

ST IGNATIUS EMBRACING THE FUTURE

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A FEW WEEKS AGO, I was invited by a friend to visit an exhibition of watches and table clocks at the Louvre. I was filled with admiration as I discovered the advances in instruments for measuring time that occurred at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In particular, the mainspring was invented, superseding the water-clock and the hourglass, and enabling the making of small clocks that could be transported. I learnt about how Francis I, around 1530, made a gift to his grand chancellor of two table clocks, at the time new instruments, that would, as it were, bring time into the chancellor's house and indeed into his office. Time was taking on a portable, constantly measurable form. The year was 1530: the very moment when Ignatius Loyola was listening to lectures at the Sorbonne.

This made me think that it might be useful to analyze how Ignatius dealt with time. Running through the sixteenth century, and all the cultural energy generating by the Renaissance, were three major currents. The first emerged from the great geographical discoveries, opening up ever wider spaces. The second arose from the printing press, which set artistic and intellectual expressions within stable forms that could be circulated. The third is my theme here: the sense of time, the feeling for time. Obviously these three currents interacted, but I would like to focus especially on the third. This is because, it seems to me, we have not yet spoken sufficiently of how far Ignatius' passions were mobilised by the time in which he lived. He shared his generation's burning concern to make something fruitful of life's moments. And we find ourselves in our own time with desires and questions very like his.

What I want to say can be summed up under three headings, and it is these that will structure what follows. First: the discovery of one's own time. Secondly: responding to one's own time accurately and judiciously. Thirdly: embracing the future. These name three aspects of Ignatius' attitude to his time. Moreover, they help us sense what his relationship to God might have been.

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Discovering One's Own Time

An Interplay of Extremes

The discovery of the present, as something to be received in its complexity and totality in faith from God was a vital need for Ignatius. This is the starting point. Without this discovery, he would have died. We know his passionate temperament. It could easily be led to extremes; it quickly transformed the very strong movements that were always within him into decisions and actions; it was quick to make prophetic connections, but it was also sensitive to the details of getting things done. All these traits marked the conquistadors who at the time were pushing back the limits of the known world. But these qualities had their reverse side: a desire to be the very best; a will to power did not find it easy to let itself gently be transformed into acceptance and humble service; an attention to detail that could become compulsive. No doubt these qualities and defects explain why some were attached to him almost viscerally, while others, particularly those weaker than him, rejected him as impossibly demanding.

Be that as it may, Ignatius, within himself, was balanced. This balance of different tendencies made him a man of action, a man in control of his own life, a man able to establish a lasting legacy. The balance turned on his capacity constantly to take account of the realities around him and their demands: realities of time and space, of the historical situation given to him; realities shaped by forces to be kept under control or evaluated. This was for him what one might call his 'grace', in both senses of the word. It was a human gift, keeping under control a temperament threatened by conflicting forces that could have destroyed it. It was also, and at the same time, a divine gift of God, keeping him constantly focused on how the gospel Kingdom can be found in the details of human lives.

As you look at his life, you sense that Ignatius was under pressure from two forces, arising from a distant and mysterious heritage. And both were pushing him towards an extreme. On the one hand there was the universal, the *magis*, constantly suggesting something beyond, the opening up of frontiers, with all the risks that entailed. On the other, there was the quest for the one specific place in which to settle; a precise commitment to the art of the possible, a taste for being at home; low-key, humble service. These desires pulled his imagination in different ways, but they were both powerfully present, and interacting, at the time when Ignatius lived. When they were in harmony, the combination sustained action without and preserved affective stability within. When, however, they were in conflict, they would lead to excess and failure. It was only because

Ignatius was rooted in his own time, with all the needs and echoes that marked people's lives, that the conflicting tendencies within him found constructive rather than violent outlets.

This makes us understand why Ignatius' first message to us is an invitation to 'look at' the time in which we live. *Mirar*—'look at': we should note this word well, which is found so often on his lips and in his writings. To look at what is really there, without fear, without illusion. To look at it in the way God does. But also, and at the same time, to look at it in a human way, to look in a way that will enable us to mobilise all our creative powers.

Thus, when so many new paths were opening up for sixteenth-century society, Ignatius did not ignore any of them. When Christianity was becoming more open to everyday reality, he could enter into the new secular, humanist world without it making him any less Christian. He took on board all the ideas that were being thrown up, provided only that they served God's glory. And he 'looked' also, with the same intensity and the same concern for the truth, at the movements of the heart sustaining human freedom as it moves towards decisions that will give it fulfilment and peace.

This is what makes Ignatius insist so strongly that each person should find his or her own way amid the pulls of so many 'means'. These means are at once divine—created by God, as he puts it in the Principle and Foundation—and also human—we use them to shape the time in which we live. To untangle the forces that dwell within us, to clear the mists in which our half-engagements disguise themselves, to perceive where our interior struggle is occurring, to reach the point where our desires can be integrated—that, for Ignatius, is both to look at and to love the time in which we live, and also to find within it the point where all our energies can be integrated.

**To look at
and to love
the time in
which we live**

The Path of Exercising

It is in this perspective that Ignatius suggests his Exercises. He did not invent the term, but the pedagogy that gives the different exercises value and significance is very much his own. The spiritual exercise is a way of discovering the full reality of the present time.

Within the duration of the ordinary day, the exercise has a beginning and an end. Little by little, more and more clearly, the practice of the exercise enables us to become actively aware. The exercise creates, as it were, an interior time, which gives rise to its own movements, cycles and alternations. Exterior time, which serves as the basis of the exercise, of course continues to exist. But it is opened up to this other time within, the

time of awareness. Gradually the awareness becomes deeper, allowing what was in darkness to come into the light, what was unspoken to be expressed and what were hitherto unknown energies within to be harnessed. These energies bring a new self into being.

Ignatius is fond of distinguishing ‘times’—not just the ‘times’ of election, the different experiential structures that can lead us to a sense of what is right, but also times of examination and of discernment. He carefully distinguished the times of consolation from the times that follow. But it was not just on exceptional occasions that the process of exercising involved distinguishing between different moments in time. It ceaselessly draws us into our own inner timeline, where awareness has its highs and lows, its calls and its moments of solitude, its moments of harvest and of barrenness. Ignatius’ favourite words for this reality are *profit* and *fruit*, *relish* and *disturbance*, *plucking* and *feeling*. These are not just images. The essential point is to see that the particular time span of the exercise serves as a way of radically intensifying our ordinary time, and of giving meaning to each successive moment.

It is a mistake to think here of privileged or particular moments, coincident with the different times of prayer. When Ignatius tells us what a spiritual exercise is, he is quite clear: he includes ‘every other spiritual activity’ (Exx 1). Even an ordinary activity, however banal and anodyne it might seem, can become an ‘exercise’ and, as such, an occasion for discovering the ‘interior time’ that I have just been describing. The exercise isolates a moment of human activity or of human affectivity, with both a beginning, before which you have to prepare yourself, and an end or purpose, which is the fruit you gain from it. And between these two there are various successive states, which give the exercise form and structure. When you follow this structure, you are allowing it to reveal the extraordinary richness of meaning borne by this moment, despite the fact that no one was paying it any attention.

But perhaps I have been wrong in using the word ‘isolate’. True, the exercise requires that time be set aside, clearly and consciously. But the point of this time set aside is that that we become more present to ourselves and commit ourselves with greater clarity. In short, it is about living life to the full: the whole of life, with moral sincerity, fully involved with others and taking all the risks involved in our daily choices. When we repeat this sort of exercise, then the moments fall into a pattern and the history of our life gradually takes shape. Each moment takes its place within a continuum that represents a person’s destiny.

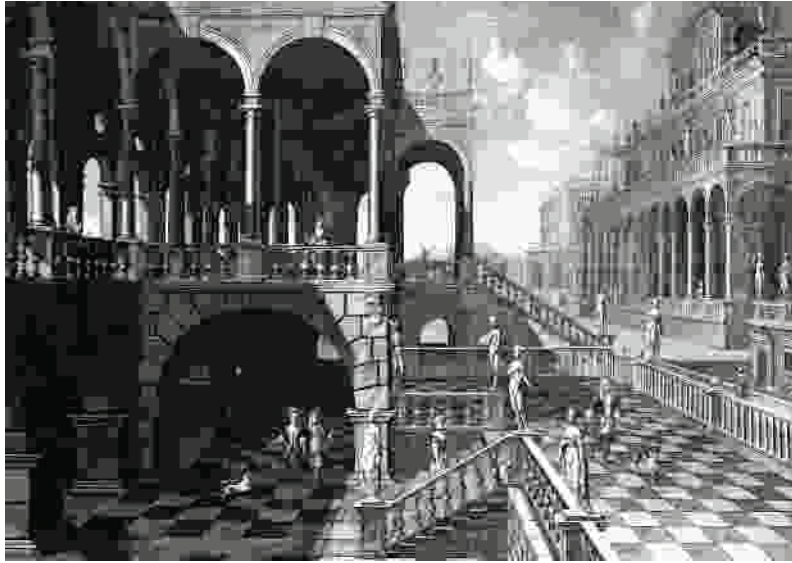
An authentic fidelity to the present moment—it is that to which we are being invited. But what came before the moment of the spiritual exercise is no longer simply over and done with. What comes to the surface in the exercise is more than a disconnected fragment out of our psyche. On the contrary, the exercise gives us access to a fullness of life: everything comes together, everything becomes a source of energy.

Thus it is that Ignatius comes close, at a deep level, to one of the great movements of his time. I have already mentioned it: the Renaissance brought about a revolution by bringing time right into the home, by increasing greatly the technical means of measuring time, by putting time at the service of navigators through devices that made them less dependent on the stars. This corresponds to the revolution that Ignatius brought about in the way human beings could listen to God. He was no longer dealing with the monastic sequence of hours, marking out in chant the rhythm of nature and the cosmos. Rather, he was attending to the moments of interiority that emerge as crucial in a human being's moral and personal history. The path of exercising, far from representing a diversion from lived life with all its details and immediacy, presupposes that we are entering fully the reality of our lives, with ardent trust in the given moment that is ours to live out.

Of course, this way of exercising can lead us astray and miss the real point. Ignatius invites us to perceive how God visits the devout soul (Exx 15); others will tell us just to make the best of the present. Montaigne sees two kinds of time given to us: 'I spend time when it is bad and disagreeable; when it is good, I don't want to spend it, I savour it, I hold on to it.'¹ Montaigne's humanism can lead us to take pleasure in blithe self-centredness. Nevertheless, between Ignatius and that current of broad openness to all that is human, there is one fundamental point of agreement: it is through the authenticity of how we live our lives that we discover the richness within the present moment. For Ignatius, this is about God's gift—a gift to be received and then transformed into acts of charity.

This path of exercising seems to me radically different from another path that was one of the Renaissance's temptations: that of 'utopia', this 'non-place' where time ceases. Creating imaginary cities, erecting false facades, multiplying royal entities, making the dream of ideal societies

¹ [Trans.] Montaigne, *Essays*, book 3, chapter 13, 'On Experience', towards the end. The wordplay makes translation uncertain: 'Je passe le temps quand il est mauvais et incommode; quand il est bon, je ne le veux pas passer, je le retaste et je m'y tiens'.



An imaginary city, architectural capriccio by Jacob Ferdinand Saeys, c. 1690

burn within the heart and captivate the eye—all this, no doubt, enabled a whole generation to exercise a certain creativity. The element of diversion here enabled the expression of needs that otherwise would have been repressed. But Ignatius ignored this temptation—or at least he overcame it (for it may be that for him the attraction of going to Jerusalem represented the utopian impasse from which he needed to break free).

For Ignatius, it is not about imagining how things could be other than they are. Spiritual fidelity is first of all, and necessarily, a fidelity to the present time. There is an inexorable duty not to avoid any of the constraints placed on us by reality. Let us take just one example that Ignatius gave in a quite low-key way to the Jesuit students at Alcalá:

Let us never delay good works, no matter how small, even a small one, with the idea that we will do greater works at another time [*en otro tiempo*]. For it is a very common temptation of the enemy that we place perfection in future things [*cosas futuras*], and encourage ourselves to undervalue present things.²

Greater things at another time! This is the deadliest of illusions, because it turns us away from the present.

² Ignatius, *Monita generalia* (n. 7015), MHSJ EI 12, 676.

Responding Precisely and Judiciously

St Ignatius is concerned to integrate and deploy our human energies for the particular moment in time in which it is our task to live. This can only happen fully when we ourselves give this moment of time a shape, an expression, through an act or decision which, once and for all, lets go of any sort of dream and roots us in the here and now that is at once, inextricably, ours and God's. This is why Ignatius is so extraordinarily concerned to understand how we get to that moment when things take shape and announce themselves. He observes the different moments of the inner life: how they follow on from each other, what their emphasis is, how they vary. In each case he is interested in what is distinctive, in how it arises and how it disappears. He presents this kind of repeated observation as a way of progressing in contemplation—a contemplation that lets us discover the Spirit's action in our awareness.

To establish the point, we can refer to just two major texts. In *Spiritual Exercises* we can clearly see a very attentive pedagogy, which takes people through series of points to remember and note, through times to be compared, through successive processes, through experiences of things feeling more or less appropriate. And all this is aimed at discovering the precise point where, finally, everything falls into place and the heart has discovered what it was seeking all along.

Besides *Spiritual Exercises*, we can also turn to the notes that we call—inappropriately—Ignatius' Spiritual Diary. These notes were, in fact, words that he quickly jotted down each day, even several times a day, as a way of reminding himself of the 'motions' he had experienced and of interpreting them—motions from his prayer or from any other moments of the day. These motions created in his soul tendencies, inclinations, convictions. They bore fruit in action, an action marked by complete self-confidence.

We are often tempted to regard Ignatius' examens and exercises as too finicky. Indeed they are, unless we see their purpose: that of pinpointing the genuinely spiritual moment, and designating the decisive point in our encounter with God and our interior journey. There are three key features of this 'hour', this *kairos*. Things come together; mere 'circumstances' take on a new significance; decisions are taken.

Finding the Point of Convergence

The *kairos* is a point where all the energies making up our human existence come together. These energies make themselves felt in how our body reacts: in our health, our physical resistances or weaknesses. They also

work through our affective capacities, which vary with the experiences we undergo: our age, our problems, the sources of our desires. Finally, they work in what we actually do, which is bound up with the whole range of 'means' from which we make either aids or obstacles. If we can draw on all these energies, assembling them, measuring them, assessing them, we will discover the right point of balance, of a fidelity to God in and through a clear discernment of what is possible. And our judgment is then either confirmed by how it works out in daily life, or else, by contrast, it is shown to be illusory—because it lacks foundation in the truth of what we are.

Lending Significance to the 'Circumstances'

The 'hour', the *kairos*, is marked out also by the combination of circumstances that accompany an event. I use this word 'circumstances' because it comes up so often in Ignatius. When, for example, he recounts what happened to him on the way from Loyola to Barcelona, he tells us that he was,

... not considering anything within himself, nor knowing what humility was, or charity, or patience, or discernment in regulating and balancing these virtues. Rather, his whole purpose was to do these great exterior deeds because so the saints had done them for the glory of God, without considering any other more individual circumstances. (*Autobiography*, n. 14)

Possessing virtue is one thing; being able to discern in a way that regulates and measures this virtue is quite another. Similarly, the revelatory event is one thing; the combination of circumstances which gives this event its weight, its range and its meaning is quite another. We might say that Ignatius' life was marked by an ever more lively perception of the exact 'circumstances' that mark an event when it becomes spiritual, that is, when it becomes a matter of how we respond faithfully to God.

When setting out the first sketch of the Society of Jesus for the Pope in 1539, Ignatius notes firmly that the candidate, in his response to the grace that the Spirit imparts to him, should take care that his zeal remains *secundum scientiam*—with due regard for knowledge. In other words, it should remain within an exact perception of what is asked of him, with nothing beyond and nothing besides. And in the Society's *Constitutions*, there comes up often, as the final requirement for action, the obligation to evaluate 'according to the circumstances of times, places and persons'. These circumstances bring in an element of the relative, the momentary, of people's subjectivities, of the way things evolve. But nevertheless,

through all these human nuances, which often call for flexible judgment and delicate understanding, the life of the Holy Spirit is being engaged. Everything is seen, perceived, in terms of a specific history of 'ways of going forward', of wondering about the significance of the circumstances moving us from one situation to another, from one decision to another.

In this light, we can better understand the force of the answer Ignatius once gave to Fr Olivier Manare, whom he was sending as superior to the college in Loreto. Manare asked Ignatius about how he should discharge his responsibility. The answer is well known, but we can quote it anyway. Manare himself tells us.

He gave me only some instructions so that I would know how to conduct myself with the governor, the canons, and other externs. I was asking what rules to observe for, I said, the rules of the Roman college, apart from a few exceptions, were not suitable for this college, given the circumstances of this holy place and the large number of pilgrims. And those of the professed houses were hardly going to be applicable. He replied: 'Olivier, act in accord with what you see and with how the anointing [of the Holy Spirit] will teach you. Match the rules to the situation in the way you can.' I asked him about how to distribute the responsibilities among the people he was sending with me. He replied briefly along the same lines. 'Olivier, cut your coat according to your cloth; how you act and learn "will be taught"'

The manuscript breaks off with the sentence unfinished, indeed in the middle of a word. But that last half-word is part of the verb *docere*, to teach, and surely implies the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Manare goes on:

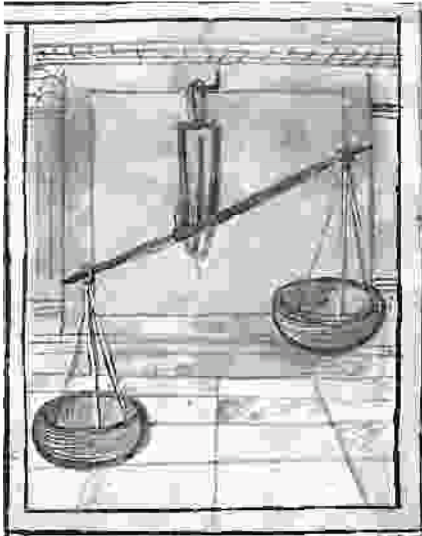
It once happened that I went against a written order of his. I told him that I had done this 'A human being', he replied, 'assigns the function; but God gives discernment. I want you to act in whatever you do without scruple, as you will judge what is necessary in the circumstances, despite the rules and regulations.'³

The Act of Decision

We have been talking about things coming together, and a respect for 'circumstances'. We must immediately add a third element that adds precision to the process: the act of decision and commitment. We know that the moment of the Election is at the heart of the Exercises. But it

³ MHSJ FN 3, 434.

is also at the heart of daily life. An Election enables us to express, firmly and publicly, what God is asking of us, the thing on which we accept that we can stake our life. In Ignatius' view, the Election is nothing other than the affirmation of a conviction: this is what, today, at this hour, in the circumstances that are mine, I judge to conform with what I am discovering about God in my life; this is what 'suits me', this is the right response that I can and must bring to God. At this definite moment of Election, our hearts stop being ambivalent in the face of our different desires and the varieties of possibility before us. These latter give way to integration, freeing all our energies for action.



Ignatius' image for expressing all this is not that of hands marking out the time on a clock-face, but of the needle in a balance which oscillates before coming to rest once the weights loaded on the two sides are equal. The different texts of *Spiritual Exercises* give various formulations: holding oneself in a balance between two sides; not inclining in one direction or another; holding oneself at the centre. But the point of all this is that the action should, so to speak, burst forth. I should try to be in the middle

of a balance, 'having meanwhile prepared my spirit so that my whole self will be carried to that side, there indeed, once I have recognised it as more fitting for God's glory and my salvation' (Exx 179).⁴

However, temporal imagery is also there. The Third Class of Persons wait, 'putting their strength into not wanting either this or anything else' (Exx 155). What are they waiting for? They are waiting for full light to be shed on what will then appear as better. They are waiting for motives to be purified, so that all they want is to serve God. When the decision comes, it thus puts an end to this time of waiting. The conscience's 'yes' is the precise reply, today's reply, to God's grace.

⁴ [Trans.] Fr Giuliani here uses the striking language of the 1548 Vulgate, which for once is stronger than the 1544 Autograph, now standard: 'potius interstitio et aequilibrio subsistere, parato interm animo, ut in eam ilico partem totus ferar, quam novero divinae gloriae et saluti meae fore aptiorem'.

Embracing the Future

I have just been talking about an end point, the culmination of a process of waiting. But there is no question of this favourable time in the present being shut in on itself. The energy mobilised—in submission to the Spirit of God and in fidelity to the task undertaken—continues to bring forth its fruit. The *kairos* opens up on to the future, a future constantly demanding that we embrace it. This is my third point—one at which I have been too long arriving. But just think. What would be the point of uncovering the *kairos* and finding our own precise way of expressing it, unless it was also the path opening us up to the future—our own, and that of humanity as a whole? There is more to be said. We need to be able to live the present, but in such a way that, from within it, the future gradually reveals itself in a new encounter with God.

St Ignatius' attitude to this is very enlightening. The present moment never provoked in him a response of stoppage or closure. He was able to live in the present while allowing the contours of what was to become his destiny gradually to emerge. There are three tendencies that seem to me to convey his general attitude. He was able to manage uncertainty; he was able to discern particular occasions; he was able to live within God's time.

Managing Uncertainty

Let us begin with his capacity to manage uncertainty. At every stage, Ignatius' life was shaped by decisions that had been taken in the light of immediate circumstances but which always opened up on to a new path. This is what made Jerónimo Nadal write the formula which became famous: 'he was being led to where he did not know, gently' (*deducebatur quo nesciebat, suaviter*).⁵ Gently: this does not mean that there was no darkness. It means rather that Ignatius was trusting in God who would make a new stage grow out of fidelity to the previous stage. And 'gently' indicates something else as well. The decisions were not so abrupt and clear-cut as to rule out other possibilities. What drove them still left room for uncertainty.

We need really to study in detail all the situations where Ignatius found himself having to take a decision. But here I just take one. On 15 August 1534, at Montmartre, Ignatius and his companions pronounced a vow that committed them for life. But its content was very complex. They had to think about what was sure and what was less sure, about their differences in temperament and culture, about the motives that were

⁵ MHSJ FN 2, 252.

impelling each of them to go to Jerusalem, to stay there or not, and to prefer one or other sort of apostolate. 'We did not know with certainty', says Ignatius, 'where we could better serve and praise God our Lord'.⁶

In the end, they did not opt between the different tendencies, but invoked a new basis for solving the issue: they entrusted themselves to the Sovereign Pontiff in his role as guarantor of universality. And on this they all converged. The points on which they were sure were affirmed. But where they remained unsure, they did not make a firm decision that might have proved fatal. Rather, they opened up a path to something else. As things turned out, this something else became fruitful: it was to become the institutional basis of the Society. Indeed, what was originally secondary, introduced in order to avoid settling a question, became primary, which decisively shaped what Ignatius did in future years.

Ignatius' life was marked by many decisions of this kind: decisions that combine fidelity to the demands of the present with openness to a future not yet revealed. He had to respect the mystery of this future until events, or some clear internal impulsion, enabled him to recognise the path that was opening up. For example, the apostolate of the order that Ignatius founded in 1540 was orientated directly towards the 'propagation of the faith'. Subsequent events in the life of the world and the Church (in particular the development of the Protestant Reformation) led them to define themselves some years later in terms of 'the defence of the faith'. This was more than an external evolution in the different versions of the institution's founding documents. It expressed, rather, a spiritual quality of availability, an openness to the needs of the present of such a kind that it could perceive the future that was on its way, and take it on board through, so to speak, a new decision.

One can see the same attitude in Ignatius on a point that was to become important: the apostolic effort exerted through the colleges for teaching the general public. At the beginning this activity was not in Ignatius' list of ideals. But the appeals became pressing. Finally, he accepted and fostered action of this kind. It is not that he was constrained by circumstances. Rather, he recognised that this new future was the unfolding of a present, and that the present had a dynamism within that had not yet fully revealed itself.

It is easy to see the very high level of interior freedom required for a person to remain at once attached—even passionately so—to the

⁶ MHSJ Const 1, 160.

demands of the present and yet detached regarding all the forms that this present might take tomorrow. We have perhaps an extreme example in the story recounted by Gonçalves da Câmara in his *Memoriale*, his diary of life with Ignatius:

Once when the doctor had told him he should avoid any bout of melancholy, because that would harm him, the Father said afterwards, 'I have considered what might cause me melancholy, and I have not found anything, except if the Pope were completely to undo the Society'.⁷

There must have been some detail unknown to us shared between Ignatius and his doctor that made the latter speak of a threat of 'melancholy'. But Ignatius does not seem to have been on the road to depression. He reflected in his own characteristic way—through an examination of consciousness that made him review what might have aroused this dark spirit—and he concluded, calmly, 'nothing'. Nothing, unless someone destroyed the project in which all his human energies, underwritten by God's grace, had been invested. It is good that Ignatius was made to confide this to us. The present in which he was living was so open to the future that he could accept its destruction as the means through which something else, still invisible, was being constructed.

So it is that he could add: 'and even this, I think, if I were to recollect myself in prayer for a quarter of an hour, I would be as happy as before, and even more so'.⁸ What is this joy? It is quantified: 'even more so'. There certainly would have been sadness, but a sadness overcome, and the heart would have been freer than it was before—freer, because it would have moved beyond every temptation to close itself in, and hold on selfishly to the present.

Discerning the Moment

What Ignatius confided here was an extreme case. In everyday life, things were no doubt less dramatic. Ignatius' inner freedom in the present was linked to a habit of discernment regarding what he calls the 'occasions'. He often comes back to this. He uses such phrases as 'occasions that must not be missed', 'occasions that God gives us', 'occasions that present themselves to us'. In all these, he sees signs addressed to us. They enable

⁷ *Remembering Iñigo: Glimpses of the Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. The Memoriale of Luís Gonçalves da Câmara*, translated by Alexander Eaglestone and Joseph A. Munitiz (Leominster: Gracewing, 2005), n. 182.

⁸ *Remembering Iñigo*, n.182.

our living present to enter into an activity responding better to the criteria of the more universal, the more pressing, the more necessary.

It is not that Ignatius had a taste for novelty. On the contrary, he distrusted it, instinctively. He would turn away from a theologian who, like Erasmus, seemed ambiguous in his positions. He set aside the works of Savonarola for an interesting reason:

Some hold him to be a saint; others think he was rightly burnt, and that is the more common opinion. And thus the Society, given that there are so many books by good authors who are not controversial, does not want people to have a controversial author in their hands. But it does not condemn him, nor censure him.⁹

There is no condemnation, but a refusal to take a risk. Or rather, it is not so much a matter of risk as of a concern, within the mission entrusted, to do what has been specified better and more fully. The *magis* requires that our engagement in the present should be submitted to spiritual discernment. This may always be calling things into question, and even prompting a new decision.

Ignatius explains the point clearly in the *Constitutions*, in a paragraph (VII.1.7 [616]) written in a way that shows meticulous concern for balance. The paragraph is about the spirit that should inspire a Jesuit engaged in a place or on a task by virtue of the mission entrusted to him. Here he is in one place. Can he go somewhere else? Here he is working on one thing. Can he do something else? These two questions boil down to just one: the one with which we are dealing here—how can he, within the present time, embrace the future?

Ignatius' response is, as usual, low-key. A person working in a particular area might make a few excursions elsewhere, but there are four conditions:

1. such excursions must be feasible 'without prejudice to the principal mission';
2. they must be practically possible;
3. 'it appears ... they could be fruitful in service to God our Lord';
4. afterwards, the companion must 'return to his residence' in order to come back to the usual place.

Look at what is being implied here about discernment. The text speaks of 'excursions' in the plural. This presupposes the repetition of experiences,

⁹ Ignatius to Cesare Helmio, 23 December 1553 (n. 4003), MHSJ EI 6, 80.

like 'repetition' in the Exercises. We are also reminded of two criteria: what is possible, and the fruits one can hope to obtain.

Regarding such possible activity, the Jesuit on mission '... can and should consider ... in what other things he can employ himself for the glory of God and the good of souls, not losing the opportunity for this which God sends him'. Here, too, discernment is required. He is not to neglect what he has been specifically charged to do 'for other opportunities in the divine service, even good ones'. This last phrase was written by Ignatius in the margin, in his own hand. The idea of an opportunity, an 'occasion', brings up the difficult confrontation between what one is doing as a mission received, and what one discovers by researches and excursions beyond the frontiers of the task undertaken.

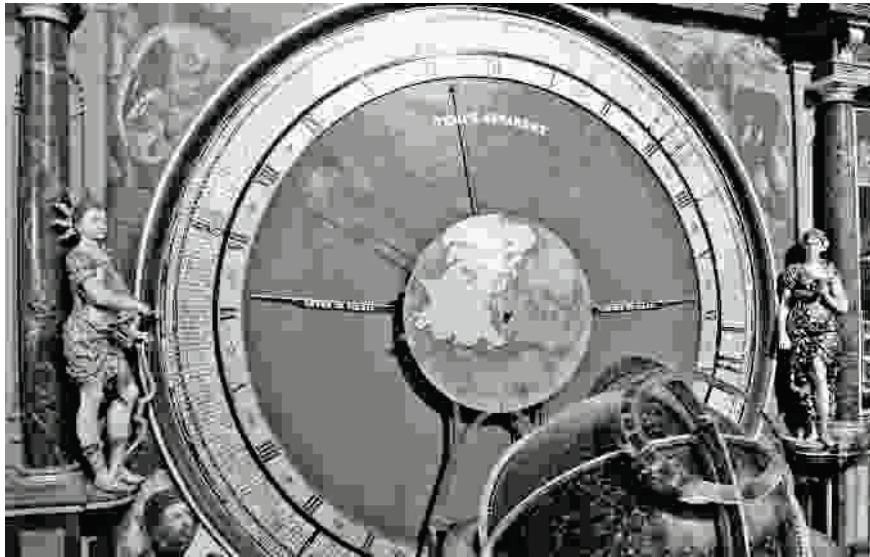
But is this really a confrontation? I was wrong to use such a word with its apparent implication of conflict. The point is that we should do our assigned task without being locked into it. We should be looking out for the needs that appear beyond the responsibilities given to us. We should stay sensitive to the opportunities God sends, in and through the initiatives we take for ourselves. We should keep our spiritual judgment sufficiently enlightened to see what is 'expedient in the Lord'. Weighing up all these elements will then be the central point of the communication between the one sent and the superior responsible for the mission. From this dialogue a decision will arise—a decision which is not the implementation of a plan of action, but rather an acknowledgement of what the Spirit of God has people sense as a means towards what Ignatius calls 'the good of souls'.

I have spent a little too much time on this text. But it seemed to me that it has a significance beyond its setting in the context of the Jesuit *Constitutions*. It brings to light an attitude that each of us, whether Jesuit or not, can make our own: that of finding at every moment the point where the present needs to make room for something which is not yet mature—something which then becomes a proposal for action, and finally a gift. In the conditions of discernment that I have described, this future, as it appears through the reading of signs spiritually received, is at once a human quest and a gift of God.

Living God's Time

We are touching here, it seems to me, on Ignatius' ultimate secret. Embracing the future freed up his energies and constantly renewed them. It also opened him fully to God's Spirit.

The present time, the right time (*kairos*), the future time: these are the three points that I have been trying to get us to think about. But as



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Astronomical clock, Strasbourg Cathedral, 1843

we have moved through them, we have arrived at the centre that throws light on the whole. This reality of time—always something to be better defined, already freighted with a time that is new—this time is nothing other than the time for encountering God. Or rather, to preserve the Ignatian vocabulary, it is here, and here alone, at this point of precise truth, that the human person ‘finds God’. Not in a contemplation that would take us away from our human task, but in a submission to the Spirit that purifies us completely of selfishness and places us in the service of souls.

St Ignatius, as we know, never stops repeating that ‘God does not make use of people only when they are praying’. Otherwise, he continues, ‘prayers for anything less than physically possible in the 24 hours of the day would be too short, for everyone must give themselves as completely as possible to God’.¹⁰ He himself confided at the end of his life that he was ‘always growing in devotion, i.e. in facility in finding God, and now more than ever in his whole life. And every time and hour he wanted to find God, he found him.’¹¹ This was the experience that was constantly filling him: even when ‘placed with the Son’, even when being drawn into the bosom of the relations between the divine Persons, ‘in all things,

¹⁰ Ignatius to Francisco Borja, July 1549, *Personal Writings*, 227; MHSJ EI 12, 632–652 (appendix 6, n. 3).

¹¹ *Autobiography*, n. 99.

actions, conversations, he felt and contemplated the presence of God and the attraction of spiritual things'.¹²

Nadal, whose testimony I have just cited, continued: 'Truly, this grace and light of his soul, as if in a certain splendour of his face, we saw to be unfolded in the transparency and rightness of his actions in Christ'.¹³ This clarity, this certitude—these are the signs that, within everyday activity, holy time has been clearly marked out. All the elements have been weighed; the decisions have been taken as a consequence of 'what is appropriate' and of 'what has been discerned according to the Spirit'. Human tasks undertaken and pursued in charity have become the way of expressing fidelity to God through fidelity to the demands of the body, of the work, of the task to be accomplished, and of all the 'circumstances' whose evolution we must constantly keep in view. It is in this fidelity that Ignatius finds his joy and his peace.

Ignatius tells us how he grew in fidelity in finding God. This experience has its source in the graces received at Manresa, when, on the bank of the Cardoner, his eyes began to be opened and he began 'understanding and knowing many things, spiritual things just as much as matters of faith and learning'.¹⁴ This was an illumination which made 'another human being' of him, because from then on he apprehended in one single vision the God who is the source of all good and the world which emanates from God's creative hands. With the years, he progressed in this unifying vision, contemplating in the infinite goodness of God 'the beginning, the middle and the end of all our good'.¹⁵ In the notes to his Spiritual Diary, we can overhear, through a few words opening on to an experience beyond measure, how the grace of 'a lover's humility' that carries him towards the Trinity is also that which carries him towards creatures.¹⁶ The same experience of faith makes him love God radically and exclusively, and also, at the same time and out of the same love, the world where God's glory lives and acts.

It is at this level of spiritual truth that we can sound the depths of the significance of human time for Ignatius—the human time in which God's time is perceived and received. Seen in the light of faith, each person, each situation, each created thing has its own place. And future time leads us deeper, as we calmly accept the decisions to be taken, the obstacles to

¹² MHSJ MN 4, 651.

¹³ MHSJ MN 4, 651.

¹⁴ *Autobiography*, n. 30.

¹⁵ Ignatius to Borja, late 1545, *Personal Writings*, 160 (translation modified); MHSJ EI 1, 339 (n. 101).

¹⁶ *Diary*, 30 March 1544.

be overcome and the actions to be taken at the 'right time', the time of God's presence, the time that enables us to 'taste' that presence as a gift.

One can thus explain why Ignatius was so free and so astonishingly at ease in the society and amid the problems of his time. He dealt with the great and the humble with equal willingness. The currents of contradiction flowing through the first half of the sixteenth century did not stop him from acting. The conflicts between persons, in particular between princes, between men of the Church, between the different people responsible for taking decisions—these conflicts did not become obstacles for him. We do not hear from him regrets, or fears, or negative judgments. He talks calmly of 'our times', of the 'times where we are'—never in such a way as to condemn them, always to receive them as positive givens within which he has to act. In *Spiritual Exercises* he makes one reference (Exx 369) to 'times as dangerous as our own', in connection with the relations between grace and freedom, a point on which the Roman Catholic faith was particularly threatened. But this expression is exceptional. Normally Ignatius accepts the times we are given as calls to discernment. Writing to Diego Laínez, for example, regarding the promotion of language study, and particularly that of Latin, he speaks of the times as 'delicate [*delicados*] in this regard', such that now 'when everyone wants to know these languages, a person who did not know them would have little authority'.¹⁷

* * *

How can we conclude? Rather than have recourse to Ignatius' words, I would prefer to evoke the last days of Ignatius' time as a human being. It seems to me that there we find what was the secret of his life, expressed even unto death.

The place was Rome, on the afternoon of a summer's day. Ignatius was ill, but people did not think his condition very serious. But all of a sudden he sent for his secretary, Juan de Polanco. He told Polanco that he was in extremis, 'without hope or almost without hope of temporal life' (I am quoting the narrative written by Polanco himself). He added that it would be good to go and inform the Pope. But Polanco was not so convinced that the matter was urgent, and he asked if he could go the following

¹⁷ Juan de Polanco to Diego Laínez, 21 May 1547 (n. 174), MHSJ EI 1, 523; see *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*, translated by Martin E. Palmer, John W. Padberg and John L. McCarthy (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 139: 'The times ... that are so delicate; this very expression points us towards the sensitivity, at once practical and accommodated to circumstances, required for what is at once effective action and a submission to the Holy Spirit's action in our human history'.

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day, the Friday. He had letters to write that afternoon for Spain, because the courier was leaving that very Thursday evening. Ignatius replied, 'I would prefer today to tomorrow, or I would prefer it to be done as quickly as possible—but do what seems to you best—I yield myself to you, in all freedom'. The doctors were consulted, and confirmed that the matter could wait.

The afternoon came to an end. Ignatius had his evening meal and, Polanco says, 'he ate better than he normally did'. He took part in a conversation on various topics, particularly the acquisition of the house needed for the expansion of the Roman College. Ignatius was sure that he was in his last hours, but he behaved completely normally. He had handed over the responsibility of notifying the Pope to someone else. He knew that sending the post out was important. And he continued to be involved, to the extent that his energy allows, in the day's business. So much so that, when night came, it was thought that he could be left on his own. A brother in the room next door heard him gently sigh, 'Ah, my God'. In the morning, about 5.00 a.m., people went in and found him dying. Polanco left in haste to notify the Pope. But when he got back, Ignatius had breathed his last.

It seems to me that this final evening, this last night, show that Ignatius had become detached even from his own death, and had handed himself over completely to his brothers and to God. His last human conversation, on matters of business, was not something different from his conversation with God—it was just the divine conversation's visible aspect. There was no distance, so to speak, between the urgency of catching the post, the problem of acquiring a house and the dialogue pursued with God. Ignatius was not divided. Death's immediate proximity in no way undermined his presence to human details, but it did give these details an infinite breadth, for God's action continued to pass through them. That night, the time of death was for Ignatius the time to come—but he maintained his total fidelity to the present moment.

Maurice Giuliani SJ (1916–2003) was the founding editor of *Christus*, the French Jesuit journal of spirituality, before serving as an assistant to Pedro Arrupe in Rome. He was centrally influential in developing the Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life, and served as principal editor for the standard French edition of Ignatius' writings, published for the jubilee celebrations in 1991. The present piece was written for a the launch of that significant volume.

translated by Philip Endean SJ