

TO FIND GOD IN PEACE

By LAURENCE J. MURPHY

IN THE CHAPEL of the Conversion in the castle of Loyla is a life-size figure of St Ignatius in a state of ecstasy. On a wooden beam over the brightly clad figure is the simple inscription: *Se entrega a Dios Iñigo de Loyola* — ‘Ignatius of Loyola surrenders to God’. I feel sure that the young army officer would have phrased it differently. He was beginning ‘to find God’ and was discovering for himself the truth attested by the saints before him that when one finds God, surrender to him is the only adequate response. At a later date he would describe this impulse stemming from affection rooted in reason and justice, in the ‘Contemplation to attain the Love of God’.¹ Ignatius describes the affective movement that disposes the exercitant to abandon himself to God, and he begins to see ‘how much, as far as he can, the same Lord desires to give himself to me according to his divine decrees’. The affective movement is one of most profound gratitude. What one is to do with this deep feeling is indicated by reflecting upon oneself and considering, according to all reason and justice (*con mucha razón y justicia*). The desire of total surrender of self to God is expressed in the famous ‘Take Lord and Receive’.

In looking at the young officer with the broken leg, we are witnessing the beginning of a pilgrimage initiated by God who gives these holy desires and confirms them in a remarkable way. This poor pilgrim’s hunger for God has been so whetted and his desire for God so aroused, that from that day on ‘he never gave the slightest consent to the things of the flesh’.²

For the rest of his life Ignatius’s one driving ambition was to help others to seek and find God. Everything else must be subordinated to that goal. What he himself had found, he wanted to share with others, for in this consists love, ‘a mutual sharing of goods’.³ The desire for God was the beginning, middle and end of Ignatius’s pilgrimage. This stress on ‘desires’ will become a characteristic trait of his spirituality and the Order he was to found. From the first exercise (48) of the *Spiritual Exercises* to the last (233) the *id quod volo*, ‘that which I desire’, becomes the object of my prayer to God. He

tells the exercitant what to want and desire because he takes for granted that he wants God. The different graces sought in the different exercises are what lead the exercitant 'to find God'. The 'First Principle and Foundation' is to begin the arousal of such desires for God, 'our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created' (23). This emphasis on experiencing 'intense desires', 'ardent desires', 'holy desires', is all the more striking in what he has to say to applicants for his newly founded Company of Jesus. In the 'General Examen' — a document to be proposed to all who would seek admission — the candidates are to be questioned at length about their desires of following Christ, their wish 'to suffer injuries, false accusations and affronts, and to be held and esteemed as fools — because of their desire to resemble and imitate in some manner our Creator and Lord Jesus Christ'. With characteristic understanding for the frailty of human nature, he realizes that such ardent desires are not always present: but in that case does the candidate have any desires for such desires?⁴ There is no way out; in order to proceed, there must be some desire to find God:

So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; search and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one who knocks will always have the door opened to him (Lk 11,9-10).

If Ignatius insists on these holy desires as coming from God and therefore leading back to God, he is astutely aware of the innumerable desires we experience which are not from God and which can lead away from God. It is worth recalling attention to the last sentence of the 'Foundation' on which the *Exercises* are built: 'our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created' (23). From the beginning the word 'more' appears and will recur at different stages throughout the *Exercises*. The indifference spoken of at this stage in the *Exercises*, while it denotes an availability to God, presupposes a positive movement and decision in order to respond more completely to the love and service of God. The significance of the 'more' is best understood, I believe, if we think of the *Spiritual Exercises* as designed to help a Christian to know the will of God in his regard. They are to provoke christian decisions. As Jules Toner points out:

The first and most general principle for judging which alternative, among those in accord with the gospel, is God's will is the greater

conduciveness to bringing about the Kingdom of God. No reason for any alternative can count unless it shows that this alternative helps to establish the Kingdom of God. This much is necessary but it is not sufficient to make a reason count. It must be shown that this alternative will help *more* than the other or others to bring about the Kingdom.⁵

The title of this article is a pithy formulation of what God wants for his children. God *wants* us to find him in peace. 'When you seek me you shall find me, when you seek me with all your heart; I will let you find me' (Jer 29, 13.14). For our part we want to find God but we are ambivalent in our search for him. We want him and we do not want him; mostly we want him on our own terms, frequently we do not seek him with all our heart. When we can admit this truth to ourselves we are ready to be helped to seek God and his will in our regard. At that point the *Spiritual Exercises* can be helpful.

In the second week of the experience which we call the *Spiritual Exercises*,⁶ the one who is receiving the *Exercises* spends one whole day on two meditations. It is an important day and the meditations are well placed to help the exercitant to purify his intentions, to help him sort out his desires. In the 'Meditation on Two Standards' (139) he will ask for knowledge of the deceits of the enemy and help to guard against them, and knowledge of the true life exemplified in Christ and the grace to imitate him. On the same day, after four periods of prayer on the 'Two Standards', Ignatius offers the retreatant the meditation on 'Three Classes of Men' — a meditation *to choose that which is better* (149). He should 'beg for the grace to choose what is more for the glory of his Divine Majesty' (152). To choose the better (whatever it might be) is to choose what God wants for me here and now. The importance of this exercise is underlined by the advice to the retreatant to see himself 'standing in the presence of God our Lord and of all his saints, that I may know and desire what is more pleasing to his Divine Goodness' (151). Again we notice the insistence on praying for the *desire* of what is more pleasing to God.

It is helpful to note the position of this exercise on 'Three Classes of Men' in the overall plan of the *Exercises*. It forms part of an introduction to a consideration of different states of life open to an exercitant. It is clarifying in order to become concrete. From my experience of giving the *Exercises* to Jesuit novices certain features of St Ignatius's text stand out in bolder relief. From our experience of ordinary christian living and doing, or giving the *Exercises*, we are

aware of a variety of less clear cut cases involving decisions or reform of life, but these would seem to be 'in place of a choice' (189). These novices, however, are faced with genuine alternatives: to follow Christ in the Society of Jesus or to follow Christ outside the Society of Jesus. They really *desire* to make a choice. Furthermore, they are often unsure which alternative is the better for them to follow; they believe that Christ is calling them to follow him along one *or* other of these paths. Now we can ask why this exercise is inserted at this stage. It is because, when faced with a serious choice, we all tend to get anxious. The anxiety derives, I believe, not so much from the prospect of what I am deciding *for* as from the prospect of what I am deciding *against*. The anxiety often comes from attachment to something or someone. The object of detachment as well as the object of attachment (in our case 'God in peace') can be thought of in terms of a symbol. Bartholomew Kiely describes a symbol as 'a representation of something, real or imaginary, regarding which the person has more or less intense feelings'.⁷ Returning to the case of a novice desiring to make an election or choice, he begins to become anxious because of some unfreedom or attachment in his life; he is in some sense troubled by this attachment, so he would like to be free of it. It is to deal with this concrete situation that St Ignatius introduces this exercise. It is like a role play: the exercitant sees three different but possible reactions and, as he watches, he can more easily situate himself and his present dispositions. The exercise is concerned with the indifference necessary to make a good choice: it is about inner freedom to choose 'that which is better'.

The *mise en scène* is probably familiar to most: three groups of men have acquired a large sum of money, 'They all wish to save their souls and find peace in God our Lord by ridding themselves of the burden arising from the attachment to the sum acquired, which impedes the attainment of this end' (150). Each of the three groups presents the exercitant with a different solution to the problem. The 'ten thousand ducats' is a symbol in the sense described above. It is the affective weight of the symbol which the exercitant desires to shake off. The solution of the first group is most clearly inadequate. They desire to do something; they would like to be free of their attachment, but they never muster the strength to put their desires into action. They procrastinate. They never get round to doing something. Their lives are lives of indecision; in fact such indecision is the unexpressed decision to stay with things as they are and were. It is the solution of the person who wants to have his cake and eat it.

It flagrantly flaunts the rules of logic and in so doing reminds us of what we tend to forget:

The feeling . . . relates us to an object. Such feeling gives intentional consciousness its mass, momentum, drive, power. Without these feelings our knowing and deciding would be paper thin. Because of our feelings, our desires and our fears, our hope or despair, our joys and sorrows, our enthusiasm and indignation, our esteem and contempt, our trust and distrust, our love and hatred, our tenderness and wrath, our admiration, veneration, reverence, our dread, horror, terror, we are oriented massively and dynamically in a world mediated by meaning.⁸

It seems to me that the complete inadequacy of this response will often strike home during the time of retreat. However, outside the retreat situation, which after all is when decisions are implemented in action, the solution of the first group is common enough. It can be the easy solution for both individuals and groups. The inability or unwillingness to 'let go', to give up some attachment, to renounce some symbol ('a representation of something, real or imaginary, regarding which the person has more or less intense feelings') in order to choose and do that which is better, is a phenomenon we all know in our personal and community lives. While such paralysis continues we may not easily claim to be searching for God's will in our regard. Though the exercitant claims that he wishes to find God in peace, such protests will sound hollow unless his actions begin to speak louder than his words. Drawing on the work of Ernest Becker, Bartholomew Kiely's contribution lies in bringing out the painful human tension, experienced most of all in decision making, which arises from our living in two 'worlds', the 'world of desire' and the 'world of limits'. 'The world of imagination, of inquiry, and of desire in general does not have necessary limits, and a corollary of the absence of limits is the absence of the need to choose'. On the other hand,

the world of limits has quite different characteristics. One of its characteristics is that certain things cannot be changed and must be accepted . . . while these limits are not always inflexible, they still impose restrictions on the fulfilment of possible desires.⁹

Those of the first class of men are living *only* in the 'world of desire'. They are unable or unwilling to 'let go' the sum of money, since all 'letting go' belongs to the 'world of limits'. Unless a man is

willing and determined to live his life in both worlds at the same time then the 'God in peace' for whom he is searching will tend to become a *reflecting* symbol and 'in such symbols the person finds himself reflected more than anything else'. As held up for us in the *Spiritual Exercises*, 'God in peace' is intended to be a *transparent* symbol, that is, mediating 'a contact with some reality beyond either the person or the symbol itself'.¹⁰

Returning to the ignatian exercise let us watch the response of the second class of men. They, too, are weighed down by their attachment to the sum of money; they would like to be rid of this feeling of attachment but they want to hold on to the money. They compromise; they try to manipulate God into fitting into their plans (which includes retaining the money); they are trying to 'subject and fit the end to the means' rather than 'the means to the end' (169). These people have a particular attachment which they are unwilling to release. Whatever is the object of this inordinate attachment has become for them an idol, a god of their own making. They have lost sight of the God who is beyond themselves and his purpose in creating them. They are unwilling to confront that most painful law of human existence, that every choice I make necessarily involves some exclusion.¹¹ Man is a being of infinite desire who resents limitation inherent in every choice.¹² Unlike the first group, these people do make decisions, do things; but all the time they are trying to bend God's will to fit their own designs. It is not surprising that they, too, fail to find God; instead they find only themselves and their own will. The New Testament presents us with a lengthy catalogue of possible objects of idolatry: money (Mt 6,24), wine (Tit 2,3), desire to dominate one's neighbour (Col 3,5; Eph 5,5), political power (Apoc 13,8), pleasure, envy, hate (Rom 6,19; Tit 3,3), sin (Rom 6,6).¹³ The men of this second group 'also want to love God and to let him guide them, but this desire is really a self-willed decision as to how they are going to realize their love of God'.¹⁴

The effect of 'watching' these two groups and their inadequate responses is to let the exercitant see where he really stands as regards his seeking 'to find God in peace'. He may slowly begin to become aware of his lack of indifference; the painful realization begins to dawn that he still has 'inordinate attachments'. When he grasps the disposition of the third group, he is much more able to see how necessary the stance of being indifferent is if one is honestly seeking to find God's will in the choice of the alternatives facing him. The third group, like the others, wish to get rid of the feeling of attach-

ment to the money (because they know that this feeling gets between them and God) but they do not decide to retain or give up the sum of money. They desire to do only what God wants them to do. However, in the meantime they try to behave as though they were already free of the attachment. This group has come to the point described in the 'Principle and Foundation': 'Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created' (23). In contrast to the other two groups 'they seek to love God in the way that he wants to be loved'.¹⁵ In the concrete that means being willing to give up, to let go, any attachments that are not ordered towards God. It does not necessarily mean giving up the object of the attachment. There is a nuance in this exercise we can easily miss. None of the groups actually gives up the sum of money. In fact, giving up the money is never in question directly. What is sought for is the surrender of their attachment to the money. The first two groups fail to achieve this, the third group succeeds. The third group of men are genuinely free, they are able to wish for the money or not as long as the course they decide on is in conformity with their own internalized values. This point is of considerable psychological significance and in fact constitutes the inner freedom from both inordinate attachment and compulsive detachment, both of which can prevent a person from *doing* God's will.¹⁶ The Spiritual Exercises are to help a person to show love in action, in deeds, as the introductory note to the 'Contemplation to attain Love' indicates (230). By meditating on the 'Three Classes of Men' it is hoped that the exercitant will be led to the determination to shake off whatever might prevent him from knowing and *doing* God's will; furthermore he should be alerted to the ever present danger, when it comes to making a choice, of trying to manipulate God's will to suit his own designs.

Although we cannot develop the point here, the note added to this exercise by St Ignatius is central to his spirituality. He is teaching us how to cope with our feelings of attachment opposed to actual poverty, or what to do when we discover that we are not indifferent as we know we need to be. What he advises us to do here has already been touched on earlier, in the 'Call of the Earthly King'. It is the ignatian pedagogical technique of *agere contra* — 'acting against their sensuality and carnal and worldly love' (97). Correctly understood in the ignatian schema of discernment, with the help of a spiritual director, the *agere contra* is intended to restore and maintain the necessary balance between sensuality, affectivity and reason. This ascetical technique is remarkably similar to what Victor Frankl

calls 'paradoxical intention'. According to Frankl (and experience confirms it), when a person is faced with something he fears or dreads he experiences 'anticipatory anxiety'. Frankl's method is to encourage the person to do, or wish to happen, the very things he fears. Encouraging the patient to do, or wish to happen, the very things he fears engenders an inversion of intention.¹⁷ The advice of St Ignatius is remarkably similar. The desired result is the same — freedom to act as one wants to act, freedom to do what God wants me to do.

So far in this article I have focused on the meaning of 'finding God in peace' in the context of choice and decision. It seems appropriate to say a word about finding God in peace after decisions have been made. 'To seek and find God in all things' sums up the meaning of the christian life for Ignatius. His spirituality contained in the *Spiritual Exercises*, his letters and most practically, in his *Constitutions* for members of the group he founded, is to form and guide others who, like himself, would be able and willing to seek and find God in all things. I am especially struck by the fact that he considered this not to be too difficult for someone *after* doing the *Spiritual Exercises*. What he has to say for the younger members of his Order, who are engaged in studies, is enlightening and really an application of the spirituality of the *Exercises* to a particular group.

In view of the purpose of our studies, the scholastics cannot devote themselves to long meditations. Over and above the exercises which they have for the acquisition of virtue, namely daily mass, one hour for prayer and the examen of conscience, and confession and communion every eighth day, they can exercise themselves in seeking the presence of our Lord in all things (*la presencia de nuestro Señor en todas las cosas*) — for example, in conversing with someone, in walking, looking, tasting, hearing, thinking, and in everything that they do, since it is true that his Divine Majesty is in all things by his presence, power, and essence. This manner of meditating, by which one finds God our Lord (*nuestro Señor Dios*) in all things, is easier than trying to elevate ourselves to spiritual things which are more abstract and which require more effort to make them present to ourselves. Furthermore, this splendid exercise will dispose us for great visitations from the Lord, even during a short prayer. Moreover, the scholastics can train themselves to offer frequently to God our Lord their studies and the difficulties they bring, by remembering that they have undertaken them out of love for God, and by putting aside their personal inclinations, in order to serve his Divine Majesty, and to help those for whose life he suffered death.¹⁸

Ignatius expects students to be able to find God, our Lord — meaning Christ — in all things ‘since he is in all things by his presence, power and essence’. They will be able to find God in all things provided that ‘they exercise themselves in seeking the presence of our Lord in all things’. He then goes on to clarify with examples what he means by ‘all things’: walking, looking, tasting, hearing, thinking and everything that they do. Haas sees in this advice the introduction into ordinary daily life of that method of prayer in the *Spiritual Exercises* which we call the ‘Application of the Senses’.¹⁹ The training (*ejercitar*) or asceticism necessary for finding God in all things in this way is spelled out in the *Constitutions* (360-362). While it is directed to a particular group of persons I think we can see how it is applicable to anyone following this pathway. He (the student) must seek God and not himself in his studies; he should intend the good of others and constantly pray for the grace to make progress in all this activity. In a word he must try to keep his intention right by focusing on God. If his activities are carried out with the intention of pleasing God, and provided that he is persuaded that no other activity would please God more, such a person will assuredly find God. Experience shows the extent of abnegation involved in such asceticism.

This ‘easier’ way of finding God in all things is the contemplative dimension of the christian life. In the mind of Ignatius, anyone who has contemplated the mysteries of Jesus in the *Exercises* and who has sensed some of the ‘infinite fragrance and sweetness of the Divinity, of the soul, of its virtues, and so of all things’ should not find it at all difficult to find everywhere this ‘Eternal Lord of all things who has come so close to us’.²⁰

The more difficult area of christian living is to find God in the action of decision-making. And yet, to be ‘contemplative in action’ means just that — to find God in making decisions. The earlier part of this article touched briefly on the tension that is inherent in the act of decision. This tension can be understood as deriving from man’s living at once in the world of desire and the world of limits. Deciding means the setting of limits on oneself. The temptation to be as gods, the craving for omnipotence and the rebellious refusal of limits is always with us; but nowhere more painfully experienced than in the making of christian decisions. ‘If desire is recognized as essential and ineradicable, and limits equally so, then a tension between the world of desire and the world of limits must be seen as inevitable’.²¹ The christian solution to this tension is not to be found by seeking refuge in one of these worlds but rather by planting one’s feet firmly

where they intersect. 'Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you' (Jn 14, 27). When Jesus wept over Jerusalem, was he not weeping over mankind's refusal to accept the message of peace won for us on the cross? (Lk 19,42; Col 1,20)

It cannot be repeated too often that the Spiritual Exercises are designed to provoke decisions for action. At any period in history, the actions decided on will be in keeping with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the teaching of his Church. The expressions of faith in action may vary from age to age, receiving new emphasis according to the new needs of people. In our time Vatican II says as much: 'this faith needs to prove its fruitfulness, by penetrating the believer's entire life, including its worldly dimensions, and by activating him toward justice and love, especially regarding the needy'.²²

Justice, love and peace are gifts of God to man. However, while they are gifts they must be sought for and won by human endeavour. Today more than ever before we are becoming aware of the enormity of the task to which our christian vocation calls us. 'While peace is a gift, man is never dispensed from responsibility for seeking it and endeavouring to establish it by individual and community effort, throughout history. God's gift of peace is therefore also at all times a human conquest and achievement'.²³ In working for the establishment of justice, love and peace, in making the decisions that this task calls for, we must constantly keep before our eyes God, from whom all blessings and gifts descend. From his supreme and infinite power comes our limited power 'and so, too, justice, goodness, mercy . . . descend from above as the rays of light descend from the sun, and as waters flow from their fountains'.²⁴

NOTES

¹ Loyola, St Ignatius of: *The Spiritual Exercises* (various editions), 234. The numbers referred to in the article and notes are the standard ones for the different sections.

² *The Autobiography of St Ignatius Loyola* (various editions), para 10.

³ *Exx* 231.

⁴ Ganss, George E., ed. and trans: *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (St Louis, 1970), 101, 102. (Hereafter cited as *Const.*)

⁵ Toner, Jules J., S.J.: 'A method for communal discernment of God's will', in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, vol III, no 4 (Sept 1971), p 131.

⁶ *Const.* 65.

⁷ Kiely, Bartholomew, S.J.: 'Consolation, desolation and the changing of symbols'. This is, as yet, an unpublished paper.

- ⁸ Lonergan, Bernard, S.J.: *Method in Theology* (London, 1972), pp 30-31.
- ⁹ Kiely, Bartholomew, S.J.: *Psychology and moral theology* (Rome, 1980), pp 174-75.
- ¹⁰ Kiely, Bartholomew, S.J.: in his unpublished paper, cf note 7 above.
- ¹¹ See Demmer, Klaus: *Die Lebensentscheidung* (Munich, 1974), p 61.
- ¹² *Gaudium et Spes*, 10.
- ¹³ Kiely, Bartholomew, S.J.: *op. cit.*, p 197.
- ¹⁴ Rahner, Karl, S.J.: *Spiritual Exercises* (London, 1966), p 61.
- ¹⁵ Rahner, Karl, S.J.: *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ See Meissner, W.: 'Psychological notes on the Spiritual Exercises', in *Woodstock Letters*, 92 (1963), and 93 (1964), p 36.
- ¹⁷ Frankl, Victor E.: *The will to meaning* (London, 1971), pp 102-03.
- ¹⁸ Cited by Adolf Haas and using his more accurate translation in *Ignatius of Loyola, his personality and spiritual heritage 1556-1956*. Ed. F. Wulf (St Louis, 1977), p 197.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 198.
- ²⁰ Haas: *op. cit.*, p 198.
- ²¹ Kiely: *op. cit.*, p 178.
- ²² *Gaudium et Spes*, 21.
- ²³ John Paul II, 'Peace: a gift of God entrusted to us', in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition (4 January 1982).
- ²⁴ Exx 237.