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The Contribution of Saint Ignatius

THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

I will speak in English, not because it is closer to Spanish, but because I am used to it. And I will speak standing up. I don't want to fall asleep during my own talk! I thought that instead of speaking about the Jesuits—Sister Maria Chiara can speak better about that—I will speak about what St. Ignatius wanted, in his own time and even now, what he wanted from religious life, and you will excuse me if I mix Ignatian things in with Asian things. I spent forty-eight years in Asia, most of my life. And I remember Bishop Hamao, who was president of the bishops' conference in Japan for a while. He was asked why Christianity doesn't grow in Japan. And he answered, "Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.' Most Asian spiritualities are spiritualities of the Way. How to become deeper, how to pray, how to concentrate, how to keep in balance.... Yoga is a way. Zen is a way of concentration. Judo is the way of the weak, using the strength of the strong. Tao is the way. So, most of Asian spiritualities and religions are religions of the way. But, he continued, most Western missionaries came speaking about the truth. So we never met. And maybe this is one of the reasons why Japan didn't become very Christian. Or at least didn't feel at home in becoming Christian." At the time I heard this, I was wondering how much truth there was in it. Today, I think there is a lot of truth in it.

Europeans tell you to forgive. Asians ask, but how do you become a forgiving person? How do you change your feelings? How do you manage the relationships in your family, because sometimes not forgiving is part of family ethics or family principles. Europeans tell you to have the same feelings as Jesus Christ, and they write a book about what the feelings of Jesus Christ are. Asians say, but how can you have the feelings of Jesus Christ? How? How are you transformed? How are you changed? So, I think there is a great difference in the approach. And, to my mind, St. Ignatius was more like the Asians than like the Europeans, because St. Ignatius was concerned about method, about "how to": how to change, how to become deeper, how to become better, how to grow into Christ. "How to" is the key question for St. Ignatius. And he found a method, he found a way, and that's what he wanted to communicate. To the Jesuits first, and then to the whole church. Now in my ministry I have to travel a little bit. And the more I travel, the more I see how right Bishop Hamao was. Asia is the way. Europe and United States are concerned about the truth and how to define, how to explain. Africa and Latin America are life, and they keep values that in Europe we forgot long ago. They keep the value of the family, the value of children, the value of friendship, the values of consensus, the values of community and development, etc. So, I think Bishop Hamao was right. We need the whole world to find the fullness of Christ.

THE WAY OF WISDOM

In recent years I have been fascinated by the idea of wisdom. I think wisdom comes before religious feeling. And you cannot find more wise men than in Asia. Asia is full of wise men: Confucius, Buddha, the mystics of the Upanishads, Mencius, Lao Tzu, in every country there is a list. This wisdom is the work of the Spirit of God. I'm convinced that we need this wisdom. Not only to be open and to feel good about being open and learning all the time. But because we need the fullness of Christ, and the fullness of Christ comes from all the wisdom that we can manage to receive. And I think that this should change our approach to mission. We were so eager, and I can speak of my own shortcomings and my own mistakes, we were so eager to communicate in Asia what we had seen in Europe that we never listened. We never sat down to listen. What do they

have to contribute? What human wisdom do they have to communicate? The Spirit of God has been at work for centuries. Very soon after going to Japan, I heard that God had been there before the missionaries came. And I am convinced that this is so. God has been working, very busily, in the wisdom, in the traditions, and in the cultures of these people.

Before I went to the Philippines, the last thing that I did in Japan was to coordinate, with another Japanese theologian, a discussion about the parable of the sower, the sower who goes to plant the seed. And there were two commentaries, one by a missionary, a French-Polish missionary, and another by a Japanese Franciscan who had studied the Bible. The missionary presented the traditional view where the missionary is the sower, and he spreads the Word of God, and so on. And the Japanese said, no, this is not a correct interpretation. God is the sower. And if you read the New Testament carefully, you will see that Christ is the sower. And he is sowing in the hearts of people. And the missionary goes there for the harvest. Which is a change of perspective. That's why, when the missionary goes there and preaches, he finds that some people respond to the Word of God, because they already have the Word of God in their hearts. That's why they respond, and this is the harvest. It's not that the missionary goes to a desert. He goes to people who have been in contact with God, and God has been working in them in many, many ways. And I think this is very important. Therefore, we ask ourselves, what is the contribution of Ignatius? Ignatius would have been very comfortable in Asia. Not only because Asians are very welcoming, and we all feel comfortable there, but because they think in a way that Ignatius would have found very familiar. Because it's the way of wisdom, it's the way of going deep into reality, returning to reality.

THE CONVERSION OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS

Let me give you another example. Not Ignatius, but somebody more modern, whom some of you might know, especially the Canadians: Father Bernard Lonergan. I'm sorry to give examples of Jesuits, but this is my source. Father Lonergan developed a very good study of how we reach the truth (we are still concerned with truth). And he tried what St. Ignatius tried: to integrate the person. And he said that to become integrated you need to go through three conversions. Intellectual conversion, moral conversion, and religious conversion. He expressed religious conversion in terms of falling in love. You get in touch with the love with God and then everything changes. You are in love with God.

And then there is intellectual conversion. He expressed this in three steps. First, be observant, look at reality, because reality is the field in which we are going to discern the will of God. Be observant, be intelligent, and be consistent. These things together. That is intellectual conversion. You don't make judgments out of the blue. You try to be consistent with what you understand of reality; that's why you have to be observant, not just follow rumors. You don't follow rumors; you are attentive to reality. You try to find solid reality and then you try to be intelligent and see the relationships in reality. And then you are consistent and you make judgments. "This is true. This is not true." That is intellectual conversion, and then you are responsible and you make moral judgments. Moral judgments, leading to action. You do something. You respond to reality, to the reality you have understood, in a committed way.

So this is the synthesis of Lonergan, and then one of his disciples, an American, Robert Doran, he said, "He's missing something, and that something is very Ignatian. You have to be observant, you have to be intelligent, you have to be consistent, but you have to be free." And that means the conversion of the subconscious. Because, as we heard yesterday from Sr. Angelica, to be compassionate you have to be spontaneous. Real compassion is the compassion that is spontaneous. It comes from the heart. It is not that you say, "I have to love my enemies and so I love you." No. Nobody would like to hear that. It comes spontaneously, because you are in love. And that's where Lonergan was right, but Doran said, you have to be free. And in order to be free, you have to convert your subconscious. So spontaneously you become a good person. Spontaneously you become a loving person. Spontaneously you become a community person,

which is something that we are learning in Taizé. Spontaneously you become like Christ. Because if it's not spontaneous, it will be rational and very easily rationalistic, which is not necessarily what we want. And therefore, this conversion of our feelings, even the hidden feelings, the subconscious, is essential.

That's why, incidentally, both my predecessor and I have always had our doubts about community discernment. How free is a community? How free is a group? How much can you take for granted that people are free to decide to change, to let go? I suppose that this is one problem that in Taizé will never be finally resolved. How can a community continue to protect the simplicity, the detachment, the freedom, that community life requires? That's why it is so difficult to decide things in a group, because there are forces that come from within the group, and someone doesn't want to lose something that he considers very good. But that pulls the group in a certain direction. So, Doran said that what was missing in Lonergan was freedom, the freedom of the person that we consider so important.

ATTUNED TO THE MUSIC OF GOD'S SPIRIT

So then, what is the contribution of St. Ignatius? I think St. Ignatius wanted to contribute to others what he had experienced. He had experienced that he had become a free person. He had become free, and then he found a method. And he wanted to communicate the method to others. And that's why he left the booklet of the exercises. I am not making propaganda for the exercises. But I think that what Ignatius wanted was to make people free. And, because he had experienced it, he said, this is a way of freedom, of coming in touch with your deepest feelings, where the Spirit of God is working. And then you can look for the will of God, which is what all of us here, without distinction, are all looking for. The Russians, the Greeks, the Protestants, the Catholics, we all want the will of God. There is no distinction there.

What St. Ignatius wanted most of all was to find the will of God, and he found a method and that's what he wanted to communicate with others. So he said, be attuned, be symphonic. Be attuned to the music of the Spirit of God, because if you are attuned, you will vibrate with the things of the Spirit. If the chord is tuned as la, you play la, the chord vibrates because it is la. And therefore St. Ignatius' contribution is, be attuned all the time. And that is the only way for me to understand why he wants people to find God in everything. Because they find the tone. It's the tone that I have, so this is from the Spirit. And that's why he asked the Jesuits to find God in everything. But how can you find God in everything if you are not attuned? If you cannot feel it? If you cannot feel it, it becomes mental, it becomes intellectual. The whole methodology is precisely to learn how to feel it, how to be attuned, how to go into your deepest feelings and let the Gospel work on them. I think this is the contribution of Ignatius and this is what we can learn from him.

I think this is crucial to Judaism, to Islam (the Muslim is the man who surrenders to the will of God) to Protestantism and to Catholicism. We all want to be attuned to the Spirit, so that in everything we can feel the Spirit. We talk with a person, and we feel the Spirit. We enter into a reality, any reality, and we feel the Spirit. Or we don't feel the Spirit. So I think the final question should be: how do we do that? Well, St. Ignatius left us the Exercises, the Examination (a review of the day, not only to find what was wrong, but to find what was good: where was the Spirit at work? where was it not at work?), Spiritual Direction, and devotions. Ignatius was a very devout person, but practicing devotions is a way of being changed, because you put affection into it. Devotions are not merely, "Well I believe in the Blessed Virgin, but it's quite distant." No, devotion means a commitment, a personal commitment, a relationship, and that relationship builds up values, and builds up tendencies, and builds up the feelings at the root of them. So I would consider that to be the contribution of Ignatius to the Church, and therefore something that can be useful for all of us.