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THE ROAD FROM LA STORTA

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TWO

IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA: EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

One day, near Caesarea Philippi in Palestine, Jesus asked a question of a group of twelve men: "Who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:15). It is a clear and precise question that we still ask today. To tell the truth, at first Jesus had asked something more simple: What did the people think of him? The Twelve could have limited themselves to giving the routine responses. But hearsay or slogans were of no interest to Jesus, nor were the crafted formulas of professional theologians. He desires and insists on receiving from us an authentic response that comes from deep within ourselves. This response should not be merely the chance to say or to repeat some truth heard from others or recounted in books. The issue is to speak the honest truth: "And you, what do you say?"

Leafing through the book of two thousand years of Christianity, we find an uncountable number of personal responses, new and unsettling. Occasionally it has been noted that, while each of the thousands of images and statues that illustrate the figure of Buddha rigidly maintains the same characteristics, the most extraordinary diversity runs through the attempts at depicting the countenance of Christ. To start with, a Michelangelo, a Dalí, the painter of an icon, and the sculptor of a medieval cathedral appear to have nothing in common when they try to depict the countenance of the Word Incarnate. But then, turning to personal experiences of encounters with Jesus, holy men and women have communicated markedly personal and individual ways of responding to Jesus's question: "And you, what do you say?"

Of course, "Only one is your Master, Christ" (Mt 23:10). But his person is so rich and his personality so inexhaustible that it is impossible to reduce his face to a single expression. It is possible, on the other hand, to be caught up in one or other of the unique characteristics in the treasury of the Good

News that is Christ. He can be the Poor Man for Francis of Assisi, the Omnipotent Lord for the Byzantine of the East, the Beloved Groom for the school of Carmel, or the Suffering Servant for a base community in Latin America. We are dealing each time with a new response to the same question posed by the Person of Christ. Ignatius of Loyola's Christ is located in this spiritual context.

Jesus Christ, the God to Serve

In the first period of his life, Iñigo Lopez de Loyola, born in 1491, was content with being a refined and joyous young man, who loved fine clothing and the good life. A solid Basque, however, he was strongly attached to a faith that made him repeat what was said of Jesus. To elicit from him a personal response, Jesus makes use of what happens around May 24, 1521, in Pamplona. The Spanish city is awakened that day by the sound of a French horn to the proposal of an honorable capitulation. The French soldiers are many and the Spanish garrison, unpaid for eighteen months, not very confident. But Don Iñigo de Loyola prevails, for a Spanish garrison ought never surrender without resisting the French invaders. During the murderous duel of artillery around the city of Pamplona, Iñigo stations himself in the most exposed spot to regulate and correct the firing ranges. Then the moment comes when a canon ball ricochets off a wall and strikes his right leg under the knee.

The wounded man insists on returning to the manor house in Loyola, where recovery is long and painful. He asks for some books to read in order to distract himself. Accustomed to immersing himself in novels patterned on themes of chivalry, he discovers with deep chagrin that the library offers him only the *Life of Christ* and a book in Spanish on the lives of saints. Attracted in spite of everything by the golden legends of the holy knighthood of this gentle captain, the Eternal Prince Jesus, Iñigo begins to discover the call of another King. And he pauses to reflect.

One is not converted by a book; one is converted by what a book makes one discover. So the reading that excites Ignatius's imagination while recovering—and makes him dream for two, three, and four hours without realizing it—achieves something. On the one hand it proposes all that he must do in service of a certain lady of noble rank; on the other, it incites him to put himself at the service of Jesus to do the "great deeds" which characterize St. Francis of

Assisi and St. Dominic de Guzmán. The worldly dreams fascinate him but leave a taste of vanity, sadness, and hollowness. The seductive alternative of being at the service of Jesus leaves him happy and contented, as if his life has finally found there its true fulfillment.

Within these conflicting trains of thought that agitate him and the growing recognition of the service to be rendered, Ignatius progressively discovers Jesus Christ whole and entire as his God. In fact, it is precisely in the experience of meaninglessness, of disgust with life, and of the joy of living to serve Jesus that the encounter with Christ occurs. The new thing for Ignatius will not be confessing his Christian faith—which will be simply the Church's faith—but a vision of Jesus that cannot be separated from serving him in the concreteness of daily life, oriented now apostolically, and which in itself evidences a response to the question asked by the Lord. This response is transfomed into a triple scrutiny which should lead to the service of Jesus' mission: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ? For Christ—who from Creator became a man, and who passed from life to death on the cross, for my sins.

Ignatius's initial experience is then enriched by immersion in life with Christ, by being a companion in a real sense in a "pure service of the Father" guided in everything by the Spirit. If we try to distinguish in this experience the features of Christ that Ignatius saw and lived, what strikes us above all else is that Christ is one of the Trinity. From the beginning of his experience with God, Ignatius discovers the Triune God—no doubt influenced by the *Life of Christ* written by Ludolph the Carthusian (who died in Strasbourg around 1377). His great devotion to the Holy Trinity is characterized by a growing familiarity into which is interjected a spirit of reverence in the presence of the Divine Majesty. This Trinitarian attraction will not be, as in the monastic tradition, a repose in abandonment to the mystery of the contemplation of glory; for Ignatius, it transforms itself into a contemplation of all created things, starting in their Creator who is the Trinity.

Probably, Ignatius was the first person in the history of Christian spirituality to perceive the Trinity as God at work—as the God who continues to work, always filling up the universe and actively awakening the divine life in all things for the salvation of humanity. If the inspired monk contemplates, the inspired Ignatius works—adhering with all his heart to the designs of the Trinity, offering himself to act in synergy with the Trinity so that his work is for the Trinity's glory. In that way, the Trinitarian attraction in Ignatius's devotion tends to

embrace the whole of humankind. His devotion seeks only God, not, however, only for himself, but rather for all his brothers and sisters. Thus might all created things, not evil in themselves but often averted by humankind from their source and origin, return with humanity to true meaning in God.

In this Trinitarian prospective, Christ comes as God. It is sufficient to examine Ignatius's semantics to note that his Christological titles revolve around *Christ our Lord, the Christ, the Lord, the Eternal Word,* much more rarely *Jesus*, and it follows from this that Ignatius refuses to see Jesus in any way other than in his majesty as Lord, One of the Trinity. In this way, the glory that surrounds Christ with splendor is not only the glittering renown of an extraordinary ruler or the halo of an outstanding spiritual leader, but the glory of the Eternal Lord of all things. This will never be disconnected or disassociated from the fullness of the divine being which reunites him to God the Father. It does not really matter that this divinity is hidden in the manger or on the cross; it does not really matter that it shines through his words or at the right hand of the Father: for Ignatius, Jesus is the Lord, the Eternal King, because he is the Word of God.

As a consequence, Ignatius does not recognize the distinction made between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. This does not involve, however, any depreciation of the intense passion that Ignatius feels for the historical Jesus—his words and gestures, his lifestyle and the place where he lives—all of which help in reaching him whom Ignatius never stops loving and praising in his majesty as Eternal Lord. It does mean that Jesus can never be what some people today claim: one voice among the many voices of spiritual teachers, of the wise, and of prophets. His is rather *the* voice, *the* light, *the* truth, because Jesus has the status that none of the others have, One of the Trinity.

One of the Trinity Always with the Spirit

Since Ignatius's Christ is One of the Trinity, he is always with the Spirit. What exists in modern Western culture today already existed in the sixteenth century: the temptation to liberate the Spirit from Christological mooring, which is trammeled in Paul's conviction that the Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). In this area, Ignatius proves cautious. He cannot forget the painful experience he went through in 1527 in Salamanca, where he was arrested and imprisoned as

an enlightened one (*alumbrado*), one of those who believed themselves directly instructed by the Spirit alone. "You, Ignatius, talk about your experience with God. Now one cannot do that unless he is qualified either by theological learning or by the Spirit. You do not speak out of theological learning; therefore you speak by the Spirit" (see *Autob.* 65). Ignatius says nothing; should he claim to be enlightened by the Spirit he would move onto dangerous ground, risking an encounter with the pyres fired by the Inquisition to still the voices of those *enlightened* by the Spirit.

Ignatius intends to live under the Spirit, though he is aware how often it is troublesome to discern what the Spirit is inspiring, and how one can let himself be confounded by theories or in religious beliefs, above all when trust in the Spirit leads to marginalizing Christology and with it ecclesiology. Extremely sensitive to the mystery of the One of the Trinity who made himself incarnate, Ignatius finds the Spirit, now not as pure spirit acting in illimitable space, but from the annunciation made to Mary, always as the Spirit who reaches out to the person of Christ, and in the same spiritual reach, to the body of Christ that is the Church. In this way, Ignatius's spiritual experience moves intricately into the dialectic between the Spirit and the body of Christ—the Spirit that forms and continues to form the body of Christ, inspiring in the concreteness of our lives here and now the options and the orientations that were those of Christ, in order to make us like Christ.

Ignatius discovers in his experience of faith that, between what the Spirit tells me in the depths of my own self and what the Gospel and the Church tell me from outside, there can be intense conflict. But that conflict can be only temporary and apparent, because in the final analysis it is the same Spirit who utters its word within me—enlightening, unique, irrevocable—and who in the selfsame movement guides and enlightens the Church. Companion of Jesus in his Spirit, Ignatius knows that he must never be absolutely rational, a calculating person who reduces everything to the reasonable. Rather, he must remain open to the impetuosity of a Spirit who breathes where it will, completing the work of Christ: open to the enthusiasm, to the gracious and the fresh that the Spirit does not cease to stir up in the body of Christ that is the Church, incessantly making all things new.

From this, it follows that Ignatius moves in a Christology of the visible. If the Spirit moves me, it is the visible aspect of Christ's earthly life that allows me to verify the authenticity of this motion of the Spirit. To this Christology of the visible belongs also the body of Christ which is the Church. Ignatius cannot

conceive a division of, or envision any opposition between, the charismatic Church and the institutional Church: the Church whole and entire is where the breath of the Spirit creates the body of Christ, the Bride—with its own hierarchy and authority, with its grace and its laws, its Easter joy and its cross, its charismatic enthusiasm and its institutional structures, its Christ and its Vicar of Christ: it is the same Spirit who inspires and leads to the truth, whole and entire. This approach was called by the Fathers of the Church "a sober drunkenness," and by Ignatius, "a spiritual sense," the human reason searching for Christ, enlightened by the light of faith in the Spirit.

But what is true for the Spirit is also true for the Father, with whom Christ is united in the Trinity. Again, in his spiritual experience, Ignatius cannot conceive a Jesus detached from his Father. Ignatius finds access to the Father in the actions and gestures of Jesus, in each of which (following the tradition of the *devotio moderna*) he discovers so many theophanies, believing that all the scenes of Jesus's life are also mysteries that speak and reveal the very mystery of God.

Christ on His Way to the Cross

It is the concrete particular that expresses what God is, Jesus's Father and our Father; and the concrete particular is the only way to know the universal. How can we reduce to a neat sentence this Ignatian vision? In a book published in 1640, an author set himself the task and created this maxim: *Non coerceri a maximo, contineri tamen a minimo, hoc divinum est.* Translating that is not very easy, but the sense is this: "To be unconstrained by the greatest, to be contained even so in the slightest—this is divine."

To put that into our perspectives: to live in the dimension of the universal, yet to labor on the concrete particular, this is the divine. This is the mystery of Christ, because he who is the "greatest"—above and beyond every conceivable frontier border, the unconstrainable Majesty of God, the Divine Majesty that nothing can force or impede, he is found in the "least"—in the flesh and heart of the Incarnate Word, in a precise place in the Roman empire, in a precise time during human history. In this vision of Christ's mystery, Ignatius adopts a line of conduct: following Christ, to immerse oneself in concrete work according to one's opportunities and one's abilities, but

singleheartedly straining towards the infinity of God, who presents in the here-and-now the wide horizons of his plan of salvation.

In selecting the readings that will reveal the universal of him who is One of the Trinity, Ignatius has clear preferences. So, starting from the call he has heard, he chooses those parts of the Gospels that fit best with the perspective he has adopted. They form, to put it this way, a Gospel according to Ignatius. Looking closely at the selection Ignatius made, one notices immediately that his Christ is always on the move. He is in a *paschal* state: that is, according to the etymology of the term, he is constantly on *passover*, passing over from city to city, from village to village, until the fulfillment of the great Passover--Easter in which for our sakes he *passes over* from a cruel and debasing death to the joy of everlasting life. Contemplating the Lord, One of the Trinity, in movement and on the way, is a summons to us to start on a way along which he will be our companion.

As a consequence, understanding Ignatius's Christology requires entering personally into the movement which it depicts. Even when Ignatius invites us to contemplate in simplicity of heart the mysteries of Jesus' childhood, his contemplative gaze finds everything in action: Mary and Joseph travel without stopping with and for the sake of the child; angels, wise men, and shepherds come and go in order to greet him who is sent by God his Father, and who for thirty years continues to advance and progress in order to fulfill the mission on which he was sent. And it is in his role of announcing the Good News of the coming Kingdom of God, of his Father and of the Father of all humankind, that Christ makes his ascent to Jerusalem.

The sixteen mysteries chosen by Ignatius to mark this journey bring us to encounter the Lord fully active. On this journey, sufferings seem not to exist; the cross is never mentioned here. Only in the last mystery does Ignatius observe that "there was no one to receive him in Jerusalem" [288].

It is the icon of the *Pantocrator* that determines the selection of passages proposed by Ignatius: five passages of the Gospels that reveal his glory as Son of God, five others that put in high relief his divine actions in performing miracles, two that similarly reveal his power over sin, two that call attention to his speaking with divine authority, and finally two passages that tell how the apostles were sent out to continue along all the roads on earth the mission of the Lord. Then, suddenly, the *Pantocrator* disappears and its icon darkens. As always, there is a way that must be traveled; and on this path, too, intense

activity rules. But the Lord finds himself condemned to a passivity to be painfully endured, which deprives him of everyone and of everything. Even at the level of language, Ignatius distinguishes this *kenotic* change with a distinctive linguistic mark: he no longer uses the Name, but designates the Lord simply as "he." He, One of the Trinity, who until now exhibited incessant activity in words and works is changed into the grammatical subject of a passive verb: "He is dragged before Annas." Even more often, he is the grammatical object of an active verb: "He led him out" [291, 295].

The Eternal Lord Compassionate in Powerlessness

It is no longer the Lord who lays out his route; now others drag him along a route of "labors, fatigue, and sufferings" from one place to another, and the divine omnipotence is revealed now in human powerlessness (116). The point here is the choice that Ignatius made, attracted by this unsettling mystery. The Evangelists themselves reveal to us a more active Christ who does not cease, in what he says and by his silences, to condemn the injustice inflicted upon him. The Ignatian perspective in contemplating this way of the cross clearly focuses on what Jesus suffers and not on what he does: his not responding during the trial; his not reacting to the provocations and ill-treatment. It is true that Jesus carries the cross; but Ignatius immediately adds, "but he could not carry it" [296]. He does not hesitate to see the proclamation of this powerlessness already present in the *kenosis* which the Gospels announce beginning with the time of the infancy: the Word as *infans,* the one who does not speak. This time, in the mysteries of the passion, the powerlessness is freely accepted: "journeying and toiling, in order that the Lord may be born in greatest poverty; and that after so many hardships . . . injuries and insults, he may die on the cross!" [116].

Ignatius is not looking for a kind of compression of feelings to the one feeling of attachment to Christ, and he does not even raise the problem of human suffering and death. His entire attention is focused on the total abasement of Christ who suffers, of this One of the Trinity, Creator and Savior, who submits to the shame of the cross and to the hatred of his own people. The divinity hides, but not in a sort of pure negation. There is a purpose and motive, which Ignatius discloses in a series of "fors" that explain

the meaning of the path the Lord has chosen. One of the Trinity has suffered *for* us, *for* me, *for* my sins, *for* filling human pain with his divine presence, for saving the human race, and all this *for* love.

Christ has not ceased to fight against suffering, which he always considered an infamy and which he felt in himself with such anguish that in the olive grove "his clothes were already full of blood" [290]. No word of the evangelists renders the disgrace sacred; rather, it is the compassion of Christ who suffers with us and for us that sanctifies the suffering. Bound to this passage for love of us, Christ does not abandon his mission, he does not retreat or retrace his steps, as he must defeat suffering through suffering. The radicality of the way in which Ignatius proposes to us this God who suffers and dies lies less in the sorrow and suffering themselves than in the disconcerting choice that God has made for love of us. Because of his experience with Christ, Ignatius knows our instinctive resistance to it, our almost visceral refusal. "All of Christ is my God," he will write later in his spiritual diary, well aware of our tendency to make up a Christ to fit our own standards, one who legitimizes our refusal to accompany him on his passage, wherever he may go, knowing that his ways are not our ways *(Diary*, 87).

In a certain sense, we have to accept this on the evidence: in the beginning, Christ deluded Ignatius. From the One who has every power in the heavens and on earth and who is the King of the Universe forever, Ignatius—extraordinarily sensitive to all that is great and honorable—would have looked forward to an evangelical enterprise of resounding success for the sake of this same God. Instead of that, he encounters in the Son of God the one through whom scandal comes. Christ certainly has what it takes to create enthusiasm in crowds or to mobilize an elite; he can handle the hard labor and dangers of engaging in brilliant combat that ends with a magnificent victory. What is more, Ignatius aspires to the remarkable and the spectacular—of course purely for the greater glory of God. But this is not the way Christ chose. He will announce the coming of the Kingdom "in poverty, in humiliation, and on the cross."

Ignatius, unlike other masters of the spiritual life, does not seem to be interested in what went on in Christ's spirit, in his prayers and his feelings. What matters to him is what Christ chooses as his way, as his paschal journey. This is entirely traced out in a freely chosen dynamic development toward a hazardous and outcast human state. This choice is particularly

surprising since Jesus belonged to a class of society that, neither well-off nor wretched, enjoyed a lifestyle that was modest but quite secure. Nonetheless, the Son of God truly and freely chose to go down to the last place, going against the impulse that drives every one of us to go up higher and to put distance between ourselves and the marginated and rejected, the stranger, and the poor of every kind. The cross is the result of this choice. It is the reason why Ignatius, who writes often about the Lord's passion, can maintain a gravely sober tone—nothing lyrical, no flights. For in the end the cross is not about death; it is, rather, the symbol of the role that the One of the Trinity has chosen. It is this choice that Ignatius privileges first among all the real events on Calvary—the choice full of the love of God. Then he talks about the crucified Creator and Lord.

Ignatius Imitator of Christ for God's Glory

On November 15, 1537, on the Via Cassia in an area north of Rome still called "La Storta," Ignatius has a vision of his Christ. He carries the cross; and Ignatius obtains the reassurance that Father God places him with his Son—he carries the cross—as companion on his paschal journey. Then he gladly sees Christ in the middle, in a sense: in the *last place,* which he has chosen, and in the *first of all places* on high, which is his own place. It was not Jesus who fabricated that last place, it was humankind following after Cain who devised it for the successors of Abel. This last place is at the frontier of the inhuman, on the border of the human. Ignatius cared about this social insertion of Christ among those who are condemned to misery, who are dispossessed and bereft of real freedom. Yet in this *last place* the face of Jesus intimates his mystery and allows his divinity to show through. Ignatius always deals with the Word Incarnate in the fullness of his sovereignty. In this unsettling paschal context, Ignatius dares to advance the choice that Christ made, fully aware from his own personal experience that the last place, despised and repulsive, disgusts us absolutely.

If the foolish love that the Lord has for humanity has made him choose the foolishness and the scandal of the last place, which disgraces and crucifies, then Jesus' companion can only present himself as a fool for Christ, should the service of God's glory deign to designate him for that.

> In order to imitate Christ our Lord better and to be more like him here and now, I desire and choose poverty with Christ poor rather than wealth; contempt with Christ laden with it rather than honors. Even further, I desire to be regarded as a useless fool for Christ, who before me was regarded as such, rather than as a wise or prudent person in this world. [167]

To choose what Christ has chosen: but as Christ made this choice out of love, to complete the mission given to him by God his Father, so Ignatius wants to make the choice not on his own initiative, but only if Christ calls him to choose the last place to serve better the praise of him who holds in everything the highest place, his Divine Majesty. The initiative belongs to the Lord who is at work here and now, in his Church, in his people, and in all the things that happen in the world.

The companion of Jesus wants union with the Christ who wears himself out in order to bring every man and woman to the Father—to bring everything created to its fullness, accomplishing again and again, anew, the choice which the Christ has made, and so to collaborate with him for the salvation of the world. In and through this election, the companion of Jesus is invited to place himself actively in this *middle* which is, for Ignatius, Christ reaching the universal of the Trinity who dwell there and refining everything authentically Christian in himself. In his personal encounter with Christ, Ignatius yielded to the evidence in the end: announcing the Good News of the glory of the Trinity to a people who give quite a contrary meaning to *glory* requires following the One of the Trinity and appropriating the Gospel of the cross. This is not in the first instance a question of desiring to suffer and die; rather, in the first instance it is to live dying wholly to self for the sake of putting oneself at the service of Christ in everything—even at the risk of being considered, as he was, a madman—so that in the end the glory of the Trinity radiates in the life of our brothers and sisters, and illuminates history, which is already filled with the Spirit of Christ who is working in it. This paschal glory will impart a characteristic Ignatian optimism to a vast variety of vocations and missions, through which men and women, made fools for Christ, will participate in the revelation of the foolish love of God, incarnate in the person and in the choices of Christ, the One of the Trinity, crucified.

This is how Ignatius responds to Jesus' question: "And you, who do you

say I am?" Once he has gazed on and lived through all of the mysteries of the life of Christ our Lord, the joyous light of the Incarnate Word shining out in him who was crucified and rose, Ignatius responds with a little phrase that he wrote in his spiritual diary: *ser todo mi Dios*: you, whole and entire, you be my God.

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