

# IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

## Some Changes in Vision and Practice

Mark Rotsaert

**D**URING THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE on the Spiritual Exercises held in Loyola, Spain, in 2006, the question—which was not on the agenda—emerged during a round table discussion: who holds the copyright of the *Spiritual Exercises*? Who is the owner of the *Spiritual Exercises*? Jesuits? The Society of Jesus? To both suggestions the answer of the specialists around the table was clearly negative. Since 1548, when Pope Paul III approved the little booklet of Ignatius, the *Spiritual Exercises* have been part of the spiritual patrimony of the whole Church. Another difficult question was raised in the discussion: who has the right to judge if an interpretation of the *Spiritual Exercises* conforms to what Ignatius had in mind? To this question there was no univocal answer.

### ***Evolution in Understanding and Giving the Spiritual Exercises***

In the mid-1960s, a shift took place in Europe from preached retreats to personal guided retreats. The trend came from the USA, but it was Paul Kennedy, tertian instructor at St Beuno's Ignatian Spirituality Centre in North Wales from 1958 to 1974, who began to form young European Jesuits with long retreats that were individually guided: there were no more long presentations for large groups, but instead a short personal encounter every day with the director of the Exercises. In the mid-1970s, the individual guided retreat became the normal way of making the Spiritual Exercises in France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands. Later, the trend reached the whole of Europe, although in some regions group retreats are also still given.

The shift to individually guided retreats was part of a movement in the Society of Jesus 'back to the sources', back to the original way of giving the Exercises practised by Ignatius himself. The Second Annotation (Exx 2) became an important guideline: the director should give 'only a brief or summary explanation' of the text for meditation or contemplation, because 'what fills and satisfies the soul' of the retreatant 'consists, not in knowing

much, but in our understanding the realities profoundly and in savouring them interiorly'. The inner feeling, the spiritual experience, of the retreatant is also at the centre of the 'reflection': what consolations or desolations were there during the meditation or contemplation? The reflection should prepare for the encounter with the director, who will help the retreatant to discern the quality of those consolations or desolations. Real consolation is the way God speaks to the retreatant: such was the experience of Ignatius himself. So, consolations felt during the retreat are a help to discern the way God wants the retreatant to follow Jesus Christ. Thus, spiritual discernment is central to the process of the Exercises.

More or less at the same time, the Nineteenth Annotation (Exx 19) was rediscovered: the retreat in daily life. Ignatius foresaw this way of making the complete Spiritual Exercises over a longer period (with one meditation or contemplation a day) for a 'person who is involved in public affairs or pressing occupations but educated or intelligent'. In Belgium at the beginning of the 1970s, it was Jean-Pierre Van Schoote, spiritual director of the Jesuit scholastics studying at the University of Leuven (Louvain), who adapted this annotation in his way of guiding young Jesuits. Simultaneously, during the deepest crisis of secularization—that of the *révolution tranquille* ('quiet revolution')—in Canada, Gilles Cusson, professor of Ignatian spirituality at the Gregorian University in Rome and tertian instructor in Quebec, trained a large number of directors capable of giving the Spiritual Exercises in daily life. This became in the 1980s a popular way of making the Spiritual Exercises in various countries around Europe.

A third important change with regard to the Spiritual Exercises involves the people making the Exercises and those giving them. In many countries, such as the United Kingdom and German-speaking lands, more and more non-Roman Catholics now make the Spiritual Exercises. And more and more Anglican priests and Lutheran ministers have been formed in the last two or three decades to be directors. Moreover, not only are there non-Catholic directors of the Spiritual Exercises—in the United Kingdom at present more Anglican priests give the Exercises than Jesuits—but the number of women giving the Exercises has increased considerably, both religious and lay. In many European countries there are formation programmes to train good directors of the Spiritual Exercises.

The role of the director is essential in an Ignatian retreat, even if that role is very discreet and prudent. The director should know the way of the Exercises by personal experience. The text of Ignatius is intended for the director, not for the retreatant. At the centre of the dialogue between

director and retreatant is the spiritual experience of the retreatant, that prayer experience which allows ‘the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord’ (Exx 15). Listening to the reflection of the retreatant, the director tries to discern where the retreatant is in the process of the Exercises, so as to give him or her some help to go further in prayer experience. It is clear that the spiritual and psychological personality of the director will have its influence on his or her way of giving the Exercises. So the increasing variety of directors enriches the Exercises. At the end of the 1970s, some retreatants did not want to have a woman as director—but others asked for a woman, especially for retreats in daily life. A person who is married and has a busy job can expect more empathy from a director who is also married, with children and a part-time job, given that this is not always the case.

*Ignatian Spirituality: No Longer Just a Jesuit Affair*

The previous paragraph makes clear that in the area of making and giving the Spiritual Exercises there are now more non-Jesuits than Jesuits involved. This is also true with regard to Ignatian spirituality in general. Of course, numbers are not always the best parameter. It is clear that during the last decades a number of books of high quality on Ignatian spirituality and on the history of the Jesuits have been written by Jesuits. To give just two examples in English: first, Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (1998) is still one of the best commentaries. Ivens’s work is an excellent mix of profound knowledge of the sources of the Ignatian text and great experience in giving the Exercises. The commentary can be read as a well-founded *lectio divina* of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Secondly, *The First Jesuits* (1993), a best-seller by John W. O’Malley, is the result of years of research by a scholar known all over the world. His book has been translated into most European languages.

However, since the late decades of the twentieth century there has been a growing interest among scholars who are not Jesuits. Thus, the French Jesuits, who have a long tradition in studying and publishing on Ignatian spirituality, produced a volume, *Écrits*, during the Ignatian year (1990–1991) containing the works of Ignatius, including 230 letters. The book was edited by Maurice Giuliani, with the collaboration of a group of nine other Jesuits, but also two outstanding non-Jesuit scholars: Pierre-Antoine Fabre, professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, who wrote important introductions for the foundation documents and the *Constitutions*; and Luce Giard, of the Centre National

de la Recherche Scientifique, Laboratoire d'Histoire des Sciences, who wrote the introduction to the letters.

Giard has published two important books on Jesuits and culture: *Les Jésuites à la Renaissance: système éducatif et production du savoir* (1995), and *Les Jésuites à l'âge Baroque: 1540–1640* (1996). Pierre-Antoine Fabre wrote his doctoral dissertation on the 'composition, by seeing the place' (Exx 151) in the Spiritual Exercises, 'Ignace de Loyola: le lieu de l'image' (1992); in 2007 he published *Journal des motions intérieures*, a critical edition of the *Spiritual Diary* of Ignatius. These two French scholars are just an example of the interest in Ignatius and his spirituality outside the Society of Jesus.

Also in France, Sylvie Robert, a religious sister of the Auxiliatrices, is responsible for the department of spiritual theology at the Centre Sèvres, the Jesuit faculty in Paris. She published her dissertation as *Une autre connaissance de Dieu. Le discernement chez Ignace de Loyola* (1997) and, in 2009, *Les Chemins de Dieu avec Ignace de Loyola*. In 2006 the Dutch and Flemish Jesuits produced *De heer van de vriendschap* (translated into English for Way Books as *The Lord of Friendship* in 2011), with articles written by both Jesuits and non-Jesuits, lay men and women from across Europe—including Sylvie Robert.

In the United Kingdom many books on Ignatius or on Ignatian spirituality have been published by the well-known Jesuit writer Gerald W. Hughes, most famously *God of Surprises*. Many studies in English have also been published in the USA by the Institute of Jesuits Sources (now at Boston College), for example Patricia M. Ranum's *Beginning to Be a Jesuit: Instructions for the Paris Novitiate circa 1685* (2011). Three women, Catherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin and Elisabeth Liebert, have written *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women* (2001). The authors explain how the masculine text of the *Spiritual Exercises* can be adapted to make possible a liberating process for women.

In Italy, too, there are women studying the spirituality of St Ignatius: for example Oller Sala Maria Dolores, author of *Il volto femminile della spiritualità ignaziana: la coscienza contemporanea delle donne e gli Esercizi Spirituali* (2004). Fernanda Alfieri and Claudio Ferlan have published a study entitled *Avventure dell'obbedienza nella Compagnia di Gesù: teorie e prassi fra XVI e XIX secolo* (2012). In Spain, Esther Jiménez Pablo has recently (2014) written an interesting study of the first hundred years of the Society of Jesus: *La forja de una identidad: la Compañía de Jesús (1540–1640)*.

Further proof that Ignatian spirituality is no longer just a Jesuit affair was provided when, in 2014, the *Journal of Jesuit Studies* first appeared. The initiative was taken by Robert W. Maryks, a former Jesuit; the aim of

the journal is to study Jesuit history. And although it is linked to Boston College, the Jesuit faculty of theology in the United States, it is not a Jesuit-run review. In Europe the *Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu* continues, always at a high academic level, to publish twice a year articles on history and spirituality; once a year the *Archivum* includes an outstanding bibliography, published by Paul Begheyn a Jesuit from Amsterdam. But since 2016, the director of the *Archivum* has been Camilla Russell, professor at the Institute of Spirituality of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

There are now three faculties in Europe where students can obtain a licentiate and prepare a doctorate in Ignatian spirituality: the Pontifical University Comillas in Madrid, the Centre Sèvres in Paris and the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Comillas has a special master's degree in Ignatian spirituality, with courses given by an excellent group of scholars (nearly all Jesuits) formed to work as a team. In 2007 this group published the famous *Diccionario de espiritualidad Ignaciana*. They are also responsible for the Spanish review *Manresa*, which continues to publish many specifically Ignatian articles. At the Centre Sèvres, the department of spirituality and religious life has an elaborate programme of Ignatian studies. The French Jesuits publish the review *Christus*: in each issue there is one article specifically on Ignatian spirituality. The institute of spirituality at the Pontifical Gregorian University offers a second and third cycle in Ignatian spirituality,<sup>1</sup> and publishes an online review, Ignaziana.org. The courses at the Institute are given mostly by Jesuits, among them some young Indian Jesuits with a particular interest in interreligious dialogue.

Even if the number of young European Jesuits is diminishing, they remain committed to Ignatian research. In 2012, the Centro di Spiritualità Ignaziana was launched at the Gregorian University on the disappearance of the Centre of Ignatian Spirituality at the Jesuit Curia in Rome; here conferences and training sessions are given for the benefit of a wide public. In some non-Jesuit institutions with faculties of theology or history it is also possible to study Ignatian spirituality. For example, at the Catholic University of Leuven, about twenty licentiate theses have been presented during the last fifteen years. There is a special chair in Ignatiana and Jesuitica, and the library of the faculty of theology at Leuven has probably the richest collection on Ignatian spirituality and the history of the Society of Jesus in Europe.

<sup>1</sup> Pontifical universities such as the Gregorian divide courses of study into three 'cycles', leading to a bachelor's degree, a licentiate and a doctorate.

### ***A New Vision of Ignatius and His Time?***

Two scholars specialising in historiography, Guido Mongini in Italy and Enrique García Hernán in Spain, have recently published studies on Ignatius and his time. Mongini's book has the title '*Ad Christi Similitudinem*': *Ignazio di Loyola e i primi gesuiti tra eresia e ortodossia* (2011). In 2014, he published a more populist book: *Ignazio di Loyola: un illuminato al servizio della Chiesa*. Gracia Hernán has produced an impressive biography in the '*Espanoles eminentes*' collection: *Ignacio de Loyola* (2013; 568 pages). Both authors have studied a great number of sources and have made major contributions to the knowledge of Ignatius and his time.

But both describe the years that Ignatius spent in Spain as a time during which the heresy of Illuminism (*los alumbrados*: 'the enlightened') was omnipresent. This is doubtless an exaggeration. They make it seem as if Ignatius, once he was sent to the court of Arévalo in 1506—he was then fifteen years old—had contact (only) with *alumbrados*. Both the authors take for well-founded the criticisms of the prominent contemporary Dominican Melchor Cano, and of Silíceo, archbishop of Toledo and later cardinal, against the Spiritual Exercises, arguing that some ideas within the Exercises clearly came from the *alumbrados*. The facts that Ignatius was never condemned by the Inquisition (neither in Alcalá in 1526 nor in Salamanca in 1527) and that Paul III officially approved the *Spiritual Exercises* in 1548 seem to have no effect on these two scholars. It is enough for them that Ignatius was very close to the *alumbrados*. Their conviction seems to be *a priori*, even if they have studied a huge number of sources.

The spiritual renewal in Spain, and especially in Castile, in the time of Ignatius was much more than what was qualified by the Inquisition around 1525 as the 'heresy' of the *alumbrados*. A common aspect of this renewal was a special attention to the 'inner life', the life guided by the Spirit. Prayer life was mostly affective; it led a person to be touched by Christ and his Spirit. This was so in renewal movements found in several Franciscan convents, but also in some Benedictine monasteries, in different prayer groups at the University of Alcalá and in various mansions of the nobility, where lay preachers gave conferences about the spiritual life and about prayer life. The letters of St Paul, with their emphasis on the 'spirit', were the preferred reading of many of these groups. The *Philosophia Christi* of Erasmus of Rotterdam was well received at Alcalá during the years that Ignatius was studying at this humanistic university.

Of course, not all these groups were heretical. The situation could be best described, as Mongini says, as a plurality of 'orthodoxies'. After 1545,



Alcalá, by Anthonis van den Wijngaerde, 1565

the Council of Trent would try to define what was Catholic and what was not. In Ignatius' time at Alcalá some groups did indeed become heretical—including the *alumbrados*. For them the emphasis on the inner life and on the Spirit became so important that anything external—such as the Church and its precepts on penance, fasting, confession and so on—made no sense. In 1525 the Inquisition condemned 48 propositions formulated by individual *alumbrados*. This made it easy to condemn someone for a proposition, which was not heretical, as though for the whole of the heresy. It looks as if both historians have followed the example of the Inquisition. So, for example, the 'illumination' at the Cardoner must place Ignatius in the company of the *alumbrados*.

This reveals another weak point is both these books on Ignatius. The authors remain historiographers by speciality and have little interest in the spiritual life of Ignatius. They leave unanswered any theological or spiritual questions. But a biography of Ignatius which fails to explain, for example, his relationship with God, gives only a partial view of its subject, omitting the most important aspect. In his last sentence Enrique García Hernán says: 'From these pages emerges the mediator who relies with equal strength on God and on the human'.<sup>2</sup> It is true that throughout his book the author emphasizes the qualities of Ignatius as a mediator, and this is certainly a positive aspect of the biography. But nearly nothing appears 'from these pages' about the confidence of Ignatius in God. The *Autobiography* of Ignatius is used in a very partial way: nothing is

<sup>2</sup> Enrique García Hernán, *Ignacio de Loyola* (Madrid: Taurus, 2013), 451.

said about the first spiritual experience of discernment; nothing about the mystical experiences in his *Spiritual Diary*.

The most constructive contribution of both authors comes, certainly, from the huge number of sources they have used. These place Ignatius in a different *Umwelt*, or personal context, from that traditionally presented in many biographies, and give a new perspective on some historical aspects of his life. But both books give a secularised portrait of Ignatius, one more in conformity with the beginning of the twenty-first century than a balanced portrait of who Ignatius really was.

### *Ignatian Spirituality and Ignatian Mysticism*

Scholars agree, in general, that the Spiritual Exercises are at the centre of Ignatian spirituality. And at the centre of the Spiritual Exercises there is a mystical experience. The Fifteenth Annotation puts it clearly:

During these Spiritual Exercises when a person is seeking God's will, it is more appropriate and far better that the Creator and Lord himself should communicate himself to the devout soul, embracing it in love and praise, and disposing it for the way which will enable the soul to serve him better in the future. Accordingly, the one giving the Exercises ought not to lean or incline in either direction but rather, while standing by like the pointer of a scale in equilibrium, to allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord.

This mutual communication is what happens during the prayer of the retreatant. The more the person grows in inner freedom, the more he or she will be able to capture how God is speaking when listening to the word of God in scripture. God is speaking to the retreatant by the inner movements in the heart, especially by the inner movements of spiritual consolation. These movements help the retreatant to discern what is 'God's will in the ordering of our life' (Exx 1). 'The Creator and Lord himself should communicate himself to the devout soul, embracing it in love and praise.' This mystical experience is at the heart of the Spiritual Exercises: it was the experience of Ignatius himself.

In two of his writings—the *Autobiography* and the *Spiritual Diary*—Ignatius describes how his experience was, many times, an experience of the Holy Trinity. He was introduced to the mystery of the Holy Trinity in several visions. But one of the most important visionary experiences of his life came at the chapel of La Storta, before he entered Rome to present his group of companions to the Pope. As he recounts in his *Autobiography*:



He had resolved to remain a year, once he became a priest [in 1537 at Venice], without saying mass, preparing himself and praying Our Lady to be pleased to put him with her Son. And being one day in a church some miles before arrival in Rome, and making prayer, he sensed such a change in his soul, and he saw clearly that God the Father was putting him with Christ, his Son, with the cross on his shoulder. And the eternal Father was close by, saying, 'I want you to take this person as your servant'. (n.96)

Ignatian mysticism has been called a 'mysticism of service', to distinguish it from a 'nuptial mysticism'—that is, one of spiritual union or marriage.<sup>3</sup> If mysticism can be described as union with God, in Ignatian mysticism this is achieved by means of a decision taken in union with God's will for the greater glory and service of God.

As prescribed by Ignatius in the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, the most important quality of the Superior General of the Society is: 'that he should be closely united with God our Lord and have familiarity with him in prayer and in all his operations ...' (IX.2.1 [723]). This familiarity with God makes it possible to find God in all things, and 'to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things' (Exx 233). At the end of his life, Ignatius said that 'every time and hour he wanted to find God, he found him' (*Autobiography*, n.99). He was a 'contemplative in action',<sup>4</sup> wrote Jerónimo Nadal, and young Jesuits have to be formed in this attitude:

They should often be exhorted to seek God our Lord in all things, removing from themselves as far as possible love of all creatures in order to place it in the Creator of them, loving him in all creatures and all creatures in him, in conformity with his holy and divine will (*Constitutions*, III.1.26 [288]).

Ignatian mysticism is not an experience far away from the concrete world; on the contrary, it is a bringing of God and creation together.

In recent decades there has been some renewal in the study of mysticism in general. This is also true with regard to Ignatian mysticism. In 2001 *The Way* published a *Supplement* on the theme *Christianity and the Mystical*. In 2004 the French review *Christus* produced a volume *hors-série*: *La mystique Ignatienne. Une tradition vivante*. The Spanish review *Manresa* has published two special volumes on Ignatian mysticism, one at the end

<sup>3</sup> See Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1964), 50.

<sup>4</sup> MHSJ MN 4, 651.

of 2004 and another a year later. Various articles in all these reviews present Ignatian mysticism in texts from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, especially from Spain and France. Over time, different authors have offered different views of Ignatian mysticism: Baltasar Álvarez, Diego Álvarez de Paz, Luis de la Puente, Louis Lallement, Jean-Joseph Surin, Jean Rigoleuc, Claude de la Colombière, Jean-Pierre Caussade.<sup>5</sup>

More recently the Hungarian Jesuit Franz Jalics has published an original book on his 'contemplative exercises'.<sup>6</sup> These exercises build on the experience of the thirty-day retreat but propose to go deeper: there is no election and at the centre of the exercises, instead of the contemplations of Christ's life, the aim is to prepare oneself in silence to contemplate God following the Contemplation to Attain Love (Exx 230–237).

In an interesting article, 'Teologia de la vida cristiana ignaciana. Ensayo de interpretación histórico-teológico', Rossano Zas Friz De Col emphasizes the importance given to the experience of the risen Lord in discussing mysticism today.<sup>7</sup> This is also the central experience of the Spiritual Exercises. For even though the text of the Fourth Week is very short, it seems that Ignatius allowed the retreatant to spend longer in the Fourth Week than in the Third. Our world is a place where pain and suffering mark our human condition, but as Christians we should live life focused on the experience of the risen Lord. One of the specific aspects of the experience of the Fourth Week is to 'consider the office of consoler which Christ our Lord carries out, and compare it with the way friends console one another' (Exx 224). To receive spiritual consolation during the Exercises is thus an experience of the risen Lord: it is a grace given by God, the Giver of all true consolation.

**Mark Rotsaert SJ** is a historian of spirituality and director of the Centre for Ignatian Spirituality at the Gregorian University in Rome. He is also a spiritual director.

<sup>5</sup> Baltasar Álvarez (1533–1580), Spanish mystic and spiritual director to St Teresa of Ávila; Diego Álvarez de Paz (1549–1620), mystic and Jesuit Provincial of Peru; Luis de La Puente (1554–1624) Spanish Jesuit mystic and ascetic; Louis Lallement (1588–1635), French Jesuit mystic and formator; Jean-Joseph Surin (1600–1665), French Jesuit mystic and disciple of Lallement; Jean Rigoleuc (1596–1658), another disciple of Lallement who compiled his *Doctrine spirituelle* for publication; Claude de la Colombière (1641–1682), French Jesuit, missionary and ascetic writer; Jean-Pierre Caussade (1675–1751), French Jesuit and spiritual director, author of *L'Abandon à la providence divine*.

<sup>6</sup> Franz Jalics, *The Contemplative Way: Quietly Savoring God's Presence*, translated by Matthias Altrichter (New York: Paulist, 2011); first published in German, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> *Ignaziana* (2010), available at [http://www.ignaziana.org/9-2010\\_1.pdf](http://www.ignaziana.org/9-2010_1.pdf).