

Mysticism and ecology

Ignatian contemplation and participation

Philip Shano

THERE IS AN INTEREST AMONG MANY practitioners of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola in finding a uniquely Ignatian contribution to contemporary questions of ecology. Convinced that the most helpful way to respond to the ecological crisis is from the perspective of spirituality, some have tried to re-work the Exercises from an ecological perspective. There have been attempts at ‘greening’ the Exercises. There have been directed and guided retreats which use the Exercises to help people pray with the ecological crisis or with their experience of the land. The point of this article is that the uniquely Ignatian contribution to the conversation between spirituality and ecology lies in allowing the dynamic of the Exercises to speak for itself.

Ignatius gives us a dynamic process which is rooted in our personal experience of an intimate knowledge of Christ. My hope in offering these reflections on the links between the dynamics of the Ignatian Exercises and an ‘ecological’ way of looking at the world is that they will contribute to the search for an Ignatian perspective in the conversation between spirituality and ecology. This article will start with a look at the connections between spirituality and geography, including reference to a form of contemporary literature which I will refer to as ‘spiritual geography’. The best of this form of writing provides many contemporary readers with help in understanding their experience of the contemporary search for God. This will be followed by highlighting a few features of the Spiritual Exercises which reveal that Ignatius had an insight about how important it is that the one who is praying has a sense of place – both in terms of one’s inner landscape and the particular geography of the matter for prayer. Central to the Ignatian elements that will be looked at is Ignatian mysticism. This is a significant Ignatian help for those who desire to bridge the worlds of ecology and spirituality. The mysticism of the Spiritual Exercises resides in an intimate knowledge of things – both of ourselves and of the world around us, including the natural environment. This knowledge comes through respectful relationships with the things that are known, and it makes us sensitive to their wellbeing. Ignatian mysticism

read more at www.theway.org.uk

is summed up in the central grace of the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises – ‘intimate knowledge of our Lord’. Ignatian contemplation uses the power of the imagination to bring a person to intimacy with Christ. This knowledge is complete only when the person is a participant in the enterprise of Christ.

A personal note is necessary. These reflections have their basis in my experience of life and ministry at the Guelph Centre of Spirituality for the past eleven years. Guelph has welcomed women and men from almost every corner of the globe. Although they are primarily drawn here because they have heard that we do good work with the Exercises, most of them find that the simple and rugged combination of farmland, meadows, wetland and woodland contributes in significant ways to their experience of the Exercises. These reflections are rooted and grounded in my experience of listening to retreatants speak to me of the power of the land and sky and water in their prayer. As they pray in the geographical reality of this rural southern Ontario setting, they speak of the ways in which the grace of an intimate knowledge of the Lord is given through their experience of intimacy with this land. For one it is the experience of spiritual freedom that was sparked by the ordinary experience of being attentive to something on this land. For others, it is the healing that they will associate with an experience at a particular tree or rock or a special place on our land. Others will speak of an acceptance of the truth of their life as a result of an intimate connection with the cycles and rhythms of nature.¹

This article is also based on my experience as religious superior of a community which has responsibility for 264 hectares of land. When you oversee that much land, which is next door to a growing city, you have no choice but to deal with issues of ecology on a daily basis – urban encroachment, water quality, garbage disposal, maintenance and preservation of significant wetland, noise pollution, the crises facing farmers in North America, the implications of our efforts to move towards being certified as an organic farm, and so on. Most days, my dual responsibilities – as one who gives the Exercises and one who has to make many decisions about the use and care of land – challenge me to find a connection between ecology and the spirituality of the Exercises. An operative question within me for most of my time in Guelph has been, ‘Would the work of the Guelph Centre of Spirituality be possible in any other place? Could we close our doors and continue doing the kind of work we are known for?’ The answer is a simple yes. Of course the work of the Exercises is not confined to any specific geographical location. However, the fact is that the land on which

retreatants walk makes a difference in their interior life. Their intimate knowledge of Christ is influenced by the geographical place in which they pray. It is not by accident that retreat centres have traditionally been located in pastoral settings which are more naturally conducive to solitude and contemplation. One of the many essential life lessons from my years of ministry with the Exercises is that geography is significant. A person's spirituality is connected with a sense of place. Show me where you live and I will tell you who you are.²

Spirituality and geography

We are products of geography. Geography not only makes a difference, it is a determining factor in shaping who we are, how we see the world, how we make decisions and how we pray. The land on which we walk influences our theology and spirituality. If we are attentive enough to the particular geographical environment in which we are situated, it will influence our lifestyle decisions, how we spend our time and money, who we relate to, what we read, how we work and how we love. Many contemporary Christians are very attentive to the intimate connection between their spirituality and their geographical surroundings. On the other hand, there are just as many who are alienated from their surroundings and live without any sense of intimacy with the place in which they are situated.

An assumption being made in this article is that one's spirituality has to be situated or grounded in a particular context. A spirituality offers us a way of understanding the world and the meaning of life; a way of practicing this understanding and living in the world; a way of opening ourselves to an experience of God; a language which helps us to name and understand our inner journey and helps us to speak of this to others. In writing of spirituality as 'the art of real presence', John O'Donohue has said that 'experience is the heart of spirituality. Without rootage in experience, the concept of spirituality becomes empty. What is spirituality? It is the unfolding and articulation of the divine dimension in experience'.³ For the purposes of this article, spirituality is the art of being present to the experience of God as revealed in the land on which we walk. Or, to put it another way, our way of entering into the environment in which we are situated will tell us something about our spirituality.

An essential element of spirituality is a sense of place. Our experience of the place in which we abide influences our sense of the sacred, our ability to find God in every dimension of our lives. Our relationship, or lack of relationship, with the places in which we live

affects all of us. To have a sense of place involves having a 'sense of what it means to dwell within a particular place and community, to become intimate with the landscape, to enter into and be shaped by the stories and culture of the place'.⁴ There is a power inherent in landscapes. If I am from a rugged island in the North Atlantic I am shaped by the rocks and water. If I am from the prairie, I am shaped by its openness and big sky. If I am from a large city, I am shaped by its particular features. To let our prayer be shaped by our sense of place is to take seriously the incarnation, the immanence of God within the beautiful and terrible realities of our world. Having a sense of place is particularly important in a world where so many have lost a sense of home. Our world is marked by a longing for a sense of belonging, home and inclusion and the security that comes with this. Simone Weil's line rings so true in our time: 'To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.'⁵

We live in an age which is shaped by the dominant image of the refugee – the one who is made homeless, the one who is uprooted from a place of meaning and significance. In an essay on the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl, Joanna Macy, an activist in movements for peace and justice, has written of 'environmental refugees' who are uprooted from the lands that hold the memories of their people. She also describes the 'internal exiles' who are unable to leave their contaminated homeland; they remain, but are removed from nature and are fearful of it. Macy writes of those who choose to go back home, choosing even a contaminated home over the bleak anonymity of exile.⁶ Apart from those who would be described as refugees, there are the masses, especially in the first world, who are alienated from their geographical setting and seem oblivious to the need to have an experience of it. This failure to be at home in the place where one lives stands in contrast to a mysticism rooted in the details of one's physical surroundings.

Contemporary writers

There is a popular form of contemporary literature which could be categorized as 'spiritual geography'.⁷ This includes works in which the writers try to combine autobiographical reflection and their reflections on the experience of a sense of place in a particular landscape. Whether intentionally or not, these contemporary writers often do this through the use of religious or spiritual language and imagery. This form of writing unites geography and spirituality. The writers use an experience of living with the natural world to explore their own inner landscapes. They are saying that the physical dimensions of landscape are

inseparable from the spiritual dimensions of landscape. Among the names associated with this form of writing in North America are Kathleen Norris, Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez, Wendell Berry, Sharon Butala and others. Let me offer a glimpse into two writers who are attractive to a culture which craves a sense of belonging while it also makes decisions which separate us from the very land to which we belong.

The Canadian writer Sharon Butala's *The perfection of the morning: an apprenticeship in nature* has been a bestseller since it was published in 1994. Several years later she published *Wild stone heart: an apprentice in the fields* as a sequel. She writes of her own life and the gradual conversion from a separation from nature to an intimate relationship with it as a result of farming on a ranch in the Canadian prairies with her husband Peter. His thinking about the world was rooted in the fact that he had lived all his life in the midst of nature. Her understanding of the world and human nature was formed by her formal education. She had to grow into a sense of the 'subtlety of land'. It took years on the ranch for Butala to begin to see 'what a life in Nature teaches one'. At one point she describes an experience of the sacredness of the land which could just as easily have been written by those describing a prayer experience or others who find themselves standing on sacred ground. On a wet, cold Sunday morning in late August, Butala found herself being driven by 'some force I couldn't see or feel, but that pushed me to go quickly' to a place on the family ranch where there was a small pile of rocks at a high point with a spectacular view of the countryside. 'It is a long, steep climb to that point, and I had not consciously chosen to go there, having had no destination in mind at any point, not even noticing where I was going. As I approached the stones, I began to feel increasingly disturbed, increasingly upset.' She was shown that she was 'not worthy', that 'I had trespassed on what had been a sacred site'. Butala recalls a vision she had as a young mother which summarized the tension in her own life between an intimacy with nature and a separation from nature.

I absolutely could not see how my baby, my precious, fragile little son could be made of the same fabric as the grass, the trees, the sky. It was unimaginable in any sense, metaphoric or real. I had been raised in a fight against Nature for survival, educated at a university increasingly dedicated to progress, to technological transcendence. I had long been removed from any kind of true Nature . . . I think that it is time to . . . forget the books, forget conventional wisdom, let go of all that I was

taught by church and school and history and by bitter experience in society. All these things tell me to discount what I have learned through these years of my life here in the landscape.⁸

Butala's writing is an intimate journal of one woman's relationship with the land which is educating and shaping her in gradual ways. She is in touch with the power and potential of the landscape. Her writing offers a portrait of her outer landscape and her inner one, the world of artistic imagination. It is a world where the writer is forced to confront not only her own solitude but her struggle to connect with the world around her. Her spiritual journey is interwoven with her daily contact with nature. There is a kind of awe as she connects with nature and discovers that the moon has phases, that life makes sense, that the world has a governing body. Butala learns to live in nature, shaping her life and activities according to the weather, the seasons, the rising and setting of the sun and moon. Unlike a writer such as Kathleen Norris, Butala does not use explicitly religious language. However, she could just as easily repeat what Norris has said in *Dakota: a spiritual geography*. The landscape of the Great Plains offers her 'my spiritual geography, the place where I've wrestled my story out of the circumstances of landscape and inheritance'.⁹

A second writer who deserves special mention is Barry Lopez, an American nature writer who has published works such as *Of wolves and men*, *Arctic dreams* and *About this life – journeys on the threshold of memory*. In *Arctic dreams: imagination and desire in a northern landscape*, he examined the effect of landscape on the imagination. *About this life* is more autobiographical and continues his theme of writing of landscape as an integral component of the development of both one's own personality and the world in which we live.¹⁰ He writes of how he was shaped by the rural landscape in which he was raised. Lopez sees a strong relationship between who we are and the landscape in which we travel. The landscape contains mysterious dimensions. Nicholas O'Connell points out that a common theme for Lopez is the life which comes through the discipline of the harsh environment. 'Journeys into the wilderness provide us with a chance to return to an original, uncompromised spiritual self, a self often buried beneath the conventions and distractions of modern urban life.'¹¹ Lopez's work on the physical environment focuses as much on issues of ethics, metaphysics and spirituality as on nature. He attempts to reconcile an intimate and scientific knowledge of the physical world with Christian virtues of hope, dignity and charity. Lopez believes that 'we can get in

touch with the larger spiritual dimensions in our lives by coming to know a local landscape and including it in our sense of community. Specific knowledge of a place makes a crucial difference in our own lives.¹² He sees the need for an intimate knowledge of the landscape – a knowledge which allows him to recognize God in the place and to love the place because of that knowledge. He writes of those who take decades of book-learned knowledge and turn it into ‘a new kind of local knowledge’ because they take up residence in a place and seek, both because of and in spite of their education, ‘to develop a deep intimacy with it’. These are people to whom the land is more than politics or economics. ‘These are people for whom the land is alive. It feeds them, directly, and that is how and why they learn its geography.’¹³

Lopez’s writing is a conversation with the landscape. In *About this life*, he says that really to come to an understanding of a specific geography,

requires not only time but a kind of local expertise, an intimacy with place few of us ever develop . . . If you want to know you must take the time. It is not in books . . . It resides with men and women more or less sworn to a place, who abide there, who have a feel for the soil and history, for the turn of leaves and night sounds.¹⁴

These are people whose knowledge of their local geography is intimate rather than encyclopaedic. He defines geography as ‘knowledge that calls up something in the land we recognize and respond to. It gives us a sense of place and a sense of community’.¹⁵ Lopez refers to an idea expressed by Wallace Stegner: ‘Whatever landscape a child is exposed to early on, that will be the sort of gauze through which he or she will see all the world afterward.’¹⁶

In writing of the landscape and its way of teaching us and leading us to a sense of the divine, it is very easy to be tempted to romanticism, to be accused of a ‘back-to-nature’ mentality. The corrective to that is the dark side to our relationship with nature. There is a power inherent in a landscape. That power is not always one that is attractive and marked by spiritual consolation. We can experience desolation in our relationship with our landscape. This is experienced as alienation and separation. I have already spoken of the image of the refugee and its centrality in our world. Annie Dillard offers the word ‘sojourner’ as a way of reminding us that the earth does not always give us a sense of home. She reminds us that this word invokes a nomadic people’s sense of vagrancy, a praying people’s knowledge of estrangement.

I alternate between thinking of the planet as home – dear and familiar stone hearth and garden – and as a hard land of exile in which we are all sojourners . . . We don't know where we belong, but in times of sorrow it doesn't seem to be here, here with these silly pansies and witless mountains . . . In times of sorrow the innocence of the other creatures seems a mockery. Their ways are not our ways.¹⁷

Barry Lopez writes of what happens when a society forgets or no longer cares where it lives. Anyone with the political power and the will to do so can manipulate the landscape to conform to certain social ideals or nostalgic visions. When our knowledge of the real dimensions of land is superficial, the land becomes vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation for short-term gain. The land, powerless before political and commercial entities, finds itself with no defenders. 'It finds itself bereft of intimates with indispensable, concrete knowledge.'¹⁸

Significant work has been done on the interconnection between geography and the broader issues of global politics. Robert Kaplan's *The ends of the earth* offers a detailed look at the political situation of the world at the end of the twentieth century, a time when politics are increasingly shaped by the physical environment. He describes the relationship between environment and local politics. Kaplan writes of the connection between humanity and the terrain or climate in which we live. He sees humanity as 'an outgrowth of the terrain and climate in which it was fated to live'.¹⁹

Inherent in the interconnectedness of geography and spirituality is a relationship to the land. Barry Lopez and others who link spirituality and geography are telling us that if we behave as though there is no spiritual dimension to the geographical place in which we live, then we can treat the place like an object. That relationship does not come from books or courses. It comes from an intimate relationship with the landscape. It is developed through participating in a loving way with the features and shapes and cycles and rhythms of the land on which we walk and work.

The Spiritual Exercises and the landscape

Ignatius is often portrayed as a pilgrim, his journey marked by the search for God in all things. Harvey Egan describes Ignatius' exterior and interior 'pilgrim journey'. The exterior pilgrimage took him from Loyola to Rome. The interior pilgrimage concerns the 'unique way God purified, illuminated, transformed, and rendered Ignatius mystically fertile in vigorous apostolic service'.²⁰ The interior pilgrimage involves

the transformation of human consciousness to an interior freedom which is then given expression in apostolic service (analogous to the external pilgrimage of Ignatius). Although Ignatius would not be an automatic choice for most people who are interested in linking land and spirituality, the process and dynamics of his Exercises offer some help in making the connection. Those who search for either the uniquely Ignatian response to the ecological crisis or a properly Ignatian perspective on living in harmony with creation will be disappointed if they expect to find statements similar to those of St Francis of Assisi. The gift of Ignatius is in the process he offers those who desire intimate knowledge of the Christ who has become one with us. We turn now to highlight a few features of the Exercises which reveal Ignatius' insight into the need for the one who is praying to have a sense of place and to be intentional in how one approaches the particular place.

Relationship with creation

Ignatius starts the Exercises with the Principle and Foundation, inviting us to look at our relationship to other persons, to the environment (the world) and to God. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach has pointed out that Ignatius did not give his statement a poetic expression as St Francis did in his Canticle, but presented it as a guide to life, necessary for any human being to act properly, make choices appropriately and understand oneself fully. 'These three relationships are, for Ignatius, so closely united that a person cannot find God unless he finds him through the environment and, conversely, that his relationship to the environment will be out of balance unless he also relates to God.' Kolvenbach says that, 'Ignatius understands clearly that if God and the human person are not in proper relationship this will have serious consequences in the biosphere.'²¹

Readiness for the journey

The Exercises provide us with a map, a plan to help us on our interior pilgrimage. Ignatius asks those who are praying to start with the 'preparatory prayer' (Exx 46). We need to consider how we are as we come to a time of prayer. Where are we in our interior journeys? Ignatius knew that our inner terrain will have an effect on our prayer. We prepare ourselves to come to God. Intentionality is what Ignatius asks of us. It is essential that we be aware of what we are about to do, that we acknowledge in some way that we are entering into a sacred space and time. In this respect, Ignatius is concerned with the interior landscape of the one who is praying.

The additions

The additional directions (Exx 73–90) offer aids to concentration, suggestions about the surroundings of each day of the retreat and the physical arrangements. They are offered as helps towards sustaining the climate of the Exercises throughout the day. They are there to remind us that the ecology of the prayer experience must be taken seriously. They help us to concentrate on keeping the surroundings and atmosphere as conducive to prayer as possible. Ignatius had enough experience of giving the Exercises to know how important one's physical surroundings are in a time of retreat.

Composition of place

The closest Ignatius comes to actually speaking of the significance of geography in one's prayer is the 'composition of place'. 'This is a mental representation of the place. Attention must be called to the following point. When the contemplation or meditation is on something visible, for example, when we contemplate Christ our Lord, the representation will consist in seeing in imagination the material place where the object is that we wish to contemplate' (Exx 47). We are imaginatively to compose a place or situation which corresponds to the subject matter of our prayer. Sometimes this will be a material place. At other times, for instance in the First Week, The Three Classes of Persons or the *Contemplatio*, the 'place' represents an aspect of one's situation before God. In the Meditation on Hell, Ignatius has us imagine the length, breadth and depth of Hell as a place – the three dimensions of space. This precedes our imagining Hell as a situation. The exercise on the Kingdom of Christ involves imagining the setting of Christ's missionary activity – 'the synagogues, villages, and towns where Christ our Lord preached' (Exx 91). Michael Ivens has pointed out that the importance of the composition of place 'lies in the fact that the composition is not only an aid to recollection, but contributes to the prayer of the Exercises as a pedagogy in incarnational and apostolic spirituality. All human activity, and hence the salvific activity of Christ and that of our own service of Christ, comes about in the material world.'²² Thus, Ignatius has us grow in an awareness of the place before we contemplate the people.

We always see the words and actions of the people within their context. This is certainly true in Ignatius' offering of the first contemplation of the Second Week. In the Contemplation on the Incarnation, Ignatius wants us to imagine the 'great extent of the surface of the earth' (Exx 103), but also to focus on one particular room

in one particular house in one particular town in one particular province. The God of Ignatius is one whose love for the world is experienced in very real contexts and settings. A sense of place is important for the one who is praying. In the Contemplation on the Nativity, he has us imagine the way or road that is travelled by Mary and Joseph. The Meditation on the Two Standards relies on our sense of place. Ivens points out that the setting or place that we imagine in the Three Classes of Persons and the *Contemplatio* is significant for Ignatius because this is the setting within which he would have us approach serious decisions.²³ We are to imagine ourselves standing in the presence of God our Lord and of all God's saints and angels – 'who intercede for me' (Exx 232) that I may know and desire what is more pleasing to God (Exx 151). Ignatius wants to accentuate the solemnity of the exercitant's situation before God.

Ignatian contemplation and intimate knowledge

The processes of the Exercises work when the one who is praying is able to do so in the manner suggested by Ignatius. The various stages of growing inner freedom are the person's entry, through a prolonged and profound communion with God, into the mystery of Christ. This communion is experienced through Ignatian contemplation. We have already looked briefly at the role of the preparatory prayer and the composition of place. Ignatius also invites us to consider the history, to name our desire and to apply our senses. Contemplation relies on our use of the active imagination to pray with the gospel narratives and the mysteries in the life of our Lord 'just as if I were there'.²⁴ The intimate knowledge that Ignatius invites us to in the Second Week (Exx 104) involves more than taking a quick glance at Jesus, at our own lives and at the created environment in which we live. Ignatius knew that intimate knowledge takes time. It takes time to be actively engaged with the Lord, with our own life situation and with the world in which we live. For Ignatius, such knowledge is rooted in contemplation. Walter Burghardt defines contemplation as 'a long, loving look at the real'.²⁵ That long, loving look is only possible when we give free rein to our imagination, letting ourselves sit and ponder Jesus, our lives, our world, another person. For Ignatius, the long loving look is focused on Jesus Christ. The geography of the place is a prelude to the intimate knowledge of the Lord. Barry Lopez and other proponents of a spiritual geography see the necessity of taking time to gain an intimate knowledge of the land. This sense of place leads many of these writers to a sense of the divine.

How do we come to knowledge of a person, place or thing? Ignatian contemplation invites us to be engaged with that which we seek to know. It offers a way of relating which can be used in coming to know more than Christ. Whether it is Christ, a friend, a body of water, a field or a particular plant or animal we seek to know, we have to gather data, to have an experience of the other such that we grow in intimate knowledge. This is not gained through a casual exchange of information. There is a necessity for close observation of the finest details, repeated again and again while one is immersed in the actual environment of the other. We do not rush in spending time, 'wasting time', with Jesus. We want to know everything about him – how he was raised, how he sees life, what he thinks. The person praying the Exercises has time to dwell with each of the mysteries. Likewise, we get to know every intimate detail of a piece of land. We try to experience the environment as Jesus experienced it. We want to know every nook and cranny of the land we love. This is not the sort of knowledge or information which can be gained automatically by reading books or watching documentaries or spending hours on the Internet. This takes patience and a total immersion in the real geographical environment of the other.

Once we know the other, we have a relationship which calls forth a responsibility and a care for the other. If I have a relationship with Christ, I will love and want to follow him. As Ignatius suggests, we should 'ask for an intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become human for me, that I may love him more and follow him more closely' (Exx 104). Thus, the Ignatian discernment process is rooted in intimacy with Christ. 'While continuing to contemplate his life, let us begin to investigate and ask in what kind of life or in what state God wishes to make use of us' (Exx 135). If I have such a relationship with an animal or a piece of land, or with the earth itself, I will love it. As Barry Lopez suggests, I will not be able to treat it as an object. Those whose knowledge of their land or crops or animals is marked by intimacy often change the language they use. Rather than refer to dirt, they will know the many varieties of soil in their area. They will stop talking about pests which should be killed and will call the insect by its proper name and will know how to relate to it. We will not usually subdue what we call by name. The Principle and Foundation calls us to be free in our use of creatures, but the totality of the Exercises calls us to know ourselves and all other creatures.

Ignatius invites us to a contemplative response to the ecological crises faced by each one of us, whether or not we are aware of them. Elizabeth Johnson offers a good description of this response.

The contemplative response gazes on the world with eyes of love rather than with an arrogant, utilitarian stare. It learns to appreciate the astonishing beauty of nature, to take delight in its intricate and powerful workings and to stand in awe of the never-ending mystery of life and death played out in the predator-prey relationship. Nothing is too large (the farthest galaxies), nothing too small to escape our wonder. Recall the comment of the scientist Louis Agassiz: 'I spent the summer travelling; I got half-way across my back yard.' Within the context of faith, the contemplative gaze renders the world sacramental . . . The earth, with all its creatures, is the primordial sacrament, the medium of God's gracious presence and blessing.²⁶

Ignatian mysticism

It is intimate knowledge which is at the heart of Ignatian mysticism. One of the great Ignatian contributions to Christian spirituality is a process which invites us to be engaged with the world. This process flows from a form of mysticism which is accessible to anyone, rather than being the exclusive property of those who give long hours to prayer and fasting, those who choose the monastery or the hermitage, or even those who give the impression of being holy and devout. Ignatian mysticism is a mysticism of everyday life, which is, as Jürgen Moltmann has reminded us, the 'deepest mysticism of all'.²⁷ Harvey Egan defines mysticism as,

the implicit or explicit experience of faith, hope and love that is rooted in all authentic human experiences. That is, mysticism is simply loving knowledge . . . Radical fidelity to the demands of daily life, even if only through implicit, hidden, or anonymous faith, hope and love – in short, self-surrender to the Mystery that haunts one's life – grounds the mysticism of everyday life.²⁸

He says that everyone experiences, even if only implicitly, a holy, loving Mystery who communicates its very self. The mystical experience does not differ from the ordinary life of grace.

Egan has written of the 'mystical horizon' of Ignatius. This goes beyond Ignatius' explicit spirituality and theology to the all-embracing horizon in which all that he experiences, knows and loves finds its

ultimate meaning. Ignatian mysticism is rooted in Ignatius' personal experience of intimate union with and love of God. His incarnational mysticism finds God in all things and all things in God. The heart of the Ignatian method is the personal encounter with the saving life and activity of Jesus of Nazareth. Egan would say that Ignatius was a mystic in the broad sense in that he experienced the mysticism of the everyday; but Ignatius was also a mystic in the strictest sense. 'Under God's palpable initiative and direction, he fell explicitly in love with God . . . God's seizure of the very root of his being gave rise to an immense longing. He was allowed no peace until he was irrevocably united to God and transformed into God's very own life.'²⁹

Ignatian mysticism is an active or apostolic mysticism which is characterized by the ability to find God in all things. As Egan stresses, Ignatius was an 'incomparable mystic whose mystical and apostolic gifts are really two sides of the same coin'.³⁰ His influential apostolic work was the expression and sacramental embodiment of his radical mysticism. The Ignatian *unio mystica* goes beyond the contemplative realm to find union with God in one's everyday activity in the world. There is a process of initiation into the Mystery, the purpose being union with God. As Javier Melloni points out in his look at the place of the Exercises in the wider tradition of western spirituality, 'the Ignatian name for union with God is *election*'.³¹ Election is precisely the unitive and mystical way proposed by Ignatius. To be configured to Christ in a complete way, we come to intimate knowledge of Christ as we discern the concrete form this will take in our lives. In other words, the Exercises 'constitute a way of living in God for the world and of living for God in the world'.³²

Ignatius offers us a way of being engaged with the world. Rather than flee the ecological crises, we are invited to use the Ignatian tools to find God in the midst of the crises. We are to come to know the world in an intimate way. Ignatian mysticism never dissociates love of God, neighbour and world. It is incarnated in effective apostolic service which includes the social and political dimensions of human existence. This service must always be grounded in the experience of intimate companionship with Jesus. The Ignatian method gives us a way of being with ourselves through our intentional reflection on experience of life and the environment in which we live and work. Ignatius also gives us a way of being and acting in the world. This way has its starting point in our ability to take a contemplative look at the world, at the beautiful and the ugly, at the good and the bad, at the hope and the fear. The

Ignatian way provides us with a spirituality of intimacy with the natural world as opposed to a spirituality of alienation.

Participation in the enterprise of Christ

Ignatius is not offering us a passive spirituality. Apostolic service is a distinctive characteristic of his mysticism. As Harvey Egan says, 'Ignatius wanted nothing less than to reform the entire world.'³³ The grace of being as discerning person requires active engagement with and participation in the very world which the Trinity looked at with love and compassion in the Incarnation. We can imagine Ignatius and his early companions looking out over Paris with a similar love and compassion after their profession of vows. They were ready to do anything and go anywhere to bring the gospel. Discernment involves choices about how we live and work in the world. One of the graces implicit in the Exercises is that of participation. Ignatian mysticism finds God in all things in order to love and serve God in all things. It serves God in and through this world. As God looks at the world today God must see a world marked by one ecological crisis after another. God's very way of relating to us is to take a long, loving look at us and at creation. We, too, are being invited to look at the world and its crises with eyes of love.

Harvey Egan sees the contemporary appeal of the Exercises as their unique blend of mysticism with humanism. The Exercises offer 'a mysticism of pragmatic service, rooted in discrete love. This blending of mysticism, service and discrete love may not appeal to the more emotional, enthusiastic elements in today's religious subcultures, but we believe that most people's search for transcendence does not really wish to cut itself off from social involvement, pragmatic concerns and reason.'³⁴ Having experienced an intimate relationship with Christ, we are free to pursue intimacy with the world, to befriend the world. Once that happens, it is inevitable for us to get involved in issues that affect who and what we love. If we care enough about land, we will fight to keep it safe and healthy. Our love for the other – Christ, person, tree, land, animal, cause – will determine the shape of our life, our calendars, our bedside reading and how we set out priorities. This has been better said in words attributed to Pedro Arrupe, the former Superior-General of the Jesuits, and which have made their way around the world over the past several years.

Nothing is more practical than finding God.

That is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.

It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,

what you will do with your evenings,

how you will spend your weekends,

what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart,

what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

Philip Shano SJ is Superior and Director of the Guelph Centre of Spirituality in Ontario, Canada. He has been involved in most of the retreats and training programmes at Guelph, and has offered programmes based on Ignatian spirituality in many parts of North America. He is also the Executive Director of Jesuit Retreat and Renewal Ministries, a group which serves the ministry of the Spiritual Exercises in the USA and Canada.

NOTES

1 For further reflections on the role of nature in prayer, see Janet Ruffing, 'To have been one with the earth . . . : nature in contemporary Christian mystical experience', in *Presence: The Journal of Spiritual Directors International*, vol 3, no 1 (January 1997), pp 40–54.

2 The work of completing this article coincides with the murder in Jamaica, West Indies on 20 June 2001, of Fr Martin Royackers SJ, a Jesuit friend with whom I was formed for the first ten years of our Jesuit life. One of Martin's involvements in rural Jamaica was with a development project which seeks, among other things, to put unused government land to food production. The priests involved in this project received death threats because of their application to the government to release a small parcel of land for local agriculture. Although Martin would probably criticize this article for being romantic, the fact is that it was in the intimacy between spirituality and geography that he lived his life. He was shaped by the land of rural Ontario, especially Parkhill and Guelph. This article is dedicated to Martin Royackers and to his passion for the poor and land.

3 John O'Donohue, 'Spirituality as the art of real presence', in *The Way Supplement* 92 (1998), p 87.

4 Douglas Burton-Christie, 'A sense of place', *The Way*, vol 39, no 1 (January 1999), p 59. Burton-Christie suggests the need for those engaged with theology and spirituality to participate in the broad interdisciplinary conversation about the meaning of place currently unfolding within and between a wide range of fields. His article is a good introduction to the work on a sense of place which is being carried out by writers and poets, cultural historians, architects, philosophers, literary critics, anthropologists and geographers as they inquire into the meaning of place in human experience.

5 Simone Weil, *The need for roots: prelude to a declaration of duties towards mankind*, translated by Arthur Wils (New York: Harper, 1952), p 43.

6 Joanna Macy, 'The way to the forest – a story from Chernobyl', in Michael Tobias and Georgianne Cowan (eds), *The soul of nature* (New York: Plume), pp 36–44.

- 7 The phrase 'spiritual geography' comes from Kathleen Norris, *Dakota: a spiritual geography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993). Burton-Christie's article provides a good overview of a few examples of what he calls 'memoirs of place'. He includes *Dakota* in this category.
- 8 Sharon Butala, *The perfection of the morning: an apprenticeship in nature* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1994), pp 209–217.
- 9 Norris, *Dakota*, p 2.
- 10 For a good overview of the work of Barry Lopez, see Nicholas O'Connell, 'At one with the natural world – Barry Lopez's adventure with the word and the wild', *Commonweal*, 24 March 2000, pp 11–17.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p 15.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p 17.
- 13 Barry Lopez, *About this life: journeys on the threshold of memory* (Toronto: Random House, 1998), pp 139–140.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p 132.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p 142.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p 206.
- 17 Annie Dillard, *Teaching a stone to talk: expeditions and encounters* (Harper Perennial, 1992), pp 150–151.
- 18 Lopez, *About this life*, p 137.
- 19 Robert Kaplan, *The ends of the earth* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), p 7. Kaplan has been influenced by Thomas Homer-Dixon's work, especially *Environment, scarcity, and violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Homer-Dixon is especially interested in conflict and the environment. He has done extensive work in studying whether violence inside poor countries could be traced to critical environmental problems. Put quite simply, he is saying that environmental stress increases the risk of insurgencies, ethnic clashes, urban riots, and coups d'état.
- 20 Harvey Egan, *Ignatius Loyola the mystic* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1987), p 31.
- 21 Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, 'Our responsibility for God's creation', address at opening of Arrupe College, Jesuit School of Philosophy and Humanities, Harare/Zimbabwe, 22 August 1998.
- 22 Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1998), p 81.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p 116.
- 24 For more on the role of the imagination in the Exercises, refer to an earlier work on the power of the imagination in the Fourth Week. Philip Shano, 'Resurrection and imagination – "Did not our hearts burn within us . . ."', *The Way Supplement* 99 (2000), pp 140–150.
- 25 Walter Burghardt, 'Contemplation', in *Church* (Winter 1989), p 14.
- 26 Elizabeth Johnson, 'God's beloved creation', in *America* (April 16, 2001), p 10.
- 27 Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences of God* (London: SCM Press, 1980), p 76.
- 28 Egan, *Ignatius Loyola the Mystic*, p 21.
- 29 *Ibid.*, pp 24–25.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p 19.
- 31 Javier Melloni, *The Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola in the western tradition*, translated by Michael Ivens (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2000), p 50.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p 54.
- 33 Egan, *Ignatius Loyola the mystic*, p 119.
- 34 Harvey Egan, *The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian mystical horizon* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1976), p 160.