

## S. Ignatius of Loyola and the Holy Year 1550<sup>1</sup>

di Pedro de Leturia, S.I.

### Riassunto

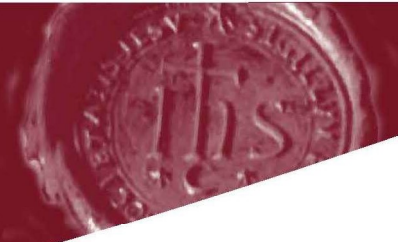
Il saggio di Pedro de Leturia analizza il significato del Giubileo del 1550, il primo a riflettere chiaramente la frattura della cristianità dopo la Riforma protestante. A causa della morte di Paolo III, l'Anno Santo fu aperto in ritardo da Giulio III nel febbraio 1550. Per la Compagnia di Gesù, questo fu un periodo di consolidamento istituzionale e fervore spirituale. Un evento centrale fu l'arrivo a Roma di Francesco de Borja, la cui presenza diede impulso a progetti fondamentali come la Chiesa del Gesù e il Collegio Romano. Durante l'anno giubilare, Ignazio di Loyola convocò i padri professi per la revisione delle Costituzioni e presentò ufficialmente le sue dimissioni da Preposito Generale per motivi di salute e umiltà. Sebbene le dimissioni fossero respinte, l'evento sottolineò il suo desiderio di totale dedizione spirituale. Il testo evidenzia anche l'impegno caritativo di Ignazio, che promosse l'assistenza ai pellegrini e la fondazione di un ospedale per i malati di mente. Gli anni che seguirono il 1550 videro l'espansione globale dell'ordine e la redazione dell'*Autobiografia* di Ignazio, consolidando il suo ruolo di mistico e psicologo moderno.

### Abstract

Pedro de Leturia's essay examines the significance of the 1550 Jubilee, the first to clearly reflect the religious division of Europe following the Protestant Reformation. Due to the death of Paul III, the Holy Year was opened late by Julius III in February 1550. For the Society of Jesus, this period marked a time of institutional consolidation and spiritual fervor. A central event was the arrival of Francis Borgia in Rome, whose presence accelerated key projects such as the Church of the Gesù and the Roman College. During the jubilee year, Ignatius of Loyola convened the professed fathers to revise the Constitutions and formally tendered his resignation as Superior General, citing poor health and humility. Although his resignation was rejected, the gesture emphasized his desire for total spiritual devotion. The text also highlights Ignatius's charitable commitment, as he promoted aid for pilgrims and the founding of an asylum for the mentally ill. The years following 1550 saw the global expansion of the order and the dictation of Ignatius's *Autobiography* to Luís Gonçalves da Câmara, solidifying his legacy as both a mystic and a modern psychologist.

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<sup>1</sup> Pedro de Leturia, "S. Ignazio di Loyola e l'Anno Santo 1550", *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 2411 e 2412 (1950), 609-616, 726-738. In these reference texts, you may consult the footnotes to locate the full bibliographic details of the cited sources.



## Parole chiave

Giubileo 1550, Ignazio di Loyola, Compagnia di Gesù, Francesco de Borja, Costituzioni gesuite, Papa Giulio III, Collegio Romano, Opere di carità.

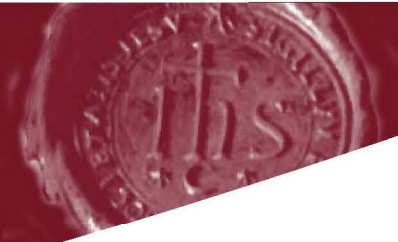
## Keywords

1550 Jubilee, Ignatius of Loyola, Society of Jesus, Francis Borgia, Jesuit Constitutions, Pope Julius III, Roman College, Charitable works.

The jubilee of 1550 draws the attention of historians for several reasons. It was the first jubilee that showed, in all its reality, the rupture produced in the Christian community by the definitive separation of the Protestants and Anglicans. In fact, that break had also been demonstrated at the jubilee of 1525, but then it had not appeared as extensive and definitive as it did twenty-five years later. Still, there were reasons to rejoice. Despite the absence of so many of the old brethren from the north, the groups of pilgrims of the incipient Catholic Restoration flocked to the tombs of the Apostles in such large numbers that nearly 50,000 faithful were recorded to have received the blessing of Pope Julius III at Easter in 1550.

One of the characteristic peculiarities of this jubilee year was that it did not open, according to custom, on 24 December 1549. Paul III died on 10 November, without publishing the Bull of Indiction, which was only partly ready, and his successor Julius III was only elected on 8 February 1550. For this reason, the Bull of promulgation *Si Pastor Ovium* bears the date of the 24th of that month, the day on which the Pope opened the Holy Door. Consequently, the jubilee year was extended until 6 January 1551. Much admired was the artistic hammer, which the Pope used to open the Holy Door – although, contrary to popular belief, it was not the work of Benvenuto Cellini. It was rightfully exhibited (at least until this last war) in the National Museum in Munich.

From the point of view of social and urban planning, this jubilee marked appreciable progress. As early as 29 April 1549, Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, Paul III's Chamberlain, had



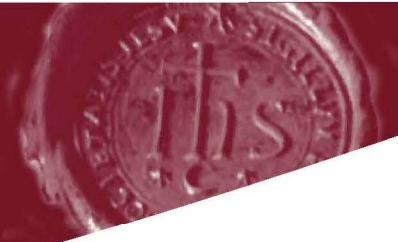
forbidden the raising of rents and the eviction of tenants, thus preventing apartment owners from speculating on the influx of future pilgrims. Julius III then appealed to Charles V of Spain and Henry II of France to send wheat, one from Sicily and the other from Provence; he also ensured that food prices did not go up. For the occasion, St. Philip Neri founded the Hospice of the Most Holy Trinity at St. Salvatore in Campo. That year, he was able to accommodate six hundred pilgrims in a single day. This figure largely exceeded in the jubilee of 1575, when, already magnificently developed, the Hospice was able to accommodate an average of seven or eight thousand people a day, as well as providing assistance to about 21,000 poor people throughout the year.

Among the personages who came on pilgrimage to Rome, Pastor recalls Michelangelo; Paolo Brezzi the dukes of Urbino and Ferrara, as well as the solemn ambassadors of obedience of the emperor Charles V, the king of France Henry II and the duke of Florence. But both historians failed to include the Duke of Gandia, Francis Borgia, in the list, even though his coming with a large retinue and still in the garb of the Grand Duke of Spain was, as we will say later, one of the most remarkable and edifying events of that jubilee. However, Brezzi is quite right when he notes that the two pearls of Holy Year 1550 were not the foreign pilgrims, but the two great apostles who were now permanent citizens of Eternal Rome, St Philip Neri and St Ignatius of Loyola.

Conversely, neither Pastor nor Brezzi, nor the other historians of the Holy Years that we have consulted, have reported anything about what the 1550 Jubilee was for St Ignatius, nor about what St Ignatius did to make it spiritually fruitful. Therefore, it will not be out of place to report here the most essential and significant information after gleaning it from the genuine sources of the *Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu* (MHSI).

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That for the founder of the Society of Jesus the specifically Roman practices of the Holy Year were of the utmost interest could certainly be deduced both from his *Rules for Thinking with and in the Church*, and from the special devotion he always felt from 1523 onwards in visiting *the Seven Churches of Rome* and in his assiduous practice of taking part in the *Lenten*



*Stations* in his Sanctuaries. In fact, the Holy Year, in essence, is nothing more than a powerful and graced invitation that the tombs of the Princes of the Apostles, the churches and the holy relics of Rome make to Christians scattered throughout the earth.

St Ignatius had already been thinking about the Jubilee of 1550 four years earlier. In fact, one day in the summer of 1546, he was talking with his favourite disciple, Peter Faber, about the composition of the Constitutions of the Order, which had just been started at that time, and about the appropriate date for bringing together the companions of the foundation, scattered here and there throughout the nations, so that they could approve them. Both of them thought about the Jubilee that was planned for four years later, a date that granted sufficient breathing space for the drafting of the desired code, and offered for the meeting a happy occasion of the Roman devotion. We are informed by Fr Polanco, to whom this detail belongs, that the death of Blessed Faber, which occurred unexpectedly a few days later, and the moral impossibility of bringing Xavier back from India for some time, cooled down Ignatius' desire of implementing his design. It, however, resurfaced in 1548, with renewed vigour, as evidenced by the letters of 18-19 August to Fr. Lainez, of 8 December to Fr Araoz, at the end of the year to the King of Portugal John III and to Simão Rodrigues, and another to Fr Araoz, Provincial of Spain, of 9 July 1549.

From these it appears that, in addition to the first companions, not excluding Xavier, Ignatius summoned the professed fathers dispersed in the provinces, however without giving a peremptory order.

This last detail, very characteristic of the founder's method of governance, is revealed by the dispositions communicated by Polanco to Araoz. "Our Father's mind about the journey is that, he entrusts himself to the devotion and, at the same time, to the discretion of those who are far away, which is to say that, having judged the necessity of their presence and the greater service of God our Lord entailed by their coming or not coming to Rome, they should decide with all freedom according to what devotion, prudence or rather devout prudence will advise'. It is not difficult to understand that devout prudence recommended the journey

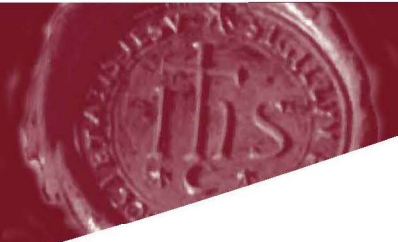


to all those who were not prevented from it either by unavoidable apostolic commitments—as was the case with Salmeron, Jayo, Nadal and Canisius—or by the physical impossibility of making it, as with Xavier, in 1549, engaged in his great undertaking in Japan. Only Fr Simão Rodrigues was a little reluctant to travel, although he too arrived in the Eternal City in February 1551.

Housing so many pilgrims in their only residence in Rome, Santa Maria della Strada, was a far from simple problem for the General. The indefatigable Polanco, to whom the saint commissioned the matter to resolve, has left us some interesting details in his *History*. He begins by telling us that in the middle of 1549, Ignatius moved more than twenty persons from Rome and assigned them here and there throughout Italy for the colleges that were then being set up, thus reducing the community in Rome to only fifty members. The place left available by those was increased by hasty adaptation and enlargement works. The adjoining part of the church was reserved for the Duke of Gandia and his entourage, and provisionally a door was opened there, giving direct access onto the street, to allow him to enter and leave without passing through the reception of the community, and to receive his many visitors.

In addition to this, Ignatius also ordered the rapid adaptation of some small houses that were then in the precincts of the professed house of Santa Maria della Strada, which, according to Polanco, consisted only of external walls covered by roofs. Ceilings and partitions were hastily constructed—though not without incident, as Polanco fell from a scaffolding which nearly cost him life. He, so reluctant to admit extraordinary events, attributed it to the intercession of St Ignatius that the fall did not have serious consequences. The absence of Polanco in those circumstances would have really embarrassed the general, because the fall occurred the very day before the duke arrived with his retinue.

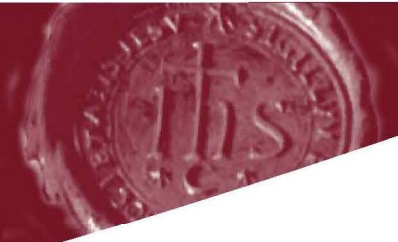
Thanks to these prudent arrangements, around 120 people were able to stay at Santa Maria della Strada during 1550: thirty of the duke's entourage and no less than 90 Jesuits. The latter, as was to be expected in the wishes of the Saint, did not really limit themselves to devoutly enjoying the jubilee. It was no coincidence that among those stationed there were



the Order's two finest orators: the fiery Francesco Strada and the profoundly erudite Giacomo Lainez, who systematically divided the labour of preaching between them during the Advent, delivering sermons in their church on Sundays and feast days—Strada in the morning, Lainez in the evening. These sermons, and the devout piety with which St Francis Borgia, his son Don Juan and his servants attended, produced a remarkable effect in the audience. Polanco recalls that due to the crowds of penitents eager to go to confession, the confessors were so numerous in listening to them that they found themselves obliged to sit too close to each other, and that was not enough.

That kind of mission was not limited to their church alone. While another father (his name is not mentioned in the sources) preached in the church of St. Celso near the very popular market *dei Banchi*, a swarm of young men did so in the middle of the market to the sellers, buyers and idlers, driving away the charlatans who then as now abounded in the area. Sources state that in this way many hearers conveniently prepared themselves for the Jubilee, and also that more than one among them left the world forever. Polanco, who communicated these happy results to the entire Society on 14 December 1550, must have felt a very special satisfaction in repeating them in his *History* in 1574.

With no less zeal and effectiveness St Ignatius endeavoured to extend the benefits of the Holy Year among the faithful of Europe and Asia who had not been able to come to Rome. Therefore on 13th June 1550, before Borgia came to Rome, he could write to him as follows: 'In these days we have been granted—by Pope Julius III—the jubilee for all those who in Gandia and in the rest of Spain, Portugal and the Indies are under the obedience of the Society, by means of the visitation in thirty days, consecutive or not, of four churches, or four times only one, just as the inhabitants of Rome must for the same number of days visit the four churches mentioned in the Bull... May it please the supreme and divine goodness that we know how to serve him with everything'. Then, on July 2, in a letter to Fr. Simone, a very cheerful Polanco conveyed that the grace was not only for the members of the Society but "for all the converts in those regions—of His Highness's Indies, and of Brazil, and of the Kingdom of Congo, and of Africa—and for all the Christian inhabitants; and that His Holiness had granted it with much kindness and edification, with one restriction (as the

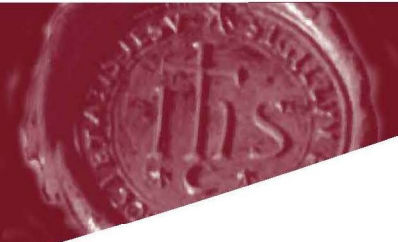


Pope himself had said jokingly), and this was that His Holiness gave all his authority on this matter to the Society, that they might communicate it to whomever they saw fit, and impose what they deemed appropriate, such as visiting some altar or church, or doing whatever else they thought best. I believe that this extraordinary gift will be a source of great spiritual joy in those regions, and from here the faculties of our Father will be sent, from which it will be seen how and to whom the Jubilee can be communicated'.

The faculty sent to Fr Simone, which is dated 7 July, as it bore the handwritten signature of the Saint is still kept at the Society's residence in Cordova of Tucumán in Argentina, or at least it was kept until 1872. Naturally, the expression 'Bride of Christ' had to be included, referring to the Roman Church, which had bestowed the grace. Even more significant is the clause added to the faculty sent on the same date to St Francis Xavier: 'by imposing on them ... what they judge to be suitable for their use, provided, however, that no offering of money is demanded: and if they offer to give it spontaneously, it must be received by those who do not belong to the Society and for works of piety that are considered suitable for the greater service of God, so that nothing will be of use to the Society, nor to its persons, houses, churches or anything else, so that the Jubilee may be given with the greater edification the less it is concerned'.

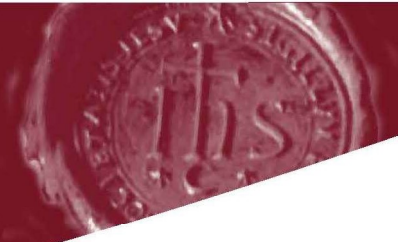
Pastor already recalls that Clement VII suppressed, in 1525, the obligation of almsgiving to pilgrims who came to Rome, but maintained it for the faithful who purchased it in their own homelands. In contrast, in these faculties—with evident progress of the spirit of reform of the Catholic Restoration—even this remnant of the Roman Curia's older, less disinterested demand is erased. It was precisely in this form that the Jubilee was solemnly celebrated in the fleet that sailed from Lisbon to the Indies in 1551, and, through it, to Mozambique, Goa, and other regions where the work of the Jesuits arrived. In the history of the Holy Years, this first extension of the sacred Jubilee to the Far East, a typically Ignatian initiative, has, as far as we know, not been recorded until now.

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We have already spoken of the coming of the Duke of Gandia with his retinue among the Spanish pilgrims. The fact deserves to be considered, because in the mind of St Ignatius (the true inspirer of the journey and its circumstances) this example was to give the Roman jubilee of 1550 not only splendour, but two lasting works in favour of the city of the Popes, of no less importance than St Philip Neri's *Hospice of the Most Holy Trinity*. It is well known that the Duke of Gandia and great-grandson of Alexander VI, Francis Borgia, had secretly made his solemn profession as a Jesuit in his ducal city as early as 1 February 1548, while retaining his titles and the administration of his possessions for a three-year period by papal dispensation. A private letter from Fr Araoz, Provincial of Spain, dated 10 March 1549, from Gandia, reveals how the newly professed was planning to make his change of life public. He wished to do this at the feet of St Ignatius, in Rome, and thought he could do it in the Jubilee year of 1550, when he expected to take care of all his state and family affairs in Spain. He had three doubts, however, on which he urged the General's prudent judgement. The first was whether he should leave in March 1550, when he expected to be free of his commitments, or wait until 24 June, the day when his eldest son Charles, turning twenty-one, could begin to validly sign public deeds, and thus assign the 500 silver ducats to the Roman College. The second concerned how he should travel, whether as a duke with an entourage, or as a pauper as his devotion would have preferred; the third was whether or not he should receive priestly ordination first.

Ignatius' answers well reveal his good qualities as a foresighted organiser of the Holy Year. Regarding the time of the journey, he had no doubts at all that preference should be given to the month of September and not to March, and not only for the reason indicated by Araoz, but also because 'it is far more beneficial for one's health to come to these places just before winter, already in October, than near summer, as experience proves'. And since the holy duke, at that time more eager than ever for mortifications and hardships, might have found that reasoning less edifying, he adds: 'here, in accordance with reason, we take such things into account, unless it concerns urgent matters of divine service, in which case human prudence gives way to the supernatural kind'. Regarding the manner of coming, that is, whether in a duke's habit or as a pauper, the answer to Araoz is twofold: In the letter addressed to Borgia himself, which is

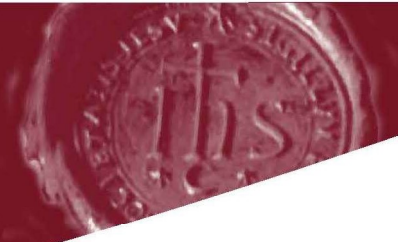


dated 9 July, he leaves it unspecified, leaving it up to the devout prudence of the duke; but already before (27 June) Ignatius had allowed Polanco to advise Araoz in a confidential letter 'that he come with a retinue as for the jubilee', and indeed 'that he not be deprived of everything, so that he might help pious works in Rome for a few years'. .. He then pointed out that the last point, that of priestly ordination, depended on the second, because ordination presupposed that the renunciation of the duchy and the journey into poverty had already been made public. However, Polanco notes to Araoz, 'for my part, I can add that in Rome he may well be ordained'; and he meant that if the duke had preferred to become a priest in Rome during the jubilee and give the extraordinary spectacle of his public renunciation of the world there, he would not have lacked the necessary dispensations from the Penitentiary...

In this well-conceived plan of Jubilee pilgrimage, one detail needs explanation, that of the *pious works*, to which, according to St Ignatius, Borgia could bring help to Rome. What these works were, how important they were for the city of the Popes and how they could be implemented was clearly explained by Ignatius' shrewd secretary in his confidential letter to Araoz of 27 June 1549.

The first, therefore, would be (he writes) 'the replacement of the little church of Santa Maria della Strada, insufficient for the crowds that flocked there and unworthy of the Order's mother house in Rome, with another larger and more decorous one. Many people in Rome wish to contribute to its construction, but it seems that if there is no one to begin, they grow cold, and if someone with 500 ducats a year, which is very little, were to provide for a few years, I believe, or rather I am certain, that so many others would contribute that in a short time this church would be built. And I am certain that if R. [Borgia] saw this thing as those who are present in Rome see it, he would not wish to miss in any way this opportunity of such merit, foreseeing how universally useful it would be for Rome, and how greatly the Society would be obliged to him in Our Lord'.

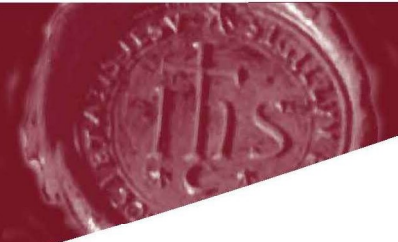
The other great undertaking in favour of Rome and the Society was the Roman College, which he had already been discussed with the duke, who—as previously mentioned—had promised that his heir would allocate an annual income of 500 ducats for it. Polanco esteemed this future



college 'without any doubt, as a particularly excellent work and of great service to God', as he had often heard Father Ignatius say, who had had the first idea of it. This work, too, many people say they want to do. First of all, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese; but 'the one who starts it will deserve it more than the others. In fact, seeing how much all of us in our Lord are indebted to the R. [Borgia], I would be pleased to see that he would also begin this undertaking, to be even more indebted to him'. Since, however, St Ignatius knew that the duke's possessions would not be sufficient, without completely liquidating the patrimony of the family and the duchy, for such great undertakings, he suggested to Polanco the practical way to succeed in the purpose, that of bringing now to Rome the five or six thousand ducats corresponding to the income of five hundred for ten or twelve years, using them since then in the construction of the church or of the College.

The reason why St. Ignatius did not dare make these proposals directly to Borgia was the fear that it would be too harsh a sacrifice for the holy Duke. In fact, at that time, Francesco longed more than ever to see himself without titles and possessions; therefore, making that journey as a prince through the cities of Italy along with his noble relatives to end it under the eyes of the Roman Curia with the spectacle of the foundation of two illustrious works in the Eternal City, must have cost him a great deal. Araoz rightly replied to Ignatius on 28 August 1549: 'I believe it will be a great trial for him, because he is looking forward to no longer being what he still is'. On the other hand, however, the Provincial knew well the Borgia's spirit of obedience as well as his esteem and veneration for Ignatius. Therefore, he concluded by saying: 'This and more (in my opinion) can be asked of him, as the most [perfect] of the Society'.

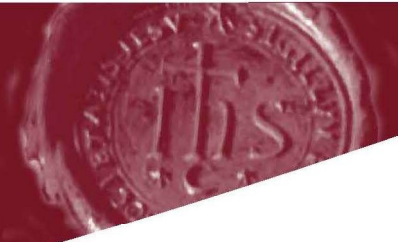
The Provincial was not deceived either. Not being able to go to Gandia, he sent him, accompanied by his explanations, the letters from Rome. The success was immediate, as Borgia himself, with all simplicity, wrote to Araoz on 3 January 1550: 'I have replied to master Polanco about V. P.'s letter, that is, about the proposal of Father Ignatius. If I have done so without first consulting Your Paternity, forgive me for the love of God, but the proposals seemed to me so convenient, that without admitting any doubts I replied that I would have done everything to arrange things in such a way as to be able in some way to begin both the College and the house in Rome. Benedictus Deus'.



The Founder's heart must have rejoiced on receiving this letter from the holy Duke, because he could see, in such a concrete case, to what extent the new professed had imbibed the spirit of self-denial and obedience proper to the Ignatian Institute. In subsequent letters Borgia confirmed what he had promised. For example, in one dated 31 March 1550, he informed him of his departure with Araoz and the others 'for the octave of the feast of Assumption of Mary'; in another dated 3 May he added that to fully assure his help to the future Roman College, he was making the paperwork to provide the money, and begged Ignatius to buy a suitable house in Rome for 600 or 800 ducats. 'This one, although presently it may not be much, if it is in a condition to be enlarged, will suffice for the time being. The essential thing is that the place is comfortable'. Yet, to ensure that his journey – which he expected to be triumphant – would not harm to his humility, he added: 'What I ask of Your Paternity, O my father, is that you put me at your mortification, knowledge, contempt and annihilation, as well as the love that the Lord communicates to you, and this I ask in all humility'.

On 31 August, therefore, the Duke of Gandia left together with his second son Don Juan, about twenty gentlemen and servants, and with the fathers Araoz, Strada, Oviedo, Mirón, Tablares, Bucerio, Emmanuele Sa and Francisco de Rojas. The journey to Genoa, Parma, Ferrara and Bologna was a triumph, since Hercules II of Ferrara and Cosimo II de' Medici were relatives of the Borgia, and Margaret of Austria, Duchess of Parma, daughter of Charles V, was an admirer of him and St Ignatius. Francis himself wrote to St Ignatius on 10 October from Bologna: 'I kissed the hand of Madama – Margherita – who gave me great news of V. P., and it gave me great pleasure to see what a true daughter and devotee she is of V. P.'

His entry into Rome on 23 October 1550 was also triumphant. He was received outside the city by a group of nobles and prelates preceded by Prince Fabrizio Colonna and by the ambassador of Charles V, Giacomo Hurtado di Mendoza, who took him with great splendour and accompaniment from the Piazza del Popolo to Santa Maria della Strada. And there, in the presence of such splendid company and before Loyola and all his sons of Rome who were waiting for him at the door, Father Andrea de Freux (Frusio), according to the humanistic custom of the time, greeted him with elegant Latin verses. The most beautiful moment was the family meeting with Ignatius in the small *camerette* he inhabited, where, in time, both saints

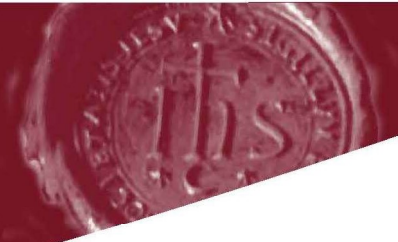


would eventually close their eyes; Borgia knelt before him, trying to kiss his feet. To stop him, St Ignatius likewise knelt down, but he could not withdraw his hand, which the great-grandson of Alexander VI kissed again and again. Finally, standing upright, those two giants of God's glory and of love for the Roman Pontificate joined in a long embrace.

This embrace marks one of the most fruitful and significant events of the 1550 Holy Year. This was confirmed by Pope Julius III, when, receiving the duke in audience on 28 October, he exclaimed with emotion: 'what a gift it would be for the Church if many princes imitating Francis Borgia were to be found there; the splendours of ancient Christendom would be repeated, when emperors and kings ran beseechingly to venerate the tombs of the Princes of the Apostles'.

It would be beyond the bounds of this article to recount what the Saint did and built from the day he entered Rome until the day he left on 4 February 1551. It is only worth mentioning the 4,700 gold ducats he left in cash for the construction of the church and college, with which the Roman College was opened on 18 February 1551, the most fruitful of St Ignatius' cultural works and his greatest contribution to the permanent splendour of the city of the Popes. The foundation stone of the new temple was also laid, and its construction began energetically, Don Juan, son of the duke, contributing with his own personal work. However, partly because the other alms promised to the Borgia by his sons, relatives and friends were not forthcoming, and partly because of the difficulties that arose with the plan of the new building, this, like the one that St Ignatius began again in 1554, had to be immediately suspended. One can really see that it was reserved for St Francis Borgia himself to complete after years and years, as General of the Order, the work he had begun in the Holy Year of 1550. With the enlightened patronage of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese and the help of Prince Marcantonio Colonna and Cardinal Ottone Truchsess, in 1568 the magnificent temple of Jesus began to be built, a jewel of art in the city and still one of its most vital centres of worship.

Only the third of the plans for the jubilee remained unimplemented: that Borgia, having made his change of state public, should have celebrated his first mass in Rome. The reasons for this non-implementation are not well known. It seems, however, that the main reason was the



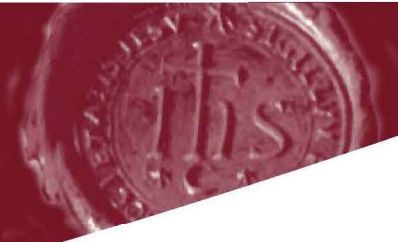
duke's sudden fear of being created a cardinal, because it is known that when Julius III learnt that Borgia had become a Jesuit, he thought of employing him in the Sacred College, and more than once mentioned the project to high prelates of the Curia. Therefore, Francis tried to get out in a hurry. According to Nadal, Jerusalem was the place where he thought of taking refuge, but Ignatius did not agree. The prudent superior thought it was time to go into exile, but he preferred it to be in Spain, where he had a great plan for the apostolate. That is why it happened that Borgia's first mass was not celebrated in Rome but in Loyola, on 1 August 1551, in the ancient chapel of the Tower House, where God had called the founder of the Society of Jesus to follow him. Even today, the vestments from that first mass are preserved there as precious relics.

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It now remains to consider the third aspect of the theme: the relationship of the 1550 Jubilee with the person of St Ignatius himself.

Fr Ribadeneira recounts having heard from his own lips on 7 April 1554, that in the year 1550, he had fallen gravely ill. Upon learning that the doctors considered his relapse fatal, just before his imminent deliverance [from life], he felt filled with such great joy that they were compelled to forbid him from dwelling on death—to stem the flood of tears in which he dissolved. The memory of that joy was still very vivid in Ignatius in 1555, so much so that he told Fr Gonzalez de Camara about it when he dictated the second part of his *Autobiography* to him that year.

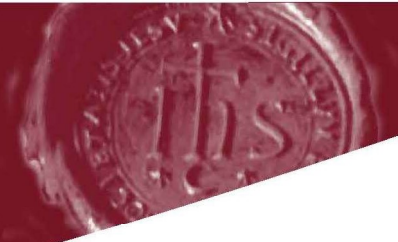
The Joy sprang from the idea of *liberation*, that is, from the experimental foretaste of heavenly bliss. Yet, in a soul as apostolic as Ignatius', ever ready to forget his own paradise when there was work to be done for the service of God, this prospect would hardly have remained separated from another experience rich in inner peace; akin to that which made the Apostle say: *cursum consummavi, fidem seroavi*. Indeed, precisely in that Jubilee year of 1550, he was heard repeating the words that alarmed Jerome Nadal, namely, that he had asked the Lord for three graces to be granted before his death: the approval of the Institute of the Society by the Holy See, a similar approval of his book of Spiritual Exercises, and the drafting of the Constitutions. Now, of these three graces, the second concerning the Exercises had been



granted through the well-known Brief of Paul III: *Pastoralis officii*, of 31 July 1548; the other two were not fully realised until the Holy Year 1550.

This became immediately evident in the *Constitutions*. As we noted at the beginning, as early as 1546 Ignatius and Faber had envisioned the year of the Jubilee as the deadline for their completion, so that they could convene the first companions and the professed members of the Order in the Eternal City at such an opportune time, since according to the Bull of Paul III, these members were to approve them. Thanks to the diligence and prayers of the founder, as well as the adaptable and intelligent cooperation of his secretary Fr Polanco, the codex in its third draft (Version A) could already be considered complete by the end of 1549, and most of the professed members gathered at Santa Maria della Strada by late 1550. Among them all (though only because Xavier was absent, being entirely occupied with the Japanese mission), the learned and very faithful Diego Lainez stood out. Due to St Ignatius' illness and particularly the delayed arrival of Salmeron, who was detained by urgent business in Verona, the examination and approval of the *Constitutions* did not occur until early January 1551. Only somewhat later came the approval, with some observations, from Simão Rodrigues and Bobadilla. Yet even here we find a curious coincidence: the 1550 Holy Year, as we have mentioned, was also extended until the Epiphany of 1551.

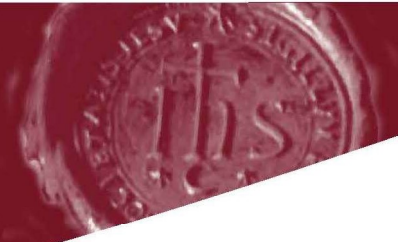
It might seem instead that no connection can be found between this Holy Year and the first grace: the Pontifical confirmation of the Society's Institute, since Pope Paul III had already solemnly confirmed it as early as 1540 and reconfirmed it three more times thereafter. Yet there is no doubt that it was only in 1550 that the Founder saw his first request completely fulfilled. In fact, it is well known that as soon as they were in possession of the first Bull of approval from Paul III, Ignatius and his companions worked to obtain a broader one, as they stated in the *Constitutions* of 1541. And, as the facts later showed, it was not only a matter of having the limitation of the number of professed to sixty lifted, which they had already obtained in 1544, but they also wanted the purpose to be delineated more precisely, and thus the intimate structure and juridical functioning of the Order. The preparation of the new Bull proceeded in parallel with the drafting of the *Constitutions* from 1546 to 1549, and cost both Ignatius



and Polanco no little effort. The Bull in 1549 was already largely ready in the chancellery of Paul III, but was published by his successor Julius III on 21 July of the Holy Year 1550. The greater precision with which they fixed the purpose of the Society, the rigour of its poverty, the difference between professed and spiritual coadjutors, the character of its students and other points which need not be recall here, explain the intimate joy it caused Loyola. Even before the approval of the *Constitutions* by the professed, the Holy Year had brought him the definitive approval of their most essential lines by the Vicar of Christ himself!

At the end of the Holy Year, Ignatius made an entirely unexpected decision; namely, on 30 January 1551, he communicated to the congregation fathers, a letter of formal renunciation of his generalate, bringing as his reasons for the resignation, the difficulty of the office, his sins, shortcomings and illnesses. This renunciation was not improvised. In the same writing Ignatius said that he had been considering it 'for several months and years', and that he had determined to do so 'many and many times'. We think that as early as 1546, when he proposed to gather the professed for the 1550 Holy Year, he also intended to take advantage of such a good opportunity to make the 'offering' of his office; and we would venture to add that, beyond the reasons of sincere humility he expressed in the note and those of conscience which in 1550 assured him that he had already completed his substantial work, there was also at play a motive of shrewd prudence.

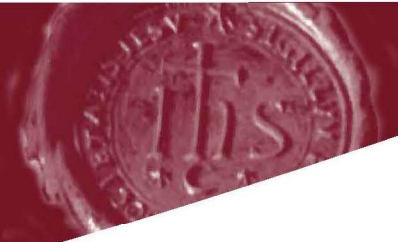
St Benedict had established abbots of his monasteries as lifetime appointments. The abbots of Cluny had likewise been lifelong positions. But since the 13th century, the prevailing practice among mendicant orders had been to limit the terms of ministers or masters general to a set number of years. Even the Benedictine reforms of St Benedict of Valladolid and St Justina of Padua had abolished the lifetime tenure of abbots. On the eve of the founding of the Society of Jesus, the Theatines—the first of the orders of regular clerics—followed this same directive, staunchly defended by Gian Pietro Carafa, the future Paul IV. Ignatius judged it better to take a completely different path for his Order, and he held firmly to this course against all opposition, obtaining



approval from both Paul III and Julius III. Yet regarding its application to himself, he was determined to dispel any suspicion – both then and in the future—that he had adopted this system for personal advantage. This explains both his stubborn reluctance in 1541 to accept the generalate to which his companions unanimously called him, and his resignation in 1551. Moreover, certain bitter complaints later made by Paul IV and even by Bobadilla about Loyola's 'tyrannical' governance suggest that these precautions were not unwarranted."

Thus, the scene that took place on 30 January 1551, in the small rooms—still preserved today—where he lived and where, in all likelihood, the professed fathers had gathered, becomes even more interesting. Loyola had anticipated that one or another of them might oppose accepting his resignation, and so in his note he wrote: "if... it is found that opinions are not in agreement," they should earnestly commend the matter to His Divine Majesty, etc. In reality, however, there was only one dissenting voice—that of the ingenuous and pious Fr Andrea d'Oviedo, later Patriarch of Ethiopia, who said that if a saint like Ignatius claimed he was unfit, they ought to believe him. But in the face of the unanimous opposition of all the others, d'Oviedo yielded most willingly, so that—as Polanco explicitly notes, both a witness and participant—the decision was made in full unanimity: *nemine except*.

Thanks to a later communication from St Francis Borgia, former General of the Society, we know the exact wording with which the assembled fathers responded to the note, as well as the Saint's subsequent reaction. One may reasonably suppose that he was in his workroom—the one opening onto the balcony overlooking the starry sky, where he had written the *Constitutions*. There, Polanco brought him the fathers' reply, who had most likely gathered in the larger room where Ignatius used to celebrate Mass, and where he, and later Lainez and Borgia, closed their eyes in death. Their reply was: "They had resolved that no change should be made, and that his Paternity should take patience and continue to bear the cross with gladness." To which the Saint at once responded: "Tell them that I shall bear the cross—but let them be assured that I shall make them bear it also."



This imposition of the cross upon his sons seems to refer both to the ailments and shortcomings which, in his humility, he had acknowledged in his written statement, but perhaps also to the perfection he would demand of them – an obedience of complete self-renunciation for the sake of a truly universal apostolate. And indeed, this is precisely what came to pass. Though the Holy Year of 1550 brought neither the eternal joys of paradise nor release from the generalate to the apostle and mystic of Santa Maria della Strada, it did grant the Society, Rome, and the Catholic Church the opportunity for that colossal effort which he undertook in the last six years of his life. One need only recall the actual founding of the Roman College (1551) and the German College (1552), the remarkable proliferation of such institutions across Europe, the promulgation of the *Constitutions* and the famous Letter on Obedience (1553), the organisation of the missions to Brazil and Ethiopia, and finally, the dictation of his autobiographical reminiscences to Fr. Gonçalves da Câmara in Rome (1553–1555). This work, a marvel of spiritual introspection, shattered the conventions of humanist literature, revealing instead the raw, objective expressive power of a modern psychologist and mystic.