

IGNATIAN CRITERIA FOR CHRISTIAN–MUSLIM DIALOGUE

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CAN IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY help us to renew Christian–Muslim engagement today? Interfaith encounters with Muslims are significantly different for Christians (and especially for people in the Ignatian tradition) from encounters with people of other faiths.¹ Islam is the world religion whose scripture explicitly reacts to the Christian creed, rejecting some of its core tenets.² Therefore, even today Muslim–Christian dialogue is often considered a mission impossible, a hopeless effort.³

In the eyes of St Ignatius, Islam was among the most frightening dangers facing Roman Catholicism. Indeed, when he stated that his new religious order was ready to be sent ‘among the Turks or to other infidels’, he was not envisaging dialogue.⁴ The first Jesuits did see dialogue in the sense of constructive personal encounter as part of their mission (see Exx 22).⁵ And they did accept that they had a mission to the Muslim world. But they did not put the two together to make Muslim–Christian dialogue a priority. After all, St Ignatius lived 400 years before the Church found itself able to say that if missionary activity is to witness to Christ, it must follow Christ’s own style. Only

This article is based on Felix Körner, ‘Das Herzstück des Ignatius (Teil I)’, *Geist und Leben*, 92 (2019), 184–189, and ‘Das Herzstück des Ignatius (Teil II). Ignatianische Kriterien für den Islam-Dialog’, *Geist und Leben*, 92 (2019), 290–299. It has been completely reworked, and I am grateful to Frs Philip Endean† and John Moffat for thoroughly reviewing the text.

¹ Emanuele Colombo, ‘Defeating the ‘Infidels, Helping Their Souls: Ignatius Loyola and Islam’, in *A Companion to Ignatius of Loyola*, edited by Robert Aleksander Maryks (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 179–197.

² The Qur’anic sura al-Ikhlās states that God ‘is not begotten and has not begotten’ (112:3); and an-Nisā’ warns the ‘people of the Book’ (that is, the members of other revealed religions) they should not say that God is somehow ‘three’ (4:171).

³ Felix Körner, ‘Hope in Christian–Muslim Dialogue. A Catholic Perspective’, in Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims, *Christians and Muslims: Bearers of Hope in Troubled Times* (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 2020), 4–29.

⁴ *Formula of the Institute*, n. 3.

⁵ The *Spiritual Exercises* is quoted here in the translation by Michael Ivens (Leominster: Gracewing, 2004).

in 1964 did Pope Paul VI teach that Christian witness takes place through dialogue, that is, in 'a climate of friendship, indeed, of service'.⁶ On the face of it, St Ignatius may seem to have come centuries too early to offer helpful advice on Christian–Muslim dialogue.

Let us, therefore, explore the more general question first: what are Ignatian criteria for work in any field? After all, the foundational Ignatian texts apparently presuppose much reflection on the right method in spiritual and practical matters, since they keep referring to '*nuestro modo de proceder*': our manner, or way, of proceeding.⁷ So there must be Ignatian criteria not only for choosing what to do but also for learning how to do things well.

Misleading Approaches

Where do we turn for such criteria? We might look at how St Ignatius himself behaved in particular situations and then imitate him. That is certainly an interesting and edifying approach.⁸ It was the declared goal of the Portuguese Jesuit Luís Gonçalves da Câmara (d.1575) when he wrote his *Memoriale* about St Ignatius. To modern eyes, however, the book presents St Ignatius as an impulsive—indeed compulsive—personality. So, we are left wondering what exactly to imitate. In fact, even the author seems unable to distil principles from what he observed in the founder. Often, da Câmara can only admire St Ignatius' behaviour. He is unable to discover a system behind it, let alone imitate him.⁹ And, of course, St Ignatius would probably have objected to the idea of anyone imitating him anyway: it is Christ whom Ignatian spirituality is encouraging us to follow.¹⁰

We are more likely to find inspiration from studying Ignatius' written advice than from narratives about him. And when we read his own words we see how he underlined the importance of adapting

⁶ Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*, 90, my translation.

⁷ With or without 'our': *Constitutions*, Examen. 4:35 [92], I. 2:4 [152], II. 2:4 [216], IV. 2:2 [321], IV. 7:3 [398], VI. 1:1 [547], VI. 3:6 [589], VII. 2: F [624], VIII. 2:2 [680], IX. 5:1 [778]; *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), nn. 3, 16, 50, 195.

⁸ St Ignatius' first known Islamic contact features in most studies on Jesuits and Islam: his wish to stab a Muslim was only hampered by the 'decision' of his mule to take the other way (*Autobiography*, nn. 15–16). However, this story's aim is not to present St Ignatius' attitude towards Muslims. It is, rather, an amused confession of his initial inability to find out God's will for himself (by leaving the decision to a mule), in other words, his lack of discernment.

⁹ *Remembering Iñigo*, nn. 2, 248, 86.

¹⁰ See Exx 98 and elsewhere.

instructions to ‘circumstances of place, time, or persons’.¹¹ St Ignatius was vividly aware that each new situation can be unforeseeably different from previous ones and that making good decisions continually requires ‘a loving discernment’ (*discreta caritas*).¹² It turns out that to be Ignatian we should precisely *not* take St Ignatius’ advice on any given situation as the last word.

What is to count as characteristically Ignatian, then, if we are not to take his specific advice as normative? One might look at what members of the order he founded have done and do. Observers of Jesuits and their works, however, are often unable to find a common denominator. Failing that, we may point to a characteristic use of antithesis—the creative tension between contrasting concepts. There are two well-known examples.

One is the classic *in actione contemplativus* (contemplative in action), which means being a contemplative in the midst of an active life, rather than creating a dichotomy between the two.¹³ The other is the so-called Hevenesius maxim: ‘this should be your rule of action: trust in God, as if everything depended on you; yet apply yourself, as if God alone brought everything about’.¹⁴ Less well known are ‘unconstrained by the greatest yet contained in the least’¹⁵ and the motto of an ‘Ignatian



A Jesuit priest, Mughal, seventeenth century

¹¹ *Constitutions*, IV.6.K [382], II.V.3.A [455]; and see Exx 18.

¹² See Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, ‘Discreta Caritas’, in *The Lord of Friendship: Friendship, Discernment and Mission in Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: Way Books, 2011), 216–230.

¹³ MHSJ MN 5, 162. Here we also find the fundamental Ignatian orientation that God is to be found in everything: ‘Deum esse in omnibus rebus inveniendum’.

¹⁴ Gabriel Hevenesius, *Scintillae Ignatianae* (Vienna: Joannis Georgii Schlegel, 1705), 230 following.

¹⁵ From the anonymous *Elogium sepulchrale S. Ignatii*, included in *Imago primi saeculi Societatis Iesv.* (Antwerp: Officina Plantiniana, 1640), 280.

mysticism of joy in the world'.¹⁶ Later theorists have come up with stimulating one-word designations representing a tension, such as the Ignatian 'dialectic' or 'drama'.¹⁷

Can we, however, establish principles in a field as contested as Christian–Muslim dialogue on the basis of theologically stimulating but intrinsically fuzzy concepts? Should we not, rather, look for the spiritual centrepiece; the Ignatian insight that holds it all together; the seed from which the other insights grew? What is at the core of St Ignatius' thought?

The Core Ignatian Insight: Consolation

A plausible candidate for that core Ignatian insight is discernment of spirits.¹⁸ However, discernment of spirits is not unique to Ignatius. It is already a theme in the early Church in the context of determining whether charismatic prophecy was authentic or not (*diákrisis*: 1 Corinthians 12:10; *dokimázein*: Romans 12:2; 1 John 4:1). In the late medieval spiritual tradition to which Ignatius was exposed, discernment of spirits (or spiritual discernment) was called for when personal decisions were to be taken in an unclear situation. And it is here that we do find St Ignatius' core insight. For him, discernment is linked to consolation. Indeed, everything should start from consolation.¹⁹

Now, consolation is often presented in the context of specific moments of discernment, as described in St Ignatius' *Autobiography* and *Spiritual Diary*.²⁰ Consolation is a sign of a decision according to God's will and desolation signals a wrong decision. Such *confirmatory consolation* is part of Ignatian spirituality. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, however, consolation means something more: it is consoled perception of reality, 'perceptory consolation', as one might say. It is not a *consequence* of a decision taken according to God's will, but rather its

¹⁶ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, volume 3, *Theology of the Spiritual Life*, translated by Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1967), 277–293. In 1937, when first using it, Rahner does not take responsibility for the expression; 'the formulation of this theme was determined by a request for a paper on the subject under this heading' (227).

¹⁷ See Gaston Fessard, *The Dialectic of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*, translated by James Colbert and Oliva Blanchette (Leiden: Brill, 2022); Raymund Schwager, *Das dramatische Kirchenverständnis bei Ignatius von Loyola. Historisch-pastoraltheologische Studie über die Stellung der Kirche in den Exerzitien und im Leben des Ignatius* (Zurich: Einsiedeln, 1970).

¹⁸ Hugo Rahner, *Ignatius the Theologian*, translated by Michael Barry (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 230: 'the very heart of the theology of the *Spiritual Exercises*'.

¹⁹ Pope Francis also seems to understand consolation as the Ignatian nucleus. When he addressed the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, his first main point was: ask for consolation!

²⁰ *Autobiography*, n. 8; *Spiritual Diary*, 23 February 1544.

precondition. St Ignatius understands consolation as the joyful growth of faith, hope and love which enables us to love God in everything and everything in God (Exx 316; *Constitutions*, III.1.26 [288]).

When we look at the *Spiritual Exercises*, we see that for Ignatius, consolation entails a threefold insight. We can classify the three elements of that insight as ‘metacognition’ (perception of perception), ‘phase-awareness’ (a perception of times) and ‘perception of reality’.

Metacognition

Ignatius begins the key section of the *Spiritual Exercises* on consolation by saying: ‘What I call “consolation” ...’ (Exx 316). Thus, he acknowledges that he is not applying the concept in a way that is already obvious within the tradition. Consequently, one should pay more attention to how he himself describes what he calls consolation than to what the word ‘consolation’ means in itself, in scripture and in church tradition. The same is true for his use of the word ‘desolation’. For Ignatius, consolation is the transformation of a human being into a loving person. Desolation is what moves us away from love. A consequence of these movements is that the consoled person *perceives* everything differently from the person in desolation.

St Ignatius wants us to see reality as completely as possible. He encourages us to recognise what he calls the movements of the soul. That recognition is particularly difficult because these movements themselves have an influence on how we perceive reality. Therefore, Ignatius teaches us not to trust our perceptions blindly. To see the full picture, we must also look at how we look. Are, so to speak, our glasses dirty or clean? In other words, he warns us about either trusting or distrusting our perceptions directly. And he gives us a criterion to test whether we can trust them or not: in consolation, you can trust your perception. So, Ignatius encourages us to have a perception of our perception; one might speak of ‘depth perception’ or, indeed, of ‘metacognition’.

Phase-awareness

Ignatius continues: ‘I use the word “consolation” when ...’ (Exx 316). So, there are different ‘times’.²¹ Consolation and desolation are movements, and since they come and go unpredictably, they must be seen as phases. Ignatius says this because we should not take at face value what appears

²¹ Exx 13; 175; 318.

to us in times of desolation. He warns us against drawing existential conclusions when our perceptions are clouded. That is why he tells us, wisely, not to change a decision in time of desolation (Exx 318 following).

Metacognition or depth-perception allows us to take a distance from our perceptions and recognise the influence of desolation or consolation. Phase-awareness helps us to see that the present moment may not be the right time to take a decision. This gives us the freedom not to act prematurely on the basis of our immediate perception of things. We must accept desolate times; but we need not surrender to them. In prayerful, grateful openness, we can prepare ourselves for a new time of consolation—‘keep in mind that consolation will not be long in coming’—and thus train ourselves in patience confident of God’s benevolence (Exx 321). We can neither remove desolation, nor create consolation. The Spiritual Exercises are not a means of generating emotions; they are not soul-programming. Consolation is a gift; this can become painfully clear in times of desolation.

Perception of Reality

Ignatius admits that what he means by consolation and by desolation goes beyond the common understanding of his day. Since consolation plays such a crucial role in his teaching, we need to inquire further how exactly we are to recognise real consolation. The *Spiritual Exercises* describe the effects of consolation in a mnemonic scheme, reversing the trinitarian formula of Father, Son and Spirit: love of the Spirit, love of Christ, love of the Creator (Exx 316). We find both dynamic and calm spiritual gifts as signs of consolation: the growth of hope, faith and love; motivating joy, but also, simply, inner peace. All are recognisable as gifts of the Spirit named by St Paul.²²

But now the signs of consolation gain a christological focus when we find ourselves overwhelmed, indeed seized,²³ even to the point of tears—if what captures us is our own neediness, or the history of Christ, or anything that draws us into God’s salvific project. The foremost sign of consolation, however, is this: to love the Creator and to love creation with the Creator, ‘loving him in all creatures and all creatures in him’ (*Constitutions*, III.1.26[288]). This then, is St Ignatius’ core insight: consolation as loving *with* God.

²² Galatians 5:22; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Romans 14:6.

²³ Philippians 3:12: ‘Christ Jesus has made me his own [katelēmphthēn]’. The Greek *katalambanō* can be translated as ‘to seize’.

Theology of Consolation: Reality

Three questions arise at this point. First, why should we trust our perceptions at a time of consolation and distrust them during desolation? Second, is consolation the proof of God's will for the unconvinced? And third, isn't consolation precisely the proof of God's existence in the first place? The answer to these last two is 'no'. Consolation is not about 'proof'. For Ignatius, the history of salvation as attested in the Bible is always presupposed. Consolation is the blaze of love for the God of Jesus. Being seized to the point of tears is consolation if what moves us is the paschal mystery. The spiritual gifts mentioned by St Ignatius as signs of consolation (hope, faith, love; joy and peace) deliberately echo the New Testament literally: they are already St Paul's criteria for the work of the Spirit of Jesus. Ignatius assumes that we are already shaped by the gospel and want to be shaped more deeply by it (Exx 104). Therefore, only if that is granted, can we say that during consolation we perceive truthfully and in desolation we don't.

Consolation in this sense does not mean that we clearly perceive one particular object (we generally do not hear the voice of our personal calling). Rather, during consolation we are able to see the whole picture, get a sense of the total context. This does not, of course, mean grasping the whole of reality conceptually. What becomes clear to us in times of consolation is an intuition of the whole of reality. Our perception of the full picture is pre-conceptual: facing a future fulfilment. Ignatius teaches us to pay attention in this way to God's activity in everything. And the point of this recognition is not to know more but to get ready for the 'interior knowledge of all the good I have received, so that acknowledging this with gratitude, I may be able to love and serve his Divine Majesty in everything' (Exx 233).

During consolation we are able to see the whole picture

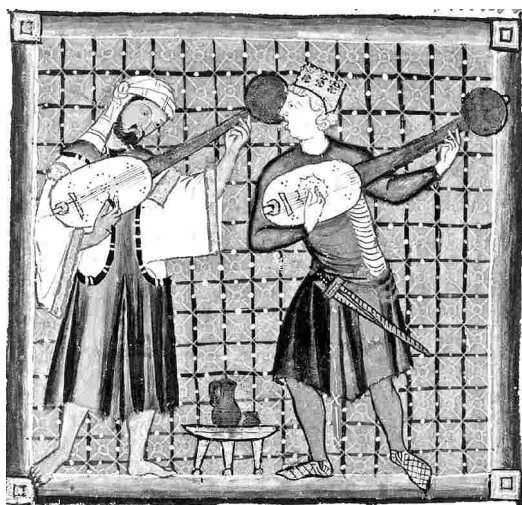
Thus Ignatius writes that in a time of consolation, 'the soul comes to be inflamed with the love of its Creator and Lord; and when it can in consequence love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but in the Creator of them all' (Exx 316). With 'soul', of course, he simply means the human person, but here considered from a specific point of view. Soul is us in the perspective of our eternal salvation.²⁴

²⁴ Therefore, *iuvare animas*—helping souls—means to allow people to find their divine destiny: *Autobiography*, nn. 26, 45, 50; *Examen*, I. 2 [3], *Examen*, 6. 2 [113], *Constitutions*, I. 2. 5 [153], I. 3.1 [186], III. 2. G [304], Preamble, IV. e. 1 [307], IV. 2. 4 [324], VI. 2. 2 [555], VI. 2. 8 [567], VI. 3. 4 [586],

To say that the soul can no longer love any created thing in itself except only in the Creator of them all, is therefore to say that the reality of God becomes so tangible to us that we no longer rely on any creature as if it could save us. That does not mean turning away from the world. It implies no lack of love for that which is not God. Rather, ‘loving everything in God’ is to recognise all things as components of God’s salvific project. Everything will be a part of it, everything has its place in it. In this perspective, everything can be acknowledged, including our own actions—and even the creaturely attempts to hold up God’s project. This is how consolation enables us to perceive reality in its fullness.

Christian–Muslim Dialogue

So we return to our initial question: can Ignatian spirituality help us to renew Christian–Muslim engagement today? We are now better able to respond with a sense of what is most characteristically ‘Ignatian’. We have uncovered as the fundamental Ignatian dynamic the growing ability to love all things in God and God in all things; and we saw that this growth of love is what St Ignatius calls ‘consolation’. What will make



A Christian and a Muslim playing the oud, from Catinas de Santa Maria, thirteenth century

a programme authentically Ignatian is not the number of quotations from the *Spiritual Exercises* or the *Constitutions* but its foundation in the experience of consolation, in the growth of love.

Using this foundation, I would like to suggest twenty questions that might help us test whether an interaction with Muslims is faithfully Ignatian; or, more positively, twenty questions to inspire a fruitful Christian–Islamic engagement.

VII. 1.B [605], VII. 1. 7 [616], VII. 4. 1 [636], IX. 2. 1 [723], IX. 6. 10 [803], X. 1 [812] following, X. 12 [825]; also repeatedly the ‘good of souls’, the ‘benefit of souls’.

Theology of Mission: servir

When our loving with God is growing, we perceive reality more aptly: that is the claim behind St Ignatius' procedures. During those times of increasing love, we also see ourselves more clearly. We understand our own role in this world better. We come to sense how all things belong together. We understand, therefore, that there is a goal in creation, indeed, that our own life has a purpose (see Exx 23). All creatures come to their fullness when they abandon their self-obsession and join in the divine project of love. That is why St Ignatius can write that the whole point of creation is God's praise, honour and service. So now, out of what we called 'perceptory consolation', there arises clarity of 'choice'. The Spiritual Exercises accompany us towards choice.

However, this choice is not simply about taking a decision. In the process of the Exercises the concept of choice itself undergoes a fundamental transformation. During the Second Week, we are prepared to choose a way of life (Exx 169–174); but as we stand before Christ, we discover that it is the Lord who is choosing us.²⁵ Our choice becomes a response to the invitation to participate in God's own choice (Exx 135). Thereby, our life becomes a mission in a very literal and personal sense.

During the Exercises, we may discover for ourselves how Christ encounters us, addresses us, wants us in the team, and then does not cling to us for his personal satisfaction. Rather, Christ commissions us and sends us out in order to liberate others from the satanic 'nets and chains' (Exx 142, 145). That is our mission and each person's particular capacities have a role in the project. Realising that we are sent means realising that we are sent *to serve*. But service here does not imply a role of secondary importance. Rather, serving means belonging to a communion of action. It means taking part in a common project.

We can highlight here three aspects of this Ignatian mission as service. And these will help us to frame our first questions, our criteria for evaluating the quality of our dialogue. The mission is personal, communal and great-hearted.

Personal

When consoled in St Ignatius' sense, we can recognise reality ever more authentically. What exactly we notice, however, will still differ from person to person. The Exercises are not a brain-washing technique.

²⁵ Exx 98, 146, 147, 168; and see John 15: 16.

Indeed, we are all challenged to see for ourselves, with our own inner eyes. When it comes to the details of a contemplation, St Ignatius does not tell us what to see, but simply asks us for example whether the road from Bethany to Jerusalem ‘is broad or narrow, level, etc.’ (Exx 192).

In fact our personal involvement goes even deeper. The exercises that St Ignatius proposes challenge us to be mentally, personally present, without anyone to regulate and control us. In contrast, if we are praying the Psalms, for instance, the rhythm of the verses channels our train of thought, its direction, its duration, its concentration. Again and again, the words bring us back to their content. However, a fifteen-minute Examen (Exx 43) or indeed a sixty-minute meditation (Exx 12) allow us space for ourselves, even for our distractions. St Ignatius asks almost too much of us, trusting to our honesty and discipline.

That is why the Spiritual Exercises are founded on the bold presupposition of personal integrity and trust (see Exx 22). This hermeneutic of benevolence has, of course, a practical purpose: it makes for a better understanding of the other. But underlying that practicality there is a very particular theology. In a spiritual conversation, we can trust that what others say is honest and meaningful because we trust that God wants to work with this person and that person wants to work with God (Exx 15). Out of this Ignatian model of personal engagement and trust, we can develop our first four criteria for Christian–Muslim interaction.

We may disagree with others—with our collaborators and interlocutors, with people from other faiths and from our own faith. We may have different agendas and approaches, priorities and positions. We may even disagree on whether we really disagree in matters of faith; but,

1. Are we prepared to keep the dialogue going?

Without a minimum of good will, it is impossible to understand others. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves,

2. Can we feel that goodwill is growing in us?

Once mutual trust grows, we will find ourselves sometimes moving beyond general topics into a more personal space. When that happens,

3. Are we willing to engage in personal conversations in which we ask each other how God is at work in our lives?

A typical question we may ask after such encounters is, ‘where was God in this?’—whether the encounter was a happy or a difficult one.

The question does not imply that God is present in some places and not present in others. 'Where was God', or indeed, 'Where was God calling me?' are a challenge to our attention. It prompts us to notice God's particular call to us in a particular situation. In fact the question has a double aspect: *what was going on when* I felt I was being addressed, and *to what* do I feel I might be invited? If God is at work in history (see Exx 236), whatever is happening, whatever is being said and done contain a message for us. So, we need to keep asking,

4. Are we open to learning, including through the words and witness of the Muslims we meet?

Communal

Goodwill in interfaith encounters should, however, not lead to homogenizing claims along the lines of *basically, we all mean the same thing*. Nor should personal interfaith encounters dissolve into a sweeping relativisation such as: *in the end, beliefs are personal opinions*. In interreligious relations, each party also represents a religious community. When it comes to theological interaction with Muslims, the Catholic Christian is also a representative of the Church. We need not agree with everything that comes from Rome; we are not obliged to defend the administration of our parishes. Indeed, by not blindly identifying with every aspect of the Church, we can also show our interlocutors our understanding of critical loyalty. Nevertheless, St Ignatius does challenge us to have a filial love of our 'holy mother the hierarchical Church' (Exx 353) and to praise practices such as 'the lighting of candles in churches' (Exx 358), even if our spirituality may be shaped by a more personal faith experience. From this follows another Ignatian criterion for our context,

5. Are we ready to present, without arrogance but with joy, the Catholic creed and tradition, the Church's liturgy and life as somehow accessible and indeed beautiful?

Great-hearted

Ignatian spirituality is extrovert. It reaches out beyond the bounds of the established Church, marked by missionary zeal. We want to offer ourselves to God and God's project 'in a magnanimous spirit and with great liberality' (Exx 5). But here, too, good discernment of inner movements is in order, for 'even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light' (2 Corinthians 11:14; and see Exx 332). We may discover that

the apparently holy intention of finding new candidates for baptism turns out to be motivated by selfish ambition rather than by God's Spirit of consolation and joy.²⁶ Wisely, St Ignatius reminds us, 'a person will make progress in things of the spirit to the degree to which they divest [*salir*] themselves of self-love, self-will, and self-interest' (Exx 189). So if our outreach aspires to be truly Ignatian, it will not be selfish but offered in a spirit of service, and therefore we should ask ourselves unselfishly,

6. Are we ready to pass on elements of Ignatian spirituality to Muslims if they ask for it?



Akbar and the Jesuits, by Narsingh, 1600–1603

It is worth dwelling here on what an Ignatian approach might mean for Muslims. Ignatius' key concepts are founded within the Christian tradition and experience. Still, many of his observations and formulations are comprehensible to non-Christians. Becoming aware of consolation and desolation can certainly be helpful to people irrespective of their beliefs. For an Islamic context we can make use of the Ignatian formula that consolation is growing ability to love everything in God and God in everything. We could also re-express this by saying that in times of consolation, *rahma* (God's mercy), is growing in your own heart. That is in line with Qur'anic wording which says both that God has *rahma* and that people should have it.²⁷ Thus, Muslims, too, can take consolation as the mark of those times when their view

²⁶ See Romans 14: 17.

²⁷ Qur'an, 6: 54 and 17: 24; 48: 29.

of reality is unclouded, so that they have the clarity necessary to take wise decisions.

Some spiritual directors even go beyond that. A Jesuit working in South Asia says that Muslims entrust themselves to him for spiritual accompaniment. He has invited some of them to contemplate Qur'anic passages such as Sura 1, *al-Fātiḥa*, in an Ignatian manner. He reports good progress among the Muslims he accompanies spiritually. That is, he observes the growth of *raḥma*. There is a Catholic nun in the Arab world who goes a step further and gives Ignatian retreats to Muslims. Incidentally, this possibility had actually been anticipated and defended by St Ignatius' close collaborator, Jerónimo Nadal (d. 1580).²⁸ The religious sister presents Muslim retreatants with scenes from Muḥammad's life as material for contemplation. She finds her work well received and fruitful. The scenes have to be carefully selected, of course. In St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, the point is precisely not to leave Jesus alone in his darkest moments, at his passion and death. However, accounts of Muḥammad's life contain dark moments that one would not present to retreatants.²⁹

But there is another aspect to St Ignatius' greatness of heart. The Church's primary purpose is to evangelize. Evangelization, however, does not mean proselytization. Proselytizers are those who only take an interest in humanity in order to recruit new members to their own group. In contrast, 'to evangelize means to make the kingdom of God present in the world'.³⁰ An evangelizing Church is, then, a sign and instrument for humanity furthering their unity with God and one another.³¹ Such a Church engages in bettering the living conditions of all peoples, transforming the 'temporal order' in the sense of the gospel.³² It engages with politics and social structures, with the economy and ecology. Ignatius' intention to 'help souls' must not be confined to the proclamation of the Good News but refers to the integral flourishing of humanity. This gives us another Ignatian criterion,

7. Are people's situations really improving through our work?

²⁸ See Jerónimo Nadal, 'Exercises for Infidels, Heretics and Sinners', *The Way*, 43/1 (January 2004), 43–50.

²⁹ For example: Muḥammad is reported to have had all men of the Medinan Jewish tribe of the *Banū Qurayza* killed (in 627).

³⁰ *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 176.

³¹ *Lumen gentium*, n. 1.

³² *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 2.

Theology of History: en todo

The consoled perception of reality sees God at work everywhere, and therefore in all religions. Some might contest whether such a view is faithfully Ignatian. Doesn't the view that God's spirit is at work in other religions lead to a radically pluralistic theology, even to a kind of pantheism? Well, no, not necessarily. St Ignatius' theology is christocentric; and any way of proceeding that legitimately refers to him will be the same. Once we accept the message of Christ's resurrection, we see why consolation is more than a beautiful illusion. The claim that in times of consolation we perceive reality more truthfully has a christological basis. It is in the light of Easter that we can see the fulfilment and meaning of creation. So we need to ask how to witness to the risen Christ in our work. From this, two further criteria follow for authentically Ignatian Muslim–Christian interactions.

8. Do we ourselves and our interlocutors come to know Christ better in our encounters?

Increasing knowledge of Christ (see Exx 104) is often triggered by remarks and questions from the other side. Even in the midst of a heated theological debate, a new aspect of Christ may be waiting to be discovered. And the trigger need not even be a remark or question. Many of us have Muslim friends who are so disarmingly humble that sometimes in their presence we cannot but think of Jesus.

9. Do we, in our theological encounters, confine ourselves to arguing for a rational theism, or can we present a compelling narrative of Jesus' claim to be the dawn of God's Kingdom, indeed, to be the definitive turn of world history?

We have already quoted the observation, 'a person will make progress in things of the spirit to the degree to which they divest [*salir*] themselves of self-love, self-will, and self-interest'. We should now take another look at the divestment (*salir*). Jesus himself was marked by that attitude: he clearly sees the danger of self-centred and self-satisfied piety (Matthew 23). Belittling others is contrary to his way (Luke 18:11). St Paul presents Christ's lifestyle as opposed to 'selfish ambition or conceit' (Philippians 2:3); he surrenders what is his by right and risks, as one might say, a new exodus.

This offers another perspective on the theme of loving everything in God and God in everything: if God is at work in everything, then this includes non-Christians. They are a 'positive challenge' for the

Church.³³ Even what contradicts our own ideas of God's will and the growth of the Kingdom is part of God's history and can become a source of enrichment or purification for us.³⁴ That may help us to recognise another Ignatian criterion for Christian–Muslim dialogue,

10. Can we see Islam as part of the history of salvation?

Pope Francis encouraged us to be the 'Church which goes forth'.³⁵ In Spanish, that is, *iglesia en salida* (a Church opening up to get moving, in departure, risking a new exodus). This is, perhaps not accidentally, the same word that St Ignatius used when speaking of ridding oneself of self-love, self-will and self-interest. How to deal with these self-obsessions? *Salir*—by going out and leaving them behind.

What does that mean for our interreligious encounters? Many Christians, including Catholics, denounce dialogue with Islam as dangerously naïve and a waste of time. Certainly, credulous naivety is a pitfall for anyone of good will. There is always the need to enter dialogue with one's eyes open. But alarmism is the contrary pitfall, and fear is as bad a counsellor as ingenuousness. The advice that follows from St Ignatius' theology of discernment here is: only make your decision when your fear has passed and consolation allows you to appreciate the full reality.

A Church that goes forth looks at the world with the 'joy of the gospel'.³⁶ Our vision in times of consolation recognises God at work in all events. Any evil there is due to creatures themselves. The Creator's project is to heal and redeem. The way God is at work in all events, then, is by calling us to collaborate courageously and creatively in God's salvific project. Thus, another Ignatian criterion for an authentically Christian cooperation with Islam is this:

11. Is our interaction with Muslims constructive, unhampered by fear—our own and that of other Christians?

Keen missionaries sometimes look at Muslims with a desolated sense of humiliation. They are a proof of our weakness! We have not succeeded in converting them (or at least, not yet)! But if we are truly in consolation and love all things in God, we see the world as a history of salvation. In such a history, Muslims have their place. In that perspective,

³³ *Redemptoris missio*, n. 56.

³⁴ Pontifical Secretariat for Non-Christians, *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, n.21, available at <https://www.dicasteryinterreligious.va/dialogue-and-mission-1984/>.

³⁵ *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 20.

³⁶ *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 84.

the question is no longer: ‘who sinned?’ (John 9:2). As if in interfaith relations we were to find out whether *they* closed their minds, or *we* were not convincing enough. Rather, the question is how ‘God’s works might be revealed’ (John 9:3) in this particular situation in which we now encounter Muslims. How are we to give space in this very situation for the growth of God’s Kingdom—or, in St Ignatius’ preferred wording, for the greater glory of God? What then is the point of looking at Islam as if it were an offence? An Ignatian criterion will take us in a different direction:

12. Is our first question when we encounter Muslims how we can help: help them in their current situation and help the Kingdom of God become more present through both of us?

Some interlocutors in theological dialogues among Muslims and Christians will want to compare credal positions, as if there is our timeless deposit of faith on one side, and theirs on the other. But the *Spiritual Exercises* suggest a more adventurous approach. As we contemplate a scripture passage, St Ignatius wants us to ‘come upon things which throw further light on it or which more fully bring home its meaning’ (Exx 2). This is a reminder that in matters of Bible and faith, discovery is still possible. Something new can happen. Indeed, such unforeseen results of our own reflection and reasoning or of a God-given enlightenment bear much spiritual fruit, says Ignatius.

Of course, Ignatius would not have applied this principle to theology itself. His era was one of constant suspicion and wariness of heretics.³⁷ Out of conviction as much as expediency, he would not want to see dogma changed. He realised, however, that an ever-deeper exploration and understanding of the Christian faith was possible (as practised and expressed in the Church Fathers) to ‘bring better understanding’.³⁸

In our time, we can say quite simply that encounters with non-Christians can become something like a source, a *locus*, of theological insight. Often it is a question (or a misunderstanding) from the interlocutor that triggers such discoveries. Perhaps St Ignatius would today encourage us to bring such insights back to the community of the

³⁷ See *Autobiography*, n. 58.

³⁸ Vincent of Lérins (d. c. 445) sees that there is organic growth and indeed progress of ecclesial teaching, as understanding, knowledge, and wisdom increase: Christian doctrine is, he writes, ‘consolidated by years, enlarged by time, refined by age’ (*Commonitory*, translated by C. A. Heurtley [Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1894], n. 56).

Church, presenting them not as new doctrines, but as an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the faith. So, we can also ask ourselves:

13. Do we promote our interreligious debates to be places (*loci*) of theological insight, and do we bring those insights back to the Church to enrich its growth in self-understanding?

Our work for and with Muslims is, however, by no means restricted to theology. Fair theological debate is only possible where the legal and cultural framework grants some parity to the parties, and that is not always the case. However, other forms of engagement are almost always possible—in particular, education. The consoled mind recognises that God dwells in human beings, giving them understanding. If God grants understanding, teachers can see themselves as co-workers with God. So, taking St Ignatius' core insight seriously, we need to ask:

14. Do our interactions with Muslims have an educational quality?

Theology of Sin: magis

To look at the world with the eyes of consolation does not mean to see everything in a rosy light. Rather in times of consolation we are able to look at the world more realistically. A deeply realistic view also sees that we make mistakes, that we—all of us—are sinners. The love experienced in consolation allows us to see that our own life is not yet fully love. That awareness is invaluable in our work of encounter.

Christians in dialogue with Muslims can sometimes start with high expectations and then become disillusioned when just those people whom they expected to be great game-changers turn out to be human after all. If, however, we keep reminding



A Jesuit missionary, Mughal, late seventeenth century

ourselves that no one is perfect, we will not nourish exaggerated expectations of our dialogue partners' integrity, reliability and efficacy.

To put it in classical terms, accepting 'original sin' is a liberating realism. It protects us from declaring our favoured interlocutors to be heroes or considering ourselves as saviours of the world. We will not expect our Muslim friends, our co-workers or our popes to work miracles. St Ignatius encourages us to see, sense and confess our sins (Exx 44). The painful recognition that I have sinned and the joyful message that I am pardoned liberate us to a life of realism without cynicism. A seriously Ignatian Christian–Muslim encounter is shaped by that attitude:

15. Are we aware, with realism, but without despair, that we are flawed human beings working with flawed human beings?

An examination of conscience is part of spiritual life in many traditions. St Ignatius' specific touch is that each such review begins positively, with the grateful memory of the benefits received (Exx 43). That memory can open us to the experience of consolation. It enables us to look joyfully at God, the world and ourselves. This leads us back into the dynamic of love: to serve more faithfully, to love more intensely. The experience of consolation thus quite naturally draws us into the practice of reviewing, both personally and communally.

We need to recognise and express clearly, openly—indeed joyfully—what went wrong (it would be something of a clerical pride if the only interaction among the friends of the Lord was mutual applause). We will rarely have to deal with catastrophic failure, but we can always develop our sensibility for where, led by love, we can serve the Lord better and follow him more consistently (Exx 104). Along these lines, an Ignatian inspiration for interfaith dialogue lies in the question:

16. Are we reviewing honestly what we have done and experienced so far, and learning from it?

An honest, constructively critical gaze takes us even further when, in times of consolation, we become aware of the bigger picture. We come to see more clearly the context of our dialogues. We come to understand the other's experience from within, and to notice the structures, social and economic, which shape that experience from without.

The Ignatian attention to the phases of consolation and desolation focuses on what is going on in people's *hearts*, their inner movements. But since consolation in St Ignatius' sense is growing ability to see the full picture, a consoled person will also come to see what is going on in

people's *lives*, even their sociopolitical context. In Muslim–Christian dialogue we sometimes focus on the truth value of our interlocutor's last statement. That can, of course, advance theological knowledge and is part of an authentic encounter among equals. And yet, every text has a subtext. We need to take into account the conditions from which we ourselves and our interlocutors speak. If we take that perspective seriously, it opens our gaze both towards the inside and the outside. Conditions at play are both internal and external. We need to take into account both the soul and the social.

Can we begin to see why they speak the way they do? We can try to see the other's background, personal and communal. And we need to become aware of our own. Which memories seem to resonate while we speak? Are colonial, abasing, abusive experiences at play? Can we talk about that with them, too? We must avoid categorizing and 'othering' others. But what Pope Francis recalled in Jerusalem in 2014 is fundamental for intercultural and interreligious encounter. He said: 'May we learn to understand the sufferings of others!'³⁹ So, a further Ignatian inspiration for Christian–Muslim dialogue is:

17. Are we able to perceive and articulate unjust power structures behind us or between us: colonial and abusive, humiliating and traumatizing experiences? Can we get a sense of our interlocutors' personal and communal memory? Are we able to empathize with them?

But it is not enough just to empathize. We must also ask ourselves, and ask the others in dialogue: what must change in terms of social and ecological justice? How can we promote transformation? Thus, it should be characteristic of the Ignatian dialogical mindset to wonder:

18. What needs to happen for socio-ecological justice to improve? What is our role in this transformation, personally, as Church and together with Muslims?

Communicating about Communication: circunstancias

As we have seen, when St Ignatius gives instructions, he has a keen sense that contexts vary. Superiors must decide 'whatever will seem suitable to them in accordance with the circumstances of persons, places, and times'.⁴⁰

³⁹ Pope Francis, address, visit to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, 26 May 2014.

⁴⁰ *Formula of the Institute*, n.6.

In light of this provision, two final Ignatian criteria for Christian–Muslim dialogue come into view.

It seems typically Ignatian to have a sense of the *kairos*, the right moment. For some decisions or some outcomes, now may not be the right time. In one case, years of patience may be needed. In another, swift action may be called for. But having a clear sense of the right moment does not necessarily mean waiting for universal approval. At times, our conscience may call us to resist the common trend and defy common expectations. For example, Jesuits in dialogue with Muslims may, precisely because of their work, encounter distrust among certain ‘good Catholics’. Conflicts should not be avoided at any price. They can be necessary and even helpful. So, the question we need to ask ourselves in the tradition of St Ignatius is this:

19. Do we have a sensibility for what needs to be done now (even in the face of intra-Christian opposition) and for what still needs time and patience?

Above, we called the attention to the ‘deep perception’ of consolation and desolation, a form of metacognition. Through such attention we become aware of the movements which influence our perceptions themselves. Ignatius instructs the retreat-giver to draw the retreatant’s attention to those often undiscovered movements (Exx 6, 8). In Christian–Muslim encounters, we should act similarly. After all, a particular Muslim–Christian dialogue is often the beginning for creating conditions for genuine dialogue in the first place. So, we should, finally, ask ourselves:

20. Are we prepared to communicate about our communication? Do we have the courage to address difficulties in our interaction and discuss their possible sources?

These, then are the twenty criteria we propose for guiding those engaged in Muslim–Christian encounters under the auspices of St Ignatius of Loyola.

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