Being "Placed With The Son:"

Locating the Catholic Faith/Creed in the "Ignatian Trinitarian Coordinate System"

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Introduction

We Catholics ask ourselves: what do we believe after all? The most straightforward and most direct answer would be our Creed: "I believe in God…" However, in today's modern era, many say: "Belief in a creed is a sign of intellectual failure. Creeds involve faith, and faith makes statements about realities that can't be tested."[1] Facing such a mentality, how does a Catholic explain the Creed?

A lived faith must be rooted in human experience and carried out by human witness. Thus, in this synthesis paper, I propose a concrete starting point: Ignatius' experience of being "placed with the Son" at La Storta, from which experience flows a trinitarian worldview "that everything comes forth from God, everything returns to God, everything – all reality – is to be understood only in God."[2] This all-embracing "worldview" is centered on and mediated by Jesus Christ, the Son sent into the world in service of God's reign.

Ignatius' experience of the Trinity achieved a specifically christological focus and depth in the vision of La Storta on the road to Rome. While Ignatius was praying in the chapel

1 Luke T. Johnson, *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 3.

2 Herbert Alphonso, S.J. "The Jesuit/Ignatian Charism: A Personal Synthesis and Tribute to Fr. P. Arrupe," in *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, N. 116, XXXVIII, 3/2007, 51.

at La Storta, "he experienced such a change in his soul, and saw so clearly that God the Father had placed him with His Son Christ; his mind could not doubt that God the Father had indeed placed him with His Son" (*Autobiography*, 96). Ignatius saw the heavenly Father and Jesus carrying his cross; he heard the Father say to Jesus, "I want you to take this man for your servant", so that Jesus turned to Ignatius and said, "I want you to serve us."[3] It was also at La Storta that Ignatius' conviction was born concerning the name the companions should take - the Society of Jesus - as well as their central charism: to be "placed with the Son."

What was remarkable for Ignatius is the fact that this experience gave him an unshakable confirmation of faith, such that "he was determined to die for them, merely because of what he had seen".[4] His experience of God is a revelation of how God may be inviting many other men and women today to be touched by and to savor the mystery of Divine love.

This paper employs a method of mathematical positioning a point in a tridimensional coordinate system. In cubic geometry, to position a point is to define its three coordinates in a tridimensional coordinate system (see figure).

3 Pedro Arrupe S.J., "The Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism," in The Trinity in the Ignatian Charism, Rome: CIS, (1982): 30, citing Lainez, *Adhort. in examen* 7. FN II 133.

4 Arrupe, "The Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism", 18.

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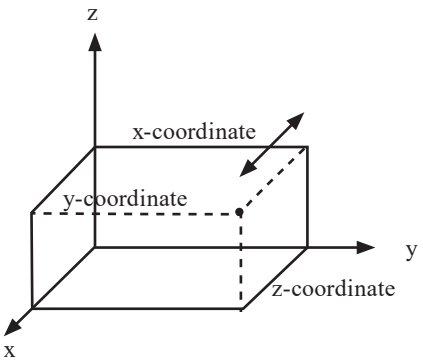


Fig. 1: The Three Coordinates in the Tridimensional Coordinate System

Analogically, the paper attempts to explain the Catholic Faith/Creed in an "Ignatian trinitarian coordinate system." Ignatius' experience of "being placed with the Son" at La Storta was essentially an experience of "defining" the Ignatian charism as well as the Society of Jesus in the "trinitarian coordinate system." In the light of such an experience, the paper first describes the "Ignatian trinitarian coordinate system" and then locates the Catholic Faith/Creed in the system, to shed light on the understanding of it and to empower people to deepen and live out the Catholic faith authentically.

Describing the Ignatian Trinitarian Coordinate System

Z-axis: I Believe in God, the Father almighty…

For Ignatius, God the Father is primarily the source and ultimate destiny of everything. As Alphonso puts it: "All reality coming forth from God, all reality returning to

God, all reality seen and understood only in God."[5] In the vision of La Storta, it is the Father who dominates the scene, accepts Ignatius and places him with the Son, and promises to Ignatius that "I shall be favorable to you" or "I shall be with you." In other words, the vision of La Storta for Ignatius is an "understanding, in the bosom of the Trinity, of the mystery announced by Paul, of how all things issue from God and return to him. Ignatius sees that the mysteries of creation, of man's fall, of redemption and of the Church are caught up in that movement of descent and ascent."[6]

What is central, for Ignatius, is not the Trinity in itself, but the presence and action of the triune God in the world, especially in terms of creation and incarnation. God touches us in our everyday lives. One might even say that for Ignatius the world is the "indispensable medium, the locus in and through which God comes to us and we, in turn, move to God."[7] The point is not merely gratitude to God who is the source of every good blessing, but "an attitude and a vision which recognizes the world and everything in it as the theatre of a divine drama."[8]

Ultimately, grace is a sharing in God's own life and action. In grace, however, we are not only drawn into God's love and life but are drawn into God's action in this world. Or, we could say, it is precisely in and through our action that we open ourselves to God who is at work in the world.

5 Alphonso, "The Jesuit/Ignatian Charism…", 53.
6 R. Cantin, "L' Illumination du Cardoner," in *Sciences Ecclesiastiques*, Montreal, 1955, 54. cited by Arrupe, "The Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism", 43.
7 Peter Schineller, "St Ignatius and Creation-Centred Spirituality," *The Way* 29 (1989): 47.
8 John R. Sachs, "Ignatian Mysticism," *The Supplement of the Way* 82 (1995): 77.

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X-axis: I Believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord…

For Ignatius, according to Pelland, "the entire life of Jesus is directed to the Father. Toward him, he is turned; it is the Father's work that he comes to do. Of him, he speaks and him he manifests. Toward him, he moves with all his being."[9] This image of Jesus is illustrated in three hymns in the New Testament. The first is found in the Letter to the Philippians: "He emptied himself…even to accepting death, death on a cross…" (2:6-9). The second is presented in the Letter to the Colossians: "He is the image of the unseen God… God wanted all perfection to be found in him and all things to be reconciled through him and for him…" (1:15-20). The third hymn is in the prologue of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God…The Word was made flesh…it is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (1:1-18). Thus, Fr. Arrupe, former Jesuit Superior General, says that for Ignatius,

> Christ is above all the One who, being always conscious of issuing from the Father and of returning to him, continuously contemplates the Father's designs in order to discern, so to speak, in a perfect indifference of heart and openness of spirit, without preconceived limits, what the Father wants from him for the realization of his work and his greater glory.[10]

It is this Christ bearing the cross with whom Ignatius was placed. It essentially means to be called to serve and to participate in the mission of Christ through humiliation and the

9 Gilles Pelland, "Ignatius and The Trinity: Theological Insights," in *The Trinity in the Ignatian Charism*, Rome: CIS (1982): 132.

10 Cantin, "L' Illumination du Cardoner", cited by Arrupe, "The Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism," 43.

cross. But the cross that the Lord bore on his shoulders means not only external hardships; it also and primarily means following Christ in humility, poverty, and self-abnegation. Arrupe cites Nadal to synthesize the significance of the cross:

> It helps to exercise oneself and to consider and feel that we are following Jesus Christ who still carries his cross in the Church militant, to whom the eternal Father has given us as servants, if we follow him with our own crosses and want nothing more from the world that what he wanted and took, i.e., poverty, opprobrium, toil, pain, even death, exercising the mission for which God had sent him into the world, which was to save and perfect souls, with all obedience and perfection in all virtues. But our cross is our delight too, for it already has the splendor and glory of Jesus' victory over death, his resurrection and his ascension.[11]

Ignatius was "placed with the Son" in order to serve. This is the heart of Ignatius' experience at La Storta. In the end, such experience is, according to Arrupe,

> a participation in the mission of the One sent by the Father, in the Spirit, in an ever greater service in love, with all the variants of the cross, in imitation and following of that Jesus who wants to lead all men and all of creation back to the glory of the Father.[12]

Y-axis: I Believe in the Holy Spirit…

For Ignatius, as we have seen above, all reality comes forth from God, and all reality returns to God. The role of the Spirit is precisely to be the moving "force" of that movement

11 Arrupe, "The Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism," 46, citing *Orationis ratio in Soc*, Nadal IV 678.
12 Ibid., 48.

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of descent and ascent. In the movement of descent, God is seen as the Spirit at work in the world. Ignatius brings out this point clearly in the Contemplation to Attain Divine Love in the *Spiritual Exercises*: "God dwells in creatures ... God works and labors for me in all creatures … all blessings and gifts as descending from above" (235-237). Sachs points out: "The goodness of the world is not merely a protological characteristic that derives from its creation by God; it is an eschatological reality which God is laboring to bring to fullness."[13] Thus, it becomes crucial to discern what God is doing, what God intends to accomplish. It is the role of the Spirit to illumine us to discover and read these labors, so that we may attune our choices and actions with the workings of God in the ascending movement of bringing to fullness.

Yet the role of the Spirit in Ignatius' experience at La Storta is best understood as a unifying agent to gather his companions as one company of Jesus. In Ignatius' understanding, to be "placed with the Son" is also to unite all his companions and those who wish to join the company with and around the Son, precisely because the union that exists among them follows a divine pattern. Arrupe says: "The unification that the Spirit brings about in a community proceeds from that very unity which operates in the heart of the Trinity."[14]

Mary Intercedes for Us to be "placed with the Son"

Being "placed with her Son" was a constant favor that Ignatius asked from the Virgin Mary (*Autobiography* 96). For Ignatius, Mary, from whom the second divine Person took flesh, appears in his mystical experience essentially in a

13 Sachs, "Ignatian Mysticism", 77.
14 Arrupe, "The Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism," 57.

mediatory role. Adolf Haas points out: "The Mother and the Son always belong together in Ignatius, and the Diary gives us a luminous witness to this."[15] Mary – Virgin in total giving of self in the response of faith; Mother in her fecundity by the Holy Spirit bringing forth her Son; Woman of the Magnificat; assumed into Heaven as the sign and promise of the eschatological fulfillment of the Church and humankind – is our intercessor for our human needs in history.

Locating Creation, Human Person, Sin in the Ignatian Trinitarian Coordinate System

All Creatures Coming Forth from God and Returning to Him

"Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). Everything takes its origin in the heart of God where there is the superabundance of love, and that love did not stay closed in on itself, but "has been poured into our hearts" (Romans 5:5). Pelland states, "We were nothing in a purely gratuitous fashion that love led us into existence and predestined us to be filled, spreading itself over us and taking us to itself."[16] Just as everything comes from God, everything returns to Him. It is He who gives meaning to everything, eternally. We will be filled precisely by finding Him, being, as it were, immersed in his abundance.

We were "placed with the Son" in anticipation—even before we existed, as Paul exclaims: "He chose us in Christ

15 Adolf Haas, "The Foundation of Ignatian Mysticism in Loyola and Manresa," in *The Trinity in the Ignatian Charism*, Rome: CIS (1982): 184.

16 Pelland, "Ignatius and The Trinity: Theological Insights," 121.

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before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). The Spirit operates in us the growth that leads us, by the ways of God, to become sons and daughters with the Son and in the Son. Paul vigorously underlines this mystery in the Letter to the Ephesians:

> With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ, we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:9-12).

Human Person is "Man with and for Others"

A "person," as Carl Rogers made clear to us, necessarily connotes freedom that is open to others, not being closed in on itself, one that grows, develops and matures precisely by the interpersonal relationships it establishes.[17] However, it is in the Trinity that the concept of person finds its most perfect and mysterious realization. The Father is the "Father" inasmuch as he generates the Son; the Son is the "Son" inasmuch as he comes from the Father and is eternally "turned towards the Father" (John 1: 1); and, in the case of the Holy Spirit, he is in his very person the mutual relationship of love between the Father and the Son – so that, in this case amazingly, "person" is itself constituted by a "relationship". Such relationship is characterized by a "going-out," a "self-giving," a vital

17 Cf. Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961).

impulse toward the other two.[18] The human person must take inspiration for his perfection and, analogically, for his fulfillment and consummation. After all, every human person was created in the image and likeness of a triune God. Thus, every human person, as Arrupe emphasizes, "should not close in on itself, but perfect itself in its relationships and otherness, renouncing all ego-centeredness. In the Divine Persons is found the ultimate model of the 'man for others'."[19]

Sin as Human Person's Selfishness and Self-Absorption

Sin enters into the world, as human persons act against their nature of "self-giving", as they deny what God is in them and what they are for God. If we consider all of human persons' selfishness: their exploitation, their violations of human rights, their injustice, whatever is an undue appropriation of the material or moral possessions of others, they are completely the opposite of the trinitarian communion in self-giving love. Arrupe affirms: "Whatever is opposed to donation—selfishness, withholding, exploitation, oppression—depersonalizes us in the trinitarian sense of that word."[20] In other words, in the light of trinitarian interpersonal communion among the Divine Persons, "giving oneself to others is the best possible use of the capacity of self-determination."[21] This is the very reason why the Society of Jesus issued a decree on the promotion of faith and justice hand-in-hand in its 32nd General Congregation:

18 Cf. Arrupe, "The Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism", 50-51.
19 Ibid., 51.
20 Ibid., 53.
21 Ibid., 52.

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> Promoting justice means also restoring in ourselves the model of the trinitarian relation. Freeing the oppressed means also refinding the sense of equality in which our condition as persons formed in the divine image places us. Fighting for peace means also rediscovering our equality as sons of the Father and brothers in Jesus Christ by the work of the Spirit.[22]

Locating the Church and Its Sacraments in the Ignatian Trinitarian Coordinate System

The Church is the Icon of the Trinity

Bruno Forte, in his book, *The Church Icon of the Trinity*, elaborates that "the Church comes from the Trinity, is structured to the image of the Trinity, and goes forward toward the trinitarian fulfillment of all of history."[23] Therefore, the Church as mystery is perfectly understood by locating it in the "Ignatian Trinitarian Coordinate System" as unrolling in/through history the divine plan—the universal saving design of the Father (LG 2), the mission of the Son (LG 3), and the sanctifying work of the Spirit (LG 3) of uniting all humankind with the Trinity and uniting all peoples and all men and women with one another in Trinitarian life.[24]

The Church is mystery and sacrament, i.e., the sign and instrument of this trinitarian presence and action, leading humankind through working out in human history the future realization of the Kingdom. In participation in the mission of Christ, all Christians are co-responsible for the Church, its outreach and mission in the world and for the world. Thus, the Church by nature is "missionary": "the mediating Gospel/salvation to all human history, in every intercross of time,

space-and-place, people-and-situation."[25]

The "deepest reality" in the Church is the Christ-life, the Trinitarian life or life of the Spirit in all the faithful, which Forte calls "the ontology of grace."[26] This "ontology of grace" is the foundation of the Church as communion. The Holy Spirit, as the innermost "soul" of the Church, living and working in each and in the whole, is operative in all the life and action of the Church on the level of communion.

The Sacraments Channel God's Life-Giving Grace

Many say that "seeking and finding God in all things" is the hallmark of Ignatian charism. Indeed, the entire created world becomes the sacrament of God's action and presence. Above all, for Ignatius, the real and concrete presence of God is found in the sacraments of the Church, especially in the sacrament of the Eucharist. As Haas affirms: "Only here in the sacrament does the presence of Christ attain its unambiguous concreteness and historical and sacramental density."[27]

It is precisely in celebrating the Eucharist that we grow in deeper understanding of the Trinity, for it is essentially an act of thanksgiving to the Father (*eucharistein*) for His bestowing of life-giving grace on us, a memorial of Christ's Paschal Mystery (*anamnesis*) in which we are "placed with Christ" here and now so that we are empowered to commit ourselves to loving and serving as Christ did on the cross, and a calling down of the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*) that unites us into sharing Christ's own experience of Abba, Father, whose "will be done on earth as in heaven" (the Lord's Prayer; cf. CFC

25 Ibid., 134.
26 Ibid., 63.
27 Haas, "The Foundation of Ignatian Mysticism in Loyola and Manresa", 180.

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1683). Eucharistic Prayer III brings out this central point of the Eucharist distinctively in the "Ignatian trinitarian coordinate system": "Father, you are holy indeed, and all creation rightly gives you praise. All life, all holiness comes from you through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, by the working of the Holy Spirit."

Conclusion

In this synthesis paper, I have attempted to explain the Catholic Faith/Creed in the light of Ignatius' experience of "being placed with the Son" at La Storta. Using a cubic geometry analogy of positioning a point in a tridimensional coordinate system, I proposed to locate our faith in the "Ignatian trinitarian coordinate system" in order to derive a coherent understanding of our faith from the Ignatian trinitarian "worldview."

Ignatius' experience of "being placed with the Son" testifies that Christian life is the life of grace, that is, a participation in the life of the Triune God. We have been created in the image and likeness of God, who is one and triune, and our destiny is to be assumed into the glory of God the Father, through the Son's redemption and in the Holy Spirit. Christ, with whom we are placed by the Father, whom we serve, has the mission of bringing us to the Father and sending the Holy Spirit to assist in sanctifying us, i.e., in perfecting the divine life in us.

"It is the way to the Trinity." Just as Arrupe exhorts the entire Society of Jesus to travel on the road of and toward the Trinity, so am I convinced that all Christians are invited to take the same road:

> That is the road the Society [all Christians] must travel; a long road that will end only when we arrive at the plenitude of Christ's Kingdom. But the road has been traced out for us and we must travel it, following the footsteps of Christ as he returns to his Father, illumined and strengthened by the Spirit who dwells in us.[28]

28 Arrupe, "The Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism," 60.

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