

IGNATIUS AND THE TURKS

Two Letters from 1552

WHEN THE FIRST JESUITS OFFERED THEMSELVES to the Pope so that he could send them on mission for the good of souls and for the spreading of the faith, they mentioned some specific possibilities: missions to the New World, and work among Lutherans. They were in fact prepared to go to anyone anywhere, whether among believers or heretics. But the first possibility they named was ‘the Turks’.

Jesuit history developed in other directions. The Turks’ most significant contribution was in fact made before that history started: the Turks made it impossible for Ignatius and his companions to go to Palestine in 1537, and thus indirectly brought about the founding of the Jesuits as we know them. But later the Turks seem to have receded from the companions’ awareness.¹ In the vast Ignatian correspondence, they come up comparatively rarely: a few are converted and baptized; shipping is always being threatened by Turkish pirates; two Jesuits are captured by them.² In later periods, the Society of Jesus would exercise a quiet, low-key ministry in Constantinople, above all among victims of the plague.³ But the first Jesuits never seem seriously to have engaged in ministry to or with or among the Turks. It is as though they had

¹ There is only one rather peripheral reference to them in the *Constitutions*—scholastics who are to work among the Moors and the Turks are to learn suitable languages (*Constitutions* IV.12.2, B [447, 449]).

² Ignatius writes a moving exhortation to Miguel de Nobrega, a Jesuit who has absconded from Goa without permission and then been captured by Turks *en route* back to Portugal, encouraging him to patience and fortitude (25 August 1554, MHSJ EI 7, 446-448). When Jean de la Goutte was captured by the Turks, there were dealings about a ransom. At one point Ignatius wrote to say that if the Turk who was to be exchanged for Jean de la Goutte wanted to become a Christian, then money must be found for de la Goutte’s ransom instead (18 July 1555, MHSJ EI 9, 336-338). Unfortunately, de la Goutte died in captivity while all the negotiations were still in hand.

³ See the article by various hands, ‘Turquía’, in *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús Biográfico-temático*, edited by Charles E. O’Neill and Joaquín M. Domínguez (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 2001), volume 4, 3849-3852.

forgotten what they had written when they presented themselves to the Pope.

The exceptions—perhaps exceptions that prove the rule—are two letters, both written on 6 August 1552, by Ignatius' secretary, Juan de Polanco.⁴ They were addressed to Jerónimo Nadal, at that stage with the Viceroy of Sicily, Juan de Vega, who was one of the early Jesuits' influential friends. Ignatius had an idea which he wanted to feed to the Emperor; the hope was that, through de Vega, the second of these letters would reach his desk. But the first text is more revealing of Ignatius inner world.

+ JHS Pax Christi

Dearest Father in Jesus Christ

I will not fail to share with you, having a commission for this from our Father Ignatius, an impression that he finds himself having in these days, so that you can write what occurs to you about it—although, if God our Lord were giving His Paternity any interior sign more effective than has been the case up till now, or if he could persuade himself that it would have credibility with His Majesty, he would not be waiting for advice from anyone. It's the business of seeing year after year these fleets from the Turk coming into Christian lands, doing so much harm, and carrying off so many souls, souls going to perdition for denying their faith in Christ who, in order to save them, died. It's also about how these fleets are getting to know these waters and doing exercises in them, as well as burning down different places. He's seeing, too, the harm which the corsairs have so regularly got used to doing in the port districts among Christians' souls, bodies and property. And so he has come to sense in our Lord very firmly that the Emperor ought to make a very large fleet and become lord of the sea, and thus avoid all these disadvantages; and there would be other great benefits, of significance for the universal good. And he feels moved to this not only by zeal for souls and by charity, but also by the light of reason, which shows

⁴ An earlier translation can be found in *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, selected and translated by William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola UP, 1959), 260-265.

this to be a very necessary thing, one that can be done with the Emperor spending less than what he is currently spending. And our Father is so much set on this that, as I said, if he thought it would find credibility with His Majesty, or if he had a stronger indication of the divine will, he would be glad to employ what is left of his old age in this, not fearing the trouble involved in going to the Emperor and the Prince,⁵ nor the danger of the road, nor his illnesses, nor any other negative things that might arise. You should commend this to God our Lord, and look into it, and let us know soon what appears to you in His divine sight.

Taken on its own, this text is principally striking for what it says about how precisely Ignatius reflected on his inner movements as he was weighing up whether or not to make a political move. At one level, the process is articulated in passive terms: he has *been moved* by 'zeal for souls' and received an *impresión*. Nevertheless, he has measured the force, so to speak, of these movements from outside himself, and he is quite clear that he should not act on them as he would have done had God given him a 'more effective' inner sign. At the same time, he has also been moved by 'the light of reason'. Here the outcome is similar: he can see convincing arguments for his position, but he also knows that he lacks credibility with the Emperor. Were the signs from God our Lord clearer, or were he convinced prudentially that he could move forward, 'he would not be waiting for advice from anyone'. But, as matters stand, he is seeking advice—or rather asking what comes to Nadal on the topic 'in His divine sight'.

The second letter, again written by Polanco under instruction, is very different. It is long, thorough, public, self-confident in tone; and its sheer length helps express its message. Ignatius must have hoped that some version of it would find its way to the Emperor's desk.

+ Jesus Pax Christi

Dearest Father in Jesus Christ

In the other letter, more general in its scope, I said briefly that our Father was being moved not only with the zeal of charity, but also

⁵ Later Philip II.

with the light of reason, to sense that a large fleet ought to be raised, and that it could be raised. In this one I shall take up more space in showing, firstly, that it ought to be raised and that it is very important for it to be raised; and secondly, that it will be possible to raise it without much cost, indeed with less than what is currently borne by His Majesty for things to do with the sea.

The reasons which impel the sense that it ought to be raised are these:

Firstly, that the divine honour and glory is suffering greatly as Christians from all parts, of high rank and low, are being carried off to live among infidels, and reneging on the faith of Christ, as is seen from experience—a matter of great lament for those with zeal for the conservation and advancement of our holy Catholic Faith.

The 2nd, that with a great weight on the conscience of whoever has to provide or not, there is being lost such a great number of people—and that, from children upwards, people of all ages, labouring under the servitude of such burdensomeness and the ills without number that they suffer from the infidels, are becoming Moors or Turks. And of these there are so many thousands that on the day of judgment the princes will be looking to see whether they really needed to undervalue so many souls and bodies—souls and bodies that are worth more than all their incomes and honours and lordships, because for each one of them Christ our Lord paid the price of his blood and his life.

The 3rd is that it removes a great danger that all of Christendom is running with these comings and goings of the Turks, who, though they are not so far hostile on the sea, are beginning to do naval exercises and to make preparations. They are beginning with the little of Christendom that is left to use the strategy that they used to gain the empire of Constantinople. They aid and abet princes in resisting each other, getting into conflict and wearing each other down; then, when the Turk is the one who remains, he takes what belongs to both the one and the other. And given that this way of dealing is now being used with France, there is a danger that later they'll come without being invited, placing Christendom in a great predicament both by land and by sea.

This disadvantage, and those mentioned above, would be removed if His Majesty controlled the sea with a powerful fleet.

The 4th reason is that with such a fleet the occasions that there are in the kingdom of Naples for disturbances and uprisings would in large part be removed. For, without hope of the Turkish fleet, there would be no way that the rebels could think



they would emerge with their intent achieved. Moreover, a fleet would prevent the rebels from hoping for help from France by sea, and they would also be afraid that it could immediately be deployed against themselves. Not only would Naples become calmer, but all the rest of Italy and Sicily, and other islands in that sea-area.

The 5th is that, when the fleet is such that the King of France realises that the power of the Turks cannot come here, he will see that it is in his interest to be quiet, since he lacks the help that the Turk's power gives him in diverting and wearing down His Majesty's forces. And even if he were not quiet within his own kingdom and its borders, he would not have any chance of causing trouble in Italy. Rather he would always be weaker, since he would be inferior by sea, and would lack help coming to him by sea. Therefore he would be fonder of peace.

The 6th is that the temporal harms continually being caused by the Turks and corsairs along all the coasts of Spain and Italy and other places would be avoided, along with all the costs of the garrisons that are established in all the ports when it is not known where the Turk's fleet is to strike next. And the size of these costs can be well seen in these last two years in the kingdom of Naples and Sicily and in other places; and for the garrisons, since the

fleet would serve as a fortification for everyone, there would be no need.

The 7th, that it would make passage from Spain to Italy safe and easy. It is well known how important this is for the good of those kingdoms in general, and also for many people's private interests, that suffer so much when this line of communication is removed.

The 8th, that it would be easy, having a very powerful fleet and with mastery of the whole of this sea, to regain what has been lost, and much more besides, along all the coasts of Africa and those of Greece and the islands of the Mediterranean Sea; and one could establish a foothold in many lands of the Moors and other infidels, and open up a wide path towards conquering them and thus making them Christians. Where there is no fleet, they would be able to take for themselves other important places in Christendom, just as Tripoli was taken.

The 9th is that much would be gained for the honour of His Majesty and his reputation (which is something quite needful whether among believers or unbelievers) by the possession of such a fleet, that would go and seek the Turks out in their own lands, and not be labouring hard to defend itself in its own lands, with the loss of much of the credibility and authority that His Majesty has in people's spirits—resources with which, even without use of arms, he could in a certain way defend his own people.

These are the motives which move our Father by the way of reason to sense that this fleet should be raised.

Now, for the second part, regarding how it could be raised, there occurs to him the following:

Presupposing that His Majesty should have no lack of people—through divine grace he has them better than any known prince in the world—the finances can be got from different places.

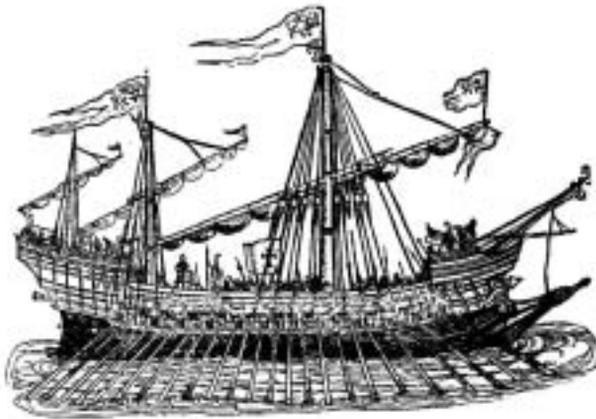
Firstly, one could give an order that many rich religious orders—there are many of these in His Majesty's dominions, and much less than what they have would be enough for them—should arm a good number of galleys. So it might be: the order of St Jerome, so many; the order of St Benedict, so many; that of the

Carthusians, so many, etc. Here come in the abbeys of Sicily and Naples where there are no religious.

The 2nd help would be from the bishoprics and their chapters and endowments, that, in all his dominions, could contribute a great sum of money to arm many galleys for the benefit of Christendom.

The 3rd, from the four orders of knights, which ought by virtue of their foundation to help this fleet against the infidels with their wealth and their people—the others too, just like the order of St John. And in order that that this be above board, the Pope should give permission for the money to be taken from them, or for the matter to be handled with their superiors there in Spain and His Majesty's other dominions, since it is for the universal good of Christendom.

The 4th is from some of the secular grandees and knights in his realms: that what is spent for the sake of show on hunting and food and excessive trappings should more justly and honourably be spent on arming galleys against infidels for the glory of God. And if they won't serve personally, they should be proud to help and serve with their fortunes. And from here one would get a large number of galleys.



The 5th is from the merchants, who, coming to an agreement among themselves, could make a contribution for a large number of ships or galleys, since it would be to their advantage too, for their trade, as well as for the good of Christendom.

The 6th help is from the cities and places as such in his kingdoms and dominions, especially those on the sea. Since they suffer so much damage from Turks and Moors and other corsairs, it is much better that they use on galleys that of which they would be robbed anyway, in order that there would be no one to rob them. And what they normally spend on garrisons they should spend on the fleet—with that there, there will be no need to be taking on expenses and diverting themselves from their own business in order to protect themselves. And in this, the regions to which more will come as a result, like those of the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily, will be able to contribute more.

The 7th help the King of Portugal might be able to provide, taking a certain number of galleys and other ships from his kingdom in the same or a similar way as was said regarding His Majesty's.

The 8th, the dominions of Genoa, which could pay for some galleys, and those of Lucca and Siena, which will always help now that that of Venice cannot.

The 9th, from the Duke of Florence, for whom it's of benefit for his own dominion as well as for the common good; and he too could get some help for himself, as was said of the King of Portugal, from ecclesiastical and secular quarters like those mentioned above.

The tenth help could and should be from the Pope and the Church's lands, if God gives him enough spirit for it; if not, at least he will allow what has been said above, which will not be a little.

And so, dearest Father, you might see what is occurring to our Father by the way of reason: that apart from the help that the Emperor can get from his revenues, which is a lot, it seems that from these ten quarters he would be able to draw what he needs in order to maintain a large fleet. And with the help also of the royal revenues, it appears that a fleet of more than two hundred

sails could be maintained without much effort, and even, if necessary, three hundred—mostly or almost all galleys. And the consequence would indeed be a great benefit to the small amount that remains of Christendom. There would be great hope that it would by this means increase greatly, whereas now we are right to be fearing its diminution and notable harm.

You should look through all this and say what you sense. If others, for whom it would be more appropriate, are not speaking about this, it could be that one of the poor men from the Society of Jesus should involve himself in this.

May God, the eternal wisdom, grant His Majesty and everyone—and in all things—to sense His most holy will, and grace perfectly to fulfil it.

Rome, 6 August 1552.

The fact that we have the two letters together suggests that Ignatius' more public and political documents are often informed by a delicate spiritual process, about which he is always discreet and often silent. One might smile at the grandiosity of Ignatius' vision, and also at the disingenuousness or cheek with which he puts rich religious orders at the top of his list of potential contributors. But it is also striking how 'the Turks' appear only as an enemy to be overcome. The sole reference to their conversion comes in the wake of a conquest; the idea that they too are people for whom Christ died seems not to cross Ignatius' mind. Perhaps this very lack says something important about the dynamics of Ignatian spirituality and ministry.

Different Frontiers

The first Jesuits were drawn by a vision of ministry at the Church's frontiers: the Turks, the New World and the Lutherans. Soon after their foundation, they added to that list the world of humanist education, with its potential for exploring a significant cultural frontier even among Catholics. Within this vision, what do the Turks signify?

At the risk of being fanciful, we might draw an analogy from the Cold War world in which most readers of this article will have grown up. In those years, vigorous missionary commitments to Africa, Latin America and Asia would have paralleled the first Jesuits' willingness to

go to the New World. There was a commitment to withstand secularist atheism, highlighted for the Jesuits by Paul VI in 1965; in an age when Catholics had begun to read Luther as something other than a mere heretic, this engagement with atheism, with contemporary worldviews perceived as false, might correspond to how the early Jesuits understood work in Protestant countries. But what of the Turks? Perhaps we could say that, for Christians in the West at least, their equivalent might be ‘the Communists’.

Western Christians in the Cold War period lived in a world bordered by the ‘iron curtain’. Spy scandals undermined our sense of security and safety. We felt haunted by an opposing power largely unknown to us and isolated from us, but which nevertheless (or so we were told) threatened the destruction of civilisation and Christianity as we knew them. In the 1950s and 1960s we may have prayed occasionally for ‘the Church of silence’; in the 1970s we coped by forgetting about communist cultures, and behaved as though there was only our affluent Western world. When Pope John Paul II was elected in 1979, he was ‘the man from a far country’, and his Polishness rather revolutionised Western senses of Catholic identity. His insistence on a European Christianity breathing with both lungs, his naming in 1980 of Cyril and Methodius as patrons of Europe alongside Benedict—all this appeared initially as wistful political correctness. It was only after 1989 that it began to feel natural.

The analogy may limp, but it seems reasonable enough to suggest that ‘the Turks’, for the early Jesuits, represented the enemy to be conquered, the enemy menacing Christendom. Any full statement of mission at the frontiers had to include them, but in immediate practice they were simply an unknown and destabilising threat, one perhaps that it was often impolite to name. They had frustrated the early Jesuits’ initial plans to serve Jesus in Jerusalem, and as the early Jesuits developed missions throughout Europe and beyond, the Turkish threat still circumscribed the space, both physical and psychological, in which much of that mission was exercised.

There was something fundamentally unmanageable about the Turks. Zealous followers of Ignatius could go to the Indies and proclaim the gospel, protected by a colonial power and with the illusion of cultural superiority. The Turks represented an Otherness that was physically nearer—sometimes all too near—but emotionally far more inaccessible. When Westerners moved into their space, they knew in

advance that they were not the powerful party. 'The Indies' betokened the Other as exotic; 'the Lutherans', the Other as apostate; 'the Turks', the Other as threat. As Ignatius and his followers developed a distinctive spirituality of apostolic engagement with the Other, it took on different forms corresponding to these different settings.

Ignatius' more public letter about the Turks reminds us of the temporal king in the Exercises, whose will it is to conquer 'all the land of unbelievers' (Exx 91, 93). But in his political spirituality, Ignatius has not really moved beyond that image, and begun to think about the eternal king, whose mission of conquest concerns the whole world, not just enemy territory, and who will thus draw us into the glory of the Father (Exx 95). The process will involve humiliations, setbacks, the way of the cross (Exx 98).

The dynamic of this meditation is as old as Mark's Gospel. What begins as an expansive programme of conquest eventually becomes something darker and more mysterious; in the end, the synoptics' Jesus inaugurates the Kingdom not by conquering the negative but by entering its shadow. The Father into whose glory Christ the King enters is one who has no favourites (Acts 10:34); 'he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous'. If we are to be His children, we are not to retaliate against our persecutors, but rather to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44-45).

The process of appropriating this vision, even in the Gospels, is slow, complex, permanently unfinished. In the *Examen*, Ignatius acknowledges that the grace we should pray for at the end of the Kingdom meditation does not come easily. But what he says about how to begin is significant. A candidate begins by,

... being resolved and ready to let it happen, and to suffer it with patience through divine grace, whenever such injuries, misrepresentations and insults as are included in this livery of Christ our Lord ... are done to him, ... not returning anyone evil for evil, but rather good for evil. (*Examen* 4 [102])

If we are to hear the call of the eternal king, we need to move beyond violence, beyond defending our sense of the right, even when this latter is correct and justified. The enemy is to be redeemed rather than overcome. Aggression and conflict are to be purged away.

The process is not easy; nor is it simply a matter of individual freedom. Salvation is corporate. It is not surprising that Ignatius, when writing in the political sphere, was still at the beginning of the dynamic. Shortly after his conversion, he encountered a Moor who denied that Mary remained a virgin after giving birth to Jesus. He experienced impulses to go after the Moor and attack him with a dagger. Dictating his account of this incident in old age, Ignatius commented that his soul was still blind, 'not knowing what humility was, or charity, or patience, or discernment in regulating and balancing these virtues' (*Autobiography*, n.14). No doubt in the interim, as his more private letter shows, he had acquired those qualities in the more individual and interpersonal spheres. But with regard to the Turks, to the Other as political and cultural enemy, he never really moved beyond competing for space.

The Turkish threat to Western civilisation was removed by the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, just as the communist one vanished with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Turkey no longer represents a military threat to Christianity; for us today, it poses different questions and challenges. A Christian visitor to modern Turkey must surely be chastened by a sense of how radically the great Christian civilisation of Byzantium has been supplanted by an Islamic, and now secularised, society. The proposal that Turkey might enter the European Union poses interesting questions about how widely we can define European identity. But if we read the references to 'the Turks' in the Ignatian sources with any historical sensitivity, the challenge evoked is a different one: that of acknowledging our deepest collective fears, of engaging with what we find threatening and inimical. Repression and denial are natural and inevitable reactions. The process will certainly take time. But nevertheless, those realities too have an important role in our journey towards God.