

MYSTICAL THEOLOGY IN THE EARLY JESUIT MISSION TO COLONIAL PARAGUAY

Contemplation and Action at the Hispanic-American Frontier

Juan Miguel Marin

NEAR THE BEGINNING OF THE FILM *The Mission* we are introduced to Father Gabriel, a Jesuit who is depicted as embodying many of the qualities often attributed to mystics. Somewhere in the jungles of colonial South America we find Gabriel praying, something he often does throughout the movie, before ascending the mountain that will lead him to his goal: bringing Christ to a remote tribe. Gabriel is presented as withdrawn, ethereal and frequently engaged in contemplation. In contrast, the tempestuous Father Rodrigo is portrayed as the man of action. A former soldier, Rodrigo will identify with the indigenous people to the point of taking up arms in order to defend them against the cruelty of the colonisers. Gabriel, on the other hand, rejects confrontation with the oppressors and chooses to flee with the tribe to safer ground. Rodrigo will train those who remain in the arts of war. Gabriel will insist that God is love. Rodrigo will remind him that God demands justice.

The conflict between the two priests obscures the fact that one of the Jesuits who inspired the film's plot, Antonio Ruiz de Montoya (1585–1652), integrated Gabriel's contemplation and Rodrigo's action in a single individual. Like Gabriel he lived a rich mystical life, even writing a treatise on contemplative prayer. But he also organized a massive flight of indigenous people in order to escape slaughter at the hands of colonisers. Like Rodrigo, he struggled against colonial oppression by securing from the Spanish king the right for the native people to bear arms. His participation in international controversies

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concerning the fate of indigenous people set a precedent for what would later be called human rights.

Here I want to explore how Montoya's active life was infused by his mysticism. I will place him in the context of the early Jesuit mission to Peru and Paraguay by discussing the mystical theology of the time, and especially of his predecessor, Diego Alvarez de Paz. A look at how his younger Jesuit brother Francisco del Castillo followed in his footsteps will provide us with another example of the way in which contemplation and action were integrated on the South American frontier.

Mystical Theology in Early Modern Spain

The word 'mystical' is often reserved today for unusual or mysterious phenomena which tend to surround specific individuals. In the Roman Catholic imagination, 'mystics' have been seen as saintly men and women who received the grace of having an extraordinary relationship with God. Sixteenth-century Spain had more than its fair share of these mystics, most famously Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and Ignatius of Loyola.

Yet in sixteenth-century Spain an understanding of mystical theology and contemplation was born that is quite different from contemporary misconceptions. Mystical theology, as Teresa and John taught it, was not an esoteric discipline but a prayer exercise in which discursive thought is left behind in order to make space for a loving encounter with God. Many at this time saw the centuries-old tradition of mystical theology as accessible only from within a contemplative lifestyle that required a monastic environment separate from the world. But Ignatius and his followers successfully challenged this requirement by showing how a contemplative vocation does not demand disengagement from an active life in ministry. The role that mystical theology should play in the nascent Society of Jesus, however, would be the cause of some controversy. While some Jesuits held that this non-discursive and ecstatic style of prayer was alien to the ministry-orientated prayer taught by Ignatius, others claimed that, nourished by sources from the mystical tradition, they were better able to serve others in their ministries.

While these views were being debated in Spain, Jesuits in Paraguay were establishing a mission where, years later, they would be put to the

test. Would mystical theology, born in a monastic context, be possible to practise in the precarious situation of this recently discovered frontier, and be able to produce fruits in the ministerial care of souls?

The tradition of mystical theology can be traced back to the writings of the fifth- or sixth-century author Pseudo-Dionysius—considered by sixteenth-century Spanish writers to be the same Dionysius who was a disciple of St Paul. The words *mystical* and *mystery* have the same root. For Pseudo-Dionysius, mystical theology was that which refers to the mysteries of God's Word. These mysteries lay beyond human comprehension. The goal of mystical theology was to achieve, through prayer, an ecstatic union with the Cause of all things.

Throughout the previous centuries, mystical theology was thought to involve an esoteric knowledge available only to consecrated religious who had enough education to delve into mystical texts. The sixteenth century in Spain marked a turning point in the history of this tradition. With the advent of the printing press and an emerging interest in translating the writings of spiritual authors into the vernacular, Spain became a fertile ground for new attitudes towards prayer. One important change was a democratization of prayer by which, since Latin was no longer required to read books on prayer, lay people could now approach these spiritual authors on their own. The discovery of prayer as an intimate encounter with God made people understand that, not only was Latin unnecessary for mystical theology, one did not even have to know how to read. Mystical theology was not theology in our sense of the word. With the help of spiritual direction anyone could practise mystical theology.

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We find this attitude in the writing of the Benedictine abbot Garcia Jiménez de Cisneros who understood mystical theology in this way in his *Exercitatorio*, a precursor to Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*. The *Exercitatorio* is Cisneros' Spanish paraphrase of spiritual sources for those without much education. It was composed in the vernacular 'because [his] intention was to make it [available] for the simple and pious and not for the arrogant and educated'.¹ Cisneros was the first of

¹ Garcia Jiménez de Cisneros, *Exercitatorio*, in *Obras completas*, volume 2 (Barcelona: Montserrat Abbey, 1965), 454 (this and later quotations from non-English texts are my translation unless otherwise stated).



St Teresa of Avila, by François Gérard

was hailed as the Doctor of Prayer. Yet she never wrote a systematic account of prayer. She uses the word *mystical* only three times. These references, which I quote in full, are in her autobiography, where we find them linked to feeling, experiencing and becoming united with God.³

... a feeling of the presence of God that in no way I could doubt that He was inside me or I totally immersed in Him. This was not in the manner of vision; I believe they call the experience 'mystical theology'. The soul is suspended in such a way that it seems to be completely outside itself. The will loves, the memory, it seems to me, is almost lost. For, as I say, the intellect does not work, but is as though amazed by all it understands, because God desires that it

many who opened up the riches of mystical spirituality to a larger audience. The Society of Jesus was the religious order that did most to disseminate Christian spirituality among lay people in Spain. But it was a Carmelite nun who became the most influential teacher of what mystical theology was all about. After her canonization, Teresa of Avila became the authority to whom, through her writings, those who wanted to learn about mystical theology first looked. Since it was her approach that influenced Montoya and Castillo I will focus upon it now.²

When St Teresa became a Doctor of the Church, she

² I discuss the following in more detail in my 'Teresa of Avila as Student and Teacher of the Dionysian tradition', *Magistra* (Winter 2007).

³ St Teresa of Avila, *The Book of Her Life*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008).

understand, with regard to the things that His Majesty represents to it, that it understands nothing. (10:1)

He who has had some experience will understand me, for I don't know how to describe this being raised up if it is not understood through experience. In mystical theology, which I began to describe, the intellect ceases to work because God suspends it. (12:5)

How this prayer they call union comes about and what it is I don't know how to explain. These matters are expounded in mystical theology. I wouldn't know the proper vocabulary. Neither do I understand what the mind is, nor do I know how it differs from the soul or the spirit. It all seems to be the same thing to me, although the soul sometimes goes forth from itself. The way this happens is comparable to what happens when a fire is burning and flaming, and it sometimes becomes a forceful blaze. The flame then shoots very high above the fire, but the flame is not by that reason something different from the fire, but the same flame that is in the fire What I'm attempting to explain is what the soul feels when it is in this divine union. What union is we already know since it means that two separate things become one. (18:2-3)

Here we find some defining characteristics of mystical theology that will also show up in Montoya's mystical text, *Silex del Divino Amor* (*Firestone of Divine Love*). Intense feeling, the dwindling of the cognitive faculties and the goal of union are all part of mystical theology as he and others practised it at the Hispanic-American frontier.

Teresa of Avila's approach to mystical theology was at first treated with mistrust by the still young Society of Jesus. Superiors in Spain were suspicious about a 'way of prayer that began to be introduced in the Society, in the province of Castilla, through the spirit and counsel of Mother Teresa of Jesus'.⁴ This 'strange' way of prayer was being taught by Baltasar Alvarez, who had previously been Teresa's spiritual director. Alvarez' 'prayer of silence' was considered by many to be too contemplative for a religious order that prided itself on being 'contemplative in action'.⁵ Some were afraid that if this affective prayer continued to spread, cases of 'visionarism or madness' would be produced.⁶ Everard Mercurian, fourth Superior General of the Society

⁴ Baltasar Alvarez, *Escritos espirituales* (Barcelona: Claraso, 1961), 150.

⁵ For the spirituality associated with this phrase see Joseph Conwell, *Walking in the Spirit: A Reflection on Jeronimo Nadal's Phrase 'Contemplatives Likewise in Action'* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2003).

⁶ Alvarez, *Escritos espirituales*, 145.

of Jesus, prohibited the indiscriminate reading of mystical theology texts by Jesuits, claiming that they were incompatible with the Society's goals.⁷ Yet this is exactly what our Jesuit missionaries would put to the test.

Alvarez de Paz

Among the Jesuits who were sent to the recently established Peruvian mission was Fr Diego Alvarez de Paz, a devoted student of the mystical theological tradition. Influenced by the Church Fathers and by Teresa of Avila, he wrote several volumes on contemplative prayer and the mystical path while he was at Lima, the frontier post of the Jesuit mission. In his youth he had experienced a tension between his desire for a life devoted to contemplation and his call to become a missionary. His superiors, Frs J. Atienza and José de Acosta, wrote to General Acquaviva because they were concerned about his vocation. Acquaviva's response provides us with an insight into the messy entanglement between contemplation and action that worried many Jesuits:

Father José de Acosta wrote me what he thought about Fr Diego de Paz, whose spirit is somewhat withdrawn, so as to make some think, including Fr Paz himself, that it is inappropriate to the Society. I believe this is the reason why he had some desire to join the Carthusians. I ask Your Reverence to console and encourage him in my name, letting him know that the Society will be happy if he devotes himself to study, since God has given him the talent to do so. I also ask Your Reverence to have in consideration, regarding his assignments, whatever is his inclination and whatever consoles him. The spirit of prayer, if it is not contrary to obedience and the Society's ministry, is not alien but very proper to the Society. This is how I understand the gift that God has given him, a path to religious perfection. Lack of prayer undermines the strength and being of the religious spirit.⁸

⁷ For a detailed discussion see Philip Endean "The Strange Style of Prayer": Mercurian, Cordeses, and Alvarez', in *The Mercurian Project*, edited by Thomas M. McCoog (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004), 351–394.

⁸ Cited in Eduardo López Azpitarte, *La oración contemplativa: evolución y sentido en Alvarez de Paz* (Granada: Facultad de Teología, 1966), 127.

It seems that zeal for the salvation of the indigenous people had led some Jesuits to question the value of contemplation. That Acquaviva had to remind Jesuits that a spirit of prayer ‘was not alien but very proper to the Society’ tells us of one temptation the missionaries encountered: judging prayer as taking time and energy away from the mission. Of course, Acquaviva was aware too of another extreme view. There were also Jesuits who held contemplation to be the end of religious life. Acquaviva here emphasizes that the Jesuits must make sure that the spirit of prayer ‘is not contrary to obedience and the Society’s ministry’. He is hinting at the aftermath of the intra-Society controversy over the role of contemplation that was still lingering in Europe.⁹

Alvarez de Paz remained in Lima, where he held the posts of professor, rector and provincial.¹⁰ His Carthusian leanings remained with him, yet he found his call in tempering the missionaries’ zeal by warning that action without contemplation will fail to accomplish anything. His letters help us to understand the issues that the Jesuit communities were facing, as well as revealing his own views on them. In one he writes:

Without spiritual men this province would become a monstrous part of the Society, neither spiritual nor like the others. Men of spirit do not develop by being involved in trivial occupations or compelled to spend whatever time is left from one ministry in yet another one; but in a quiet life with enough time to spend in prayer and spiritual reading.¹¹

As idiosyncratic as he can sound, we can trace Alvarez de Paz’ growing maturity in his later works. His experiences in Peru made the former novice who wanted to join the Carthusians aware of how contemplation leads to action. A passage where he describes the mystical state ends with the zeal of the missionaries:

⁹ See Edean, ‘“The Strange Style of Prayer”’.

¹⁰ Aurelio Yanguas, ‘Alvarez de Paz et l’oraison affective’, *Revue d’Ascetique et Mystique*, 19 (1938), 376–393.

¹¹ Antonio Astrain, *Historia de la Compania de Jesus en la Asistencia de España*, volume 4, part 2 (Madrid: Real Casa, 1909), 546 .



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San Pedro Cathedral, Lima

In it the soul is so full of sweetness and delight that it seems that only with difficulty it is held so that it does not burst open the body The lower part of the soul remains enchanted and brimming with tenderness. Everything dissipates in gentle tears. An urgent desire for the things in heaven arises The soul is strengthened so that it can face adversity and obstacles Zeal and desire for the salvation of souls are increased¹²

Here we have three important elements that we will also find in Montoya's mystical theology. First, we have an intense desire for heavenly things. Then we see that there is no fear of adversity—something that Jesuits in frontier, colonial territory encountered every day. Finally we see that the intense desire is linked to the desire for the salvation of souls. Passages like this are rare in Alvarez de Paz' mystical

¹² Diego Alvarez de Paz, *Opera Iacobi Alvarez de Paz*, volume 6, 566 a-b; V, III, V. Quoted in Azpitarte, *La Oración contemplativa*, 97.

theology. Yet the few we find are precious. His exhortation to be like guardian angels, whose vocation is directed towards both God and those in their care, is one of these:

... we should imitate our Guardian Angel, who perfectly serves God by caring for our spiritual health, but at the same time maintains his peace with his gaze always fixed in the divine face. Fervour for divine ministry does not obscure its light, nor does the vision of God present an obstacle in taking care of us Likewise, while we are in external action, we should glance at God so that during moments of holy rest we empty ourselves ... into pure contemplation.¹³

Montoya, as we shall see, took up this call and became for many a guardian angel.

Antonio Ruiz de Montoya

As a young man in colonial Lima, Montoya felt attraction both to the life of a soldier and to the religious life. In his twentieth year he spent eight days exploring his vocation while making the Spiritual Exercises under the guidance of one of the Spanish Jesuits assigned to the colonial territories. During the Exercises he entered into the kind of prayer that is often called mystical. He tells us of his experience:

If a man who is in a room surrounded by windows wishes to recollect himself in the dark, he would slowly close all windows. The more windows he closes the more his senses are recollected until everything is obscured, without his being able to see, hear or touch anything. A similar thing happened to my soul. Slowly my senses began to fall asleep. I was not able to see, hear or smell anything, even though my faculties remained lively.¹⁴

These signs of apophatic darkness place Montoya in the company of Gregory of Nyssa and John of the Cross, for whom God is met in absolute withdrawal from exterior reality. Reducing sensory input intensifies the mind's concentration so as to focus only on God. Such intensification occurs not only at the cognitive level but also at the

¹³ Diego Alvarez de Paz, *De vita spirituali*, volume 2, 36. Quoted in Francisco de Castillo, *Un místico del siglo XVI*, edited by Ruben Vargas Ugarte (Lima: Gil, 1960), vii.

¹⁴ José Luis Rouillon Arróspide, *Antonio Ruiz de Montoya: biografía* (Lima: UNISINOS, 2001), 23.

emotional level, where desire is increased. For Montoya this led into a rapturous encounter with Christ:

It seemed that Christ Our Lord came to me and drew my mouth to his side, which was bleeding. The consolation I felt cannot be expressed in words. This I felt mostly with my senses. He disappeared. I was left so consoled and moved that everything seemed meaningless. I felt so strong a desire to pray that I could not think of anything else.¹⁵

But the sensuousness and physicality of this encounter brought Montoya back to the exterior world and to what needed to be done in it. Mystical ecstasy was not an end in itself but the place where his mission would be revealed. Christ showed him in a vision how the indigenous people,

... were being chased by men bearing weapons in their hands. When the latter caught up with them, they bludgeoned them, wounded them, and ravaged them, seizing and kidnapping great numbers and setting them to hard labour. At the same time he beheld a group of men who shone brighter than the sun, robed in white garments. He could tell that these belonged to the Society of Jesus—not by the colour but by a certain understanding that enlightened his mind These men were striving with all their might to drive off the others, who had the appearance of devils This sight enkindled in him a burning desire to be their fellow in this noble task.¹⁶

Montoya decided to enter the Jesuits so as to help the indigenous people. But his call to ministry cannot be separated from his call to a life of prayer. In these two excerpts we find how he associates desire with the two calls: He experiences both a 'strong desire to pray' and a 'burning desire to be their fellow in this noble task'.

After his formation Montoya was assigned to minister to the indigenous population. He found out that the vision he had had during his prayer was not far from the truth. Forced labour was decimating the people. In a document from the mission at San Ignacio we find a letter from

¹⁵ Arróspide, *Montoya*, 25.

¹⁶ Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, *Spiritual Conquest*, translated by C. J. McNaspy (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1993), 36.



Spanish Cruelty to Indian Slaves, by *Theodore de Bry*

the indigenous leaders to the king asking for his intervention. The letter reads:

Our people have been consumed. Not only our people but also the sons of the leaders and even the leaders themselves end up dying in the jungle without the sacraments, as if they were infidels or irrational animals. The plantations are full of the bones of our people and our sons Now only our women remain. They do not cease weeping for the death of their sons and husbands.¹⁷

Montoya himself writes in one of his letters to his superiors:

They kill the Indians as if they were animals, regardless of age or sex. They kill the children so that their mothers will walk faster. Because the elderly cannot walk as fast and cannot work they kill

¹⁷ Arróspide, *Reducciones*, 221.

them by hitting them on the head. Leaders and rebels are also killed so that they do not incite the others.¹⁸

The plight of the indigenous people moved Montoya to become embroiled in international disputes over whether or not they were human beings. He travelled to Spain to argue on their behalf, and convinced the king to support the Jesuits' cause. He saw his actions as part of a spiritual enterprise, not a political one. The book he wrote in order to gain support for his mission, *Spiritual Conquest*, describes supernatural graces received as signs of God's approval for the Jesuits' work. The book became popular and won many to the Jesuits' side.¹⁹ The king granted the native people the right to possess arms and defend themselves against the colonists' incursions.

His mystical practice did not diminish while he was engaged in these activities but intensified. While praying before a return trip to Lima,

... he suddenly felt that his soul, as at previous times, retreated and recollected itself to his inner part. He noticed that a ray of light emerged from the tabernacle and arrived at his chest, wounding him. By this his heart received much consolation and assurance of the graces he would receive in such a long and dangerous trip.²⁰

It was prayer that strengthened Montoya throughout his ministry.

But as a Jesuit called to contemplation in action, Montoya also knew how difficult contemplation could be. During his time Jesuits often emphasized *meditation*, as taught at the beginning of St Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, more than *contemplation*, described at the end. Meditation is praying with the imagination, applying the senses and engaging in conversation with God. Montoya teaches that:

Contemplation is a sincere gazing at God, lacking discourse, which produces in the understanding the highest concept of God and in the will an ardent desire of loving him. Contemplation ought not to

¹⁸ Arróspide, *Reducciones*, 234.

¹⁹ Astrain, *Historia de la Compañía de Jesús*, volume 5, 565.

²⁰ Arróspide, *Reducciones*, 305.

have as its object something sensible, but to be totally spiritual. This is the difference between contemplation and meditation.²¹

Montoya had learnt from experience that emptying the mind of thoughts and images requires effort. Castillo had practised meditation as the Jesuits taught, but felt called to engage also in contemplation, even when it was a struggle. Montoya borrowed an example from St Teresa to describe this struggle:

Saint Teresa complained about that little butterfly that fluttered around her understanding like around a candle's flame. It impeded her from knowing God and finding the will to love him.²²

The understanding is restless. What it needs to do is to surrender to the light of God, a brightness that blinds and leaves one in darkness. A way of doing this is described by St Ignatius who, at the end of the *Spiritual Exercises*, teaches us to focus on the rhythm of the breath or a word from a prayer that gives one consolation.

Montoya liked to pray with the word *renuncio*, 'I renounce', as a way of leaving everything to God. He renounces his memory, understanding and will, just as Ignatius did when he prayed the *Suscipe*: 'Take, O Lord, and receive my memory, my will and understanding ...' (Exx 234). By doing this Montoya moved from discursive activity to non-discursive rest. First, he saw himself renouncing wealth, fame and power in order to leave space for God, until at the end only the word *renuncio* was left, leading to a wordless prayer. In this prayer what remained was a 'simple gaze, staring at the beloved, saying nothing, expressing nothing. With this simple gazing and intimate silence more is said than by speaking.'²³ Montoya would then leave this silence with enough strength to keep renouncing in his life those things that impeded him in his ministry to the native people. In the midst of adversity he would return to prayer, oscillating between exteriority and interiority. An accident while travelling through the jungle provided an opportunity for supernatural intervention through prayer:

In the midst of adversity he would return to prayer

²¹ Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, *Silex del Divino Amor* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1991), 145.

²³ Montoya, *Silex*, 259.

My knee was swollen, my muscles like iron. At every moment I felt as if I were being stabbed with spears. I lacked even a bandage to wrap my leg with. Deciding that my best medicine would be prayer, I commended myself to my glorious father St Ignatius Hardly had I dozed off for a few moments through exhaustion, when I felt St Ignatius at my feet. He touched my foot and said: 'Go on with your journey; your foot is healed'. I immediately woke up (I am not sure if I was asleep) and tested my leg: it was healed.²⁴

Prayer also allowed Montoya to find God no matter what job he had to do. As he tells us:

I do not live in any place, but in Him who does not take any space yet permeates everything with His immensity: since I seek Him I shall find Him, whether in the king's palace or the school's kitchen at Santa Fe.²⁵

Whatever the ministry he was involved with, the mystical side of his life was what motivated him to keep struggling in his fight for justice. This was a lesson that his brother Francisco del Castillo would learn by heart.

Francisco del Castillo

Castillo brought together mystical contemplation and the activity of ministry as successfully as his teacher Montoya did.²⁶ Castillo was born in Lima in 1615 and entered the Jesuit novitiate seventeen years later. He studied to become a missionary under the guidance of Montoya. Yet his calling would turn out to be different after a discernment made during prayer:

One day after Communion, giving thanks to God, I asked His Majesty to let me know in which ministry I would please and serve Him the most. An inner voice seemed to be saying: in the ministry to black slaves.²⁷

²⁴ Montoya, *Spiritual Conquest*, 35.

²⁵ Arróspide, *Reducciones*, 325.

²⁶ My two references for this section are Castillo's autobiography, edited by Ugarte as *Un místico*, and the biography by Armando Nieto Vélez, *Francisco del Castillo: el apóstol de Lima* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Perú, 1992).

²⁷ Castillo, *Un místico*, 14.

By this time slaves brought from Africa were replacing indigenous slaves, who were succumbing to disease brought on by the inhuman conditions in which they were kept. Castillo was among the first to include these African slaves in the Jesuits' ministries. As one witness stated during Castillo's beatification process, he 'always attended with special care the sick, the abandoned and the poorest of the poor, mainly black slaves and prisoners'.²⁸



Slaves praying the rosary, by Guaman Poma

Prayer inspired all of Castillo's actions. His major project was building a chapel dedicated to 'Our Lady of the Abandoned', whose design he had seen in a vision.²⁹ After a colloquy with the Virgin Mary he began construction of the edifice, which would include a school for the education of the poorest children. The chapel became a centre for his ministry. In his sermons, Castillo encouraged others to help the needy. He organized groups to visit hospitals and bring food to the sick. Days were set apart to visit prisoners and slaves.

The mystical graces that he received were not something that alienated him from everyday life. They were a sign that what he was accomplishing was the will of God. His encounters with Christ served as reinforcement of his actions. Even the most otherworldly, rapturous moments were a source of energy that would help him continue his work:

²⁸ Vélez, *Francisco del Castillo*, 147.

²⁹ Vélez, *Francisco del Castillo*, 119. Castillo, *Un místico*, 176.

... waking up at midnight, I saw and felt, in an intellectual vision, Christ Our Redeemer crucified next to my bed. I felt at the same time in my heart and my will the effects of his presence: great ardour and exultation in my heart, celestial joy and consolation, an anxious and passionate surge and inner impulse to join my soul with Christ Our Lord. My soul knew and sensed a powerful and superior attraction towards his Majesty. His loving violence carried and dragged the soul unifying it with himself like metal to a magnet My soul saw itself in his arms, my body and soul being penetrated by the crucified Christ³⁰

The crucified Christ carried him away in ecstasy for a specific reason. Christ, 'very poor and wounded', told him that 'since in the poor you offer me refuge, I shall offer refuge to you too'.³¹ Castillo's identification of Christ with the outcast was strengthened by his mystical encounters. The intense desire he felt for God was to be directed towards the service of others. He tells us that this union is the way in which Christ is able to work through him:

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Crucifix from the St Miguel Arcanjo Church, São Miguel das Missões, Brazil

³⁰ Castillo, *Un místico*, 41.

³¹ Castillo, *Un místico*, 140.

I felt that my soul became one with Christ and Christ one with my soul Christ was seeing, hearing, speaking and acting through my eyes, ears, mouth, hands and body.³²

From this we can deduce that for Castillo the mystical moment did not end when the visions and strong feelings were over. It continued as he visited the prisoner, listened to the sick, preached to the comfortable, and served the poor with his hands and body.

Castillo would give simple everyday moments a mystical significance. Extraordinary visions, such as the one below, were just a reflection of what he did in his day to day job.

That afternoon I was given some sweets in a handkerchief. I always refused to accept gifts but in this case, since the woman who gave them to me was very devout, I accepted. I in turn offered the gift to God by giving it away to charity. That night, while sleeping, I received a greater gift. The Lord returned the gift ... by becoming one with me, not only in my soul but also in my body. It was a very special gift of consolation, with wonderful effects of fusion, humility, light and a reciprocal love with God.³³

Here the mystical moment is not in the ecstasy of the night. That consolation is but the reverberation of the everyday episode, which is an example of what has been called 'Ignatian mysticism of joy in the world'. For Karl Rahner,

... every act which is good in itself, therefore also one which is already meaningful within the world, can be supernaturally elevated by grace in such a way that its aim and its meaning extend beyond the significance it has within the world.³⁴

Castillo's mystical graces helped him realise that such gifts flow back and forth between the humdrum of daily life and the contemplative space in which the day's events are perceived anew in the context of divine providence. Little events give rise to mystical joy, which for Castillo is then elevated into an extraordinary state, but only as a sign of the everyday grace that is always present. The

³² Castillo, *Un mistico*, 42.

³³ Castillo, *Un mistico*, 122.

³⁴ Karl Rahner 'Ignatian Mysticism of Joy in the World', in *Karl Rahner: Theologian of the Graced Search for Meaning*, edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 91.

contemplative space in which this happens is not absolutely detached. Its boundaries are permeable; mystical grace diffuses between interior and exterior.

Castillo and Montoya provide us with an example of how the Jesuit charism of contemplation in action does not have to lead to tension. Mysticism and ministry can reinforce each other. The Jesuit experiment in colonial Paraguay, linking contemplation and action, had effects that still reverberate in Latin America. Many today continue exploring the frontier that was first encountered by Montoya and Castillo. This frontier is not a matter of geographical limits but of the barriers that often separate us from God and from others—barriers that these Jesuits were able to transcend.

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