

# A PRECIOUS LEGACY

*Brian O'Leary SJ*

**M**ANY PEOPLE REFER TO A BOOK LAUNCH as a birth. So indeed it is. A new reality takes its place in the world and is ready to enter dialogue with its readers. But for a small group of Jesuits this particular launch is also a kind of closure, the end of a difficult process. Shortly after Joe Veale died four years ago the then Provincial, Fr. Gerry O'Hanlon, and I as Delegate for Spirituality, discussed the question of how Joe's legacy could be honoured and preserved. What emerged was a decision to gather in book form his published articles, and possibly some unpublished material as well. Some time after this, on the initiative of Brian Grogan, and with the fundraising ability of Noel Barber, the Veale Chair of Spirituality was established in the Milltown Institute. These two parallel projects were to ensure his legacy.

For me personally the word legacy became highly significant. A legacy connotes something of importance, something of value, something worth conserving. A legacy is a way for a person to live on after their death, for their influence, wisdom, and teaching to continue for the benefit of later generations. Joe Veale was the most learned and insightful authority on Ignatian spirituality in the Irish Jesuit Province in living memory. Not everybody appreciated this during his lifetime. Resistance, in one or other of its many forms, was often the reaction to Joe's rather difficult personality. But the claim is true nevertheless. Joe's legacy is unique, precious and can be enduring.

The path to bringing the book to completion was not smooth. A certain publishing house, which will remain anonymous, initially showed interest in producing the book. After about two years of waiting for a more definitive response we put it to the publisher that we could not wait indefinitely. The further we moved from Joe's death the less impact the book would have. The publisher agreed and suggested that we

seek another publishing house. At this point Philip Endean entered the scene and as editor of *The Way* undertook to become General Editor of the project. Philip's energy and enthusiasm got things moving quickly. A small committee was formed consisting of Philip, Laurence Murphy, Dermot Mansfield, and myself. We were to plan the content and format of the book and share among us the initial editorial work.

It was tempting to opt for publishing almost everything in Joe's *oeuvre* and not only his writings on spirituality. In particular we were interested in four earlier articles on education, stemming from his time as a teacher of English at second level. These had been published in *Studies* between 1957 and 1970. One of them in particular, 'Men Speechless' (1957), remains something of a classic. However, for the sake of the unity of the material, and so that the book would not become overly long, we eventually confined ourselves to his work on spirituality. Even here, through careful editing, we tried to eliminate repetition while ensuring that no idea of Joe's was lost.

Two hitherto unpublished lectures appear in this collection. One deals with Jesuit formation ('Renewing Jesuit Life in the Spirit') but I would like to comment briefly on the other, here entitled 'The Spiritual Exercises in Ecumenical Context'. This was originally known as the Elizabeth Smyth Memorial Lecture. Elizabeth Smyth was a Cenacle sister who, along with the Anglican Community of the Resurrection, established an ecumenical Ignatian training centre for spiritual directors in London. After her tragic early death from cancer, Elizabeth's friends established the annual Memorial Lecture in her honour and asked Joe to deliver the first of the series. The perfectionist in Joe came to the fore as he agonised over how he might speak to a denominationally diverse audience on Ignatian spirituality.

He began to read widely in Anglican history, theology and spirituality. Then he made a discovery that filled him with enthusiasm and showed him the way forward. He found in that offshoot of seventeenth century Anglicanism, the English Puritan tradition, surprising similarities to the spirituality of the Spiritual Exercises. You can read what he made of this in the

remarkable lecture that he conceived. I offer this vignette of how Joe went about his work because it illustrates some of his great strengths. He was always extremely sensitive to whatever group he was dealing with. He had a horror of being patronising to anyone (although he could sometimes be, albeit unintentionally). He had a genuinely ecumenical heart and spirit. He never shirked the hard slog of research. He was open to the yet unexplored aspects of human life and history, and was never satisfied to repeat received opinion no matter how revered.

These qualities of openness and enquiry came to the fore in an even stronger way in the last years of his life. Already in his seventies, Joe decided that he had done as much as he could in the field of Ignatian spirituality. He turned his attention instead to three apparently unrelated areas: human sexuality, Islam, and globalisation. This choice was dictated by his conviction that these particular subjects were crucial to understanding the challenges facing the Church, and the whole of humanity, over the coming century. His profound reflections on sexuality find expression in the article entitled ‘Meditating on Abuse’ (2000).

If asked to name the most valuable insights that I personally received from Joe, through reading his writings, working alongside him, and in friendly conversation, I would not point to any particular piece in *Manifold Gifts*. I would rather underline two presuppositions that lay behind all his work and that I hope you may find illustrated across this collection.

The first is that one needs to examine and become familiar with the whole of the Ignatian corpus and not try to understand any particular text on its own. So the Spiritual Exercises, the Autobiography, the Spiritual Journal, the Constitutions, and the Letters *together* reveal what is meant by Ignatian spirituality. The five texts must be allowed to interact with each other, throw light on each other, even to interpret each other. So when someone tells me that they have made or studied the Spiritual Exercises and that *therefore* they fully understand Ignatian spirituality, I reserve the right to be sceptical.

The second presupposition has to do with methodology or how to read a spiritual text. This is a central issue in the academic study of spirituality today. An authentic reading involves an awareness of the historical and cultural contexts out of which any spiritual text has emerged. It also calls for an awareness of our own historical and cultural biases. But it is even more than that. Perhaps, after all, methodology is not the best word, as if we were only speaking about a skill that can be learned. With Joe it was more an art, and therefore a gift, a spiritual sensitivity that resonated with the spiritual experience that lay behind the text. Such a sensitivity came and was nurtured through his inner life and his regular prayer (which is well attested to). It led to an awareness of the Spirit's presence in writer, text, and in himself as reader. Maybe the Ignatian word 'reverence', *acatamiento*, comes closest to what I am trying to say.

I commend *Manifold Gifts* to you.

# MANIFOLD GIFTS

*Philip Endean SJ*  
*Editor of The Way*

IT IS NOT ONLY IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS that I have served as editor for the title essay of the collection—‘Manifold Gifts’. I also worked on it when it was first published in 1995, shortly after I began to work on *The Way*. I shall not forget that first process. Joe was an anxious author; on some days it felt as if the phone lines between Milltown and my office in London were permanently open, and I quickly learnt that an editor needs to be able to combine flattery with firmness. Moreover, Joe and the person I was working with most closely at the time developed a sharp dislike of each other, and in order to get the piece written at all, I had to keep them firmly apart, and absorb quite a bit of the tension myself. I have frequently reflected over the last months that Joe is much easier to edit dead than alive!

But more important than the history of its composition, the article itself has been formative for me. It speaks eloquently of the freedom of God, and of how absolutely central it is in Ignatian ministry that we respond to people where they are in their response to that divine freedom. Joe internalized from the Ignatian texts a sense that any good speech about God is always open-ended. If you glance in the book at his classic article on the First Week, you will notice that much of it is in note form: lists of ‘the things I keep in mind’. Typographically, such writing causes problems; stylistically, the verbless sentence is hardly elegant. But the medium is the message, and this bitty, disconnected style reflects a deep wisdom about the ways of God, a deep sense that it is God who must be allowed to make the connections.

Recently, I was, along with some 160 others, at a conference in Loyola on the Exercises. It was my task to sit as the English-speaking member of a panel discussing where Ignatian studies had got to since

Joseph de Guibert—a figure whom Joe criticizes rather severely - wrote his synthesis in the early 1940s, informed as it was by a rather decadent and inadequate version of neo-scholasticism. The evening before the panel, the chair of the session informed us that he would plant a question in the event of the audience not being forthcoming: ‘If someone was to write a similar synthesis today, what would it look like?’. I decided that if I had to answer that question in public, I would say: ‘a wise person wouldn’t try’. A *synthesis* of Ignatian spirituality is a contradiction in terms. And I would say this not just as a *jeu d’esprit* to liven up a discussion, but as a matter of conviction—a conviction which I think I learnt from Joe, specifically from working on the first publication of the ‘Manifold Gifts’ essay. I am actually not surprised that Joe could never write his *book* about the *Constitutions*. The fact that we find his thoughts on the *Constitutions* in three essays—on their structure, their genesis, and the central theme of mission—and in some scattered paragraphs elsewhere seems to me actually truer both to the *Constitutions* and to Joe’s take on them than any full-scale book could have been.

The other feature of these essays is more elusive: an insistence that this religion business is somehow for real, and a polemic against styles of Church life and forms of spirituality that in the end avoid the real. One of the last times I met Joe, we were at a meeting of theologians from the British and Irish provinces, the so-called Archipelagians. Perhaps because he thought I would agree, he caught hold of me after a somewhat heated discussion, with divided opinions, on the practice of exposing the Blessed Sacrament in some retreat houses, and said, ‘Why are they fussing about *that* when the culture around us just doesn’t want to know?’. Joe was always interested in the central question. If you just read the final piece in *Manifold Gifts*, ‘The Silence’, you might think that Joe was a reactionary when it came to faith and justice. But that would be wrong. Joe was no advocate of a focus on the transcendence of God in separation from the political and cultural worlds in which we live. He is certainly claiming that much justice advocacy in the Irish Church during the 1970s and 1980s missed a point or two. But at the same time, his 1977 article on GC32’s Decree 4 was remarkably prescient and shrewd in its explorations of the deep connections

between spirituality and the ministries of justice, and it would take half a generation, at least, before the rest of us were to catch up. Joe's concern was that we get *real* and move beyond forms of prayer nourishing avoidance and denial—avoidance and denial that could take the form not only of a conventional, alienating piety, but also of a political activism in the end bypassing the deep questions about God.

These two qualities I have mentioned—a sensitivity to divine freedom and a concern that we get real—are what have struck me most as I have been doing the final stages of the editing of this book. And I reflect now that these two qualities converge. In Ignatian studies, Joe encouraged us to work with what Ignatius wrote and to learn from it, but also to go beyond it, to avoid being fixated on it. The text is there as a resource to help us respond, in ever new ways, to the human beings in search of God that we find before us. And there is something analogous in Joe's views about Christian mission more generally: we must be nourished by Church tradition, and we must learn from the human sciences and from what they tell us about the chains in which our freedom is bound. But we have to go beyond them. What we learn must promote our growth into God's freedom. We must not use our learning and our piety to avoid the challenges of growth before God, of engagement with God's brooding presence that might often seem absence.

Joe never, to my knowledge, wrote about the Ignatian annotation which tells a director to be suspicious of a process where all is going very smoothly, and more or less says that if there isn't a crisis, the director should provoke one. But the thought behind that annotation seems to me central to Joe's witness. Whenever we engage on spirituality, we must be focussing on the one question necessary: 'How can we be growing towards the God of life?' If that question is being really faced in a world of structural un-freedom, of sin both individual and corporate, then life is stormy, then our identities are continually being refashioned, then religion is something other than a vehicle of tranquillity, then spirituality is subversive. Both in his school teaching and in his Ignatian ministries, Joe was a challenging, troubling presence. *Manifold Gifts* is not a conventional book of spiritual writing, and I do not expect to see it in the 'Mind, Body,

Spirit' sections of Easons and Waterstones—not only because there is some scholarship behind it, but also because of the blessed awkwardness of the questions that Joe could never stop raising.

*Manifold Gifts* is thus a significant and worthwhile book. I am grateful to the Irish Province for its support of this venture in financial and other ways, and in particular to those of its members—Brian O'Leary, Laurence Murphy, Dermot Mansfield and Noel Barber—who gave so much help in the initial stages. And I am delighted, on behalf of *The Way* in which Joe first published several of the pieces, and of the new enterprise *Way Books*, to present and commend this collection of manifold gifts to you tonight.

# LAUNCHING OF MANIFOLD GIFTS

*Terence O'Reilly*

WHEN I RECEIVED THE INVITATION to speak about *Manifold Gifts*, which brings together the Ignatian essays of Joe Veale, I accepted at once. Joe was a friend to whom I felt, and feel, indebted, as well as a writer whose articles I admired. At the time, it is true, I had not seen the book, and a member of my family expressed concern: what, she intimated, if it should disappoint? But when it came it did not disappoint. On the contrary, my reasons for accepting the invitation were confirmed. From reading it I learned more about Joe Veale as a person, and more, too, about the significance of his work. Today I should like to mark its publication by speaking briefly about what I learned, beginning with Joe himself and his voice.

## **Voice**

The anonymous editor of the first part of the book (on the *Spiritual Exercises*) writes in an introductory note, 'what matters here is to present the authentic voice of Joe Veale himself' (p. 19), and although the essays in the volume were written for various occasions, and over a period of thirty years, the same voice may be heard in them all. It is, essentially, a 'speaking' voice, directed to the reader in person. To hear it you do not need knowledge of a specialist kind: the author's learning is extensive, but concealed. And the tone is urgent throughout. In a memoir that precedes the collection, Noel Barber writes that as a young man Joe excelled academically: 'some may have been superior in intellectual sharpness', but 'in high seriousness he was without equal' (p. 7). That 'high seriousness' is evident here. Indeed, if anything is missing, it is Joe's often mordant sense of humour.

The voice is, above all, that of a teacher, which Joe was, of course, for twenty-one years. It holds your attention, it aims at clarity, and it has what Joe himself described as, 'the inner rhetoric that controls the order, sequence and coherence of an argument and that gives it its force' (p. 102). There are, surprisingly perhaps, few references to the literature Joe taught for so long. His pedagogy comes out, instead, in his attention to style, and I was struck by the comment of Noel Barber, whom he taught: 'I am still unable to use the word "very" without a tremor of guilt as I hear him say, "'very' does not strengthen, it weakens the proposition"' (p. 7).

### **Spirituality**

All the essays in the book, directly or indirectly, concern prayer, and writings on that subject can be problematic, as Joe Veale points out:

Books about prayer can sometimes make us feel discouraged and oppressed with a sense of their unreality. It all seems too easy and remote from our own dry, modest struggles. Or else they make it all seem too hard, only for moral giants and heroes. Prayer is destroyed by anything false in us or unrealistic. (p. 39)

'False' and 'unrealistic' are not adjectives you would apply to this book, no doubt because its teachings stem directly from Joe's own experience. The editor of the third part (on the Ignatian *Constitutions*) writes: 'These papers reveal something of the author's relief and indeed exhilaration as he came in middle life to know God in a new way' (p. 126). We are not told more, but clearly this 'new way' of knowing involved a call to contemplation. This may be seen in Joe's approach to the *Spiritual Exercises*, a text to which he constantly refers. He more than once quotes two passages in them that seemed to him important. First: 'Where I find what I want, there I will rest, without anxiety to go further' (Exx 73). Second: 'It is not much knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul but to taste and savour the reality interiorly' (Exx 2). To be still before Christ, to savour his presence, and to learn his mind: this, for Joe, was what St Ignatius wished to teach.

Reverence for contemplation led Joe also to draw a firm line between our activity and the special gifts of God. At one point he relates the *Exercises* to the four stages of *lectio divina*. The first three stages (reading, meditation, prayer) we can embark on ourselves, he points out, aided by grace. The final stage, however, is beyond us. ‘*Contemplatio*’, he writes, ‘is something that is simply given and cannot be acquired or induced’; and he adds: ‘the corresponding term in St Ignatius is ‘consolation’ (pp. 47–48). Like other recent commentators on the *Exercises*, Joe placed ‘consolation’ at their heart.

A contemplative approach is apparent as well in all Joe writes about spiritual direction. Noel Barber notes that as a director and counselor Joe ‘cultivated his talent for listening’ (p. 10), and this, it would seem, had a radical effect on his understanding of spirituality, as Joe himself implies in a moving passage:

It is remarkable what one learns about the ways of God when one spends time each day with one exercitant listening to their experience in prayer and trying to discern together where it may seem the Spirit is leading. The trim garden paths of the spiritual treatises begin to look unreliable. One is brought to wonder at the largeness and generosity of the infinite variety of ways in which God sanctifies souls .... God ignores our maps and schedules. Methods of prayer are seen simply for what they are: useful devices that may or may not be a means to open this or that person to God’s action. Some of the venerable generalisations of the tradition are seen to be useful, some false, some pointless. (p. 139)

Joe had strong views, as these lines indicate, but he was able to combine his deeply-held convictions with an equally deep respect for the freedom and specific needs of the person he was helping.

### **The Society of Jesus**

The book shows Joe’s love of the Order to which he belonged. But his love was not blind to the problems it faced. He was aware of its high calling, and of its human frailties, too. At the end of the third part (*Retrieving Ignatian Wisdom*), he quotes a phrase of Karl Rahner: ‘I dare to think that Ignatius belongs to the future, not to the age now coming to an end’. Then he cites the observation that follows: ‘It

remains to be seen whether those who historically call themselves his disciples and pupils will be the ones who really represent this spirit in the future' (p. 160). Joe appears to have shared the concern that Rahner expressed. Yet he had a hope, a passionate hope, that the Society would respond to its call, and he worked hard, as these essays show, to help it do so.

His hope was founded in part on the changes he had witnessed in his own lifetime, in the aftermath of Vatican II. Noel Barber in his memoir, and two of the editors in their introductions, point out that Joe's years as a Jesuit student were not particularly happy. He was ill at ease in the clerical culture around him. Joe himself describes that culture in his hard-hitting essay on clerical abuse:

There was a desert in the heart, and a rhetoric of self-denial that twisted into self-abasement. There was self-hatred, a conviction of worthlessness, an unattended guilt, resentments, rage at things being done to us. We had no say in the disposition of our own lives. Authority could be impersonal and demeaning, and there was a culture of comfortable dependency that could suddenly reverse into angry rebellion. And the living environment was Spartan in the lack of amenity, the walls denuded of beauty, the 'spiritual' assumptions that dehumanised. Can we imagine the levels of private pain that might have their roots in this complex? (p. 224)

The editor of the final part of the book, in which this essay occurs, comments: 'Once one has read this piece, everything else Joe wrote appears in a new light' (p. 164). This, I think, is so. Joe's journey from darkness to light, which we merely glimpse, makes us conscious of the desire to 'console' others that his writings express, and it helps us to understand the mixture of compassion and anger in his tone, especially in the later essays. This tone is 'prophetic', as Philip Endean observes in his Foreword. But Joe was not a voice lost in the wilderness: the care with which the volume has been prepared by his Jesuit friends and peers suggests that he was heard.

### **Joe Veale's Legacy**

Publishing a book is like placing a message in a bottle and casting it onto the waves: who will its readers be? In the case of *Manifold Gifts*,

some of the readers will be Joe's friends, and others members of the Society of Jesus throughout the world. There is a further group too. At the end of August, I attended a conference in Loyola, on the practice of the *Spiritual Exercises* today, in which a number of speakers noted that the traditional link between Ignatian and Jesuit spirituality has been broken. One of them, Philip Endean, told us that at the National Congress on the *Spiritual Exercises* in Great Britain, which he attended, only two of the one hundred and twenty delegates were Jesuits, and Catholics were in a minority overall. How can the Society resource the giving of the *Exercises* outside it, and put people in touch with its own 'living tradition'? This book, surely, is part of the answer: Joe was steeped in Ignatius' writings, aware of contemporary needs, and able to write for non-specialists, as we have seen.

The editor of the first part affirms: 'Joe Veale had not read widely in spiritual traditions apart from the Ignatian one' (p. 17). That, no doubt, is true, though one of the essays ('The Spiritual Exercises in an Ecumenical Context') shows how deeply he could respond to another tradition he found sympathetic, in this case the writings of the English Puritans. But what may seem a limitation is also a strength. The one tradition that shaped Joe is present in these pages, not only in what he says, but in how and why he says it, and in that sense, the book, like its author, embodies what it is about. That, in the end, is what makes it so valuable, and its publication a significant event.