love” from Spiritual Exercises, as its source, inviting one to see the world animated by Divine activity. Also Saint Ignatius's life narratives increasingly focused on his supernatural experiences to the extent that they re-define him as a Mystic at the end of 16th Century. His endurance of great pains due to “infused contemplations” —as Jesuit circles finally called this spiritual state— was seen to overcome the resistance to accept mysticism as something characteristic of Ignatian spirituality. We should consider how Jesuits were involved in this tension in order to understand their religious identity as “contemplatives in action”.

One way to reinforce the sense that contemplation does not depend on recollection or reclusion, was to redirect the analysis of spiritual practices towards literature named “ascetic”, whose most important Hispanic representatives, were Luis De la Puente, Luis la Palma, Alonso Rodríguez, and Diego Alvarez de Paz (the previously mentioned missionary in Peru who explored mystical traditions interwoven with Ignatian sources, and who highlighted psychic-mental states (“graces” as singularities). This happened despite their coinciding with dissemination of narratives intended to approach the founder as a mystic, highlighting supernatural aspects of his “infused” contemplations. Even if Luis de la Puente did not use this last concept, he described the highest contemplation as an “elevation of our mind to see the things of God with insight, suspension and admiration” reached after an *ascetic journey*. Then, he proposed union with God inside an active life. De la Puente speaks of the process of gradual abstraction from intellectual

<sup>36</sup> *Silex*, f. 127v.

visions until concluding in “acts of charity” throughout a contemplation similar to Mystics, speaking of an “*experimental knowledge of God*” as one of its effects<sup>37</sup>

These essays of complementary ideas between mystical experience and apostolic asceticism were characteristic of Jesuits spiritual endeavors during the first half of 17th Century. In different ways, they were developing a theory that sought to define almost literally the ideal of “contemplative in action”. This is what some of these authors called “mixed methodology” which, in my opinion, should be associated with the process of self-understanding of Jesuit spiritual identity<sup>38</sup>.

Approximately 30 years after the main publications of these authors, Ruiz de Montoya launched his proposal at the core of the South American mission. His purpose seems similar to that of Jesuits and non-Jesuit authors of his time<sup>39</sup>. His methodology gives a special place to asceticism according Nordic-rooted mystical tradition: it is a process involved in intellectual abstraction. He did not go so far as Lallemant to say that “infused contemplation” was necessary to become a true apostle<sup>40</sup>, but it is clear that he promoted the rejection of mental discursiveness; even imagination, in spite of its prestigious place in Ignatian spirituality, was dismissed. In this sense, it is an example of Jesuits’ efforts to harmonize both mystical and Ignatian heritages in a single practice. The Peruvian missionary tried almost literally to solve the question of how to be a contemplative in action; if De la Puente, or Alonso Rodriguez, considered the highest moment of contemplative prayer as a unitive state whose effects are a confusion of senses, Ruiz de Montoya thought that practitioners remained in total awareness of God’s presence in that very moment.

The way *Silex’s* author conceives contemplation in the midst of action would therefore be as a particular attention, a high state of consciousness instantly lived as inhabited by the presence of God. As happens in the practice of Eastern *mantra*, Ruiz de Montoya recommends avoiding being distracted from full attention to the presence of God, repeating: *I Enjoy, I Praise, I desire, I resign, I Imitate, One, I surrender or I sacrifice*

<sup>37</sup> Luis De la Puente. *Guía espiritual en la que se trata de la oración, meditación y contemplación*. Madrid, viuda de Alonso Martín, segunda impresión. *Guía espiritual en la que se trata de la oración, meditación y contemplación*. Madrid, viuda de Alonso Martín, segunda impresión, 1614 [1609]. P. III, Chap. III, 2., p. 534; also: pp. 243-245.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph de Guibert. *La Espiritualidad de la Compañía de Jesús...* op. cit., pp. 148; 187-188 quotes some Cordeses unedited writings, but also Alvarez de Paz’.

<sup>39</sup> V.gr. Rojas *Vida del Espíritu para tener oración y unión con Dios, según los sagrados Doctores que en la contemplación, unión y mística Teología mas se aventajaron*. An important work that has recently analyzed by Verd “Antonio de Rojas, sus obras, su condena, sus “poesías místicas” y el soneto “No me mueve, mi Dios, para quererte”. *Archivo Teológico Granadino*, 80, 2017, pp. 79-171; also: López Navarro *Theologia Mystica. Unión y Ivnta perfecta de la alma con Dios en este destierro por medio de la oracion de contemplacion en vista sencilla de fe. Recogida de la Divina Escritura, Padres de la Iglesia y Doctores Mysticos*. Madrid, Imprenta Real. 1651 [1640]; Caldera *Teología mística y discreción de espíritus: ejercicio de la fe divina y de la oración mental* 1629 [1623]; Juan Bretón *Mística Teología*, Madrid, casa de la viuda de Alonso Martin. 1614.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph de Guibert SJ. *La espiritualidad de la Compañía de Jesús...* op.cit., p. 254.

*myself, I pray*<sup>41</sup>. However, this is not one of the most original features of *Silex*. In my opinion, what constitutes the boldest jump of the text is to have placed as the best example of this practice, an indigenous Paraguayan daily exercise. I have previously identified this character thanks to the references made by Ruiz de Montoya's first biographer, Jesuit Francisco Jarque, from this passage of *Silex*<sup>42</sup>. Furthermore and most important, through this example he showed how in everyday activities it is possible to achieve a full attention to God's presence, thanks to the awareness of living a deep alterity arising from the act of faith.

So that you are truly persuaded that this exercise is for everyone, that is, if you are new, or old in virtue and exercise of prayer, I want to remind you of Ignatius, that principal Indian, with whom you communicated and who for fifty-five years lived gently, kept the natural law in its purity, content with only one woman, with no offense from nobody. He received Baptism at such a mature age, that he carefully applied himself to the study of divine law, which he carefully applied to his memory, and to his good will. He continuously heard Mass every day before going to work on his estates. Coming back to the town before entering his house, he entered God's, where with affection of a living faith, he adored the living sacrament of the Eucharist and, as a source of grace he daily communicated much to him; the points of his prayer, the speeches, the composition of place was always to believe that God was in every present place. This act of faith only went through his continuous exercise; and without any another teacher than divine light, he excelled in virtue that his works were testimony of his guilt-free life.<sup>43</sup>

Ruiz de Montoya shows a contemplative prayer in full action as no other than a reminiscence of the founder's spiritual experience: *to see God in all things*. Ruiz de Montoya turned this "act", into a "composition of place" being the beginning as well as the end (objective accomplished) of the sentence. The Indigenous -named *Ignacio*- became the master:

Remember that you walked through those days eager to find an easy way to continually have the presence of the First Cause, and heaven wanted that this new in faith, to you, an ancient exerciser, teach you in a single act of faith, what you were looking for.<sup>44</sup>

Ignacio the Guarani had not developed this ability because of his conversion but because he was an *ancient exerciser*. Already in his "gentile" state he had not only preserved a moral according to the principles brought from Christian culture, but also lived with a spirit that simply transferred that devotion to the Christian God.

<sup>41</sup> *Gócome, alavo, deseo, renuncio, imito, uno, entrego o sacrificio, ruego: Silex: f 67v*. Similar to some of mindfulness practices currently promoted from Eastern tradition; Ruiz de Montoya puts this Contemplation as correlate to daily activities proposing plenty attention to *find* (originally *see*) God in all things more suited with a Christian way of meditation, as being not only in a pure awareness state but committed with an Other, in this case a Transcendent One.

<sup>42</sup> Jarque 1900 [1661] Vol. 4, Book IV, Chapter XXV, p. 150.

<sup>43</sup> *Silex*, f. 96v.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, f. 96v.

Leaving one day his praiseworthy exercise of hearing mass, without you // asking him something or even seeing the concept of the character of his spirit, he spoke to you in this way: “Once I wake up, I believe that God is present there; and accompanied by this memory I start my day; together with my family and leading the choir, I pray with them all the prayers. Then I go to hear my mass, where I continue my memory and act of faith that there is God present; with this same memory I go back to my house, I summon my people to go to work, I go with them and all the way I keep this memory, which I never lose while the labor lasts. Coming back to town, my thinking on the road is only that there is God, present and accompanying me. With this same thought I enter the church first before my house; there I adore the Lord and I thank him for the continuous care he has for me, with which happily I entered my house to rest, and while I eat, I do not forget that God is there. With this I sleep and this is my continuous exercise. (*Ibid*, f. 97r.)

Ruiz de Montoya places in Ignacio Piraycí’s mouth the same state of continuous recollection that Jerónimo Nadal witnessed in Saint Ignatius of Loyola<sup>45</sup>. The difference is that while Loyola’s deep concentration in the presence of God appears as a gratuitousness beyond a personal will -to the extent that he could be distracted from activities in which he was engaged-, the Indigenous experienced it as an act emerging from his own will, looking for not being distracted by daily activities to feel God’s presence in all things.

*Silex of divine love* is a complex *colonial* text, which Ruiz de Montoya probably wrote at irregular intervals throughout his very intense missionary life, interweaving a narrative in order to help every Jesuit missionary overflow with the urgency of “saving souls” and become inhabited by the question of the best way to follow the example of their founder who, from his saintly nature, had come to be truly contemplative in action.

<sup>45</sup> Joseph de Guibert SJ. *La espiritualidad de la Compañía de Jesús*....op. cit., p. 20: quoted from *Monumenta Historica Societate Iesu, Epistolae: ab anno 1546 ad 1577. Selecta Natalis monumenta in ejus epistolis commemorata*, Volume 4, p. 661.

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