

THE WAY

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FOR AUTHORS

The Way warmly invites readers to submit articles with a view to publication. They should normally be about 4,000 words long, and be in keeping with the journal's aims. The Editor is always ready to discuss possible ideas. A Special Issue is planned on spirituality and the body, so articles in this area will be particularly welcome.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Autobiography</i>	Ignatius of Loyola, 'Reminiscences (Autobiography)', in <i>Personal Writings</i>
<i>Constitutions</i>	in <i>The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms</i> (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996)
Diary	'The Spiritual Diary', in <i>Personal Writings</i>
Dir	<i>On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599</i> , translated and edited by Martin E. Palmer (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996)
Exx	<i>The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius</i> , translated by George E. Ganss (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992)
GC	General Congregation, in <i>Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus</i> (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009) and <i>Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus</i> (Boston: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2017)
MHSJ	Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu, 157 volumes (Madrid and Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1898–)
<i>Personal Writings</i>	<i>Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings</i> , translated by Philip Endean and Joseph A. Munitiz (London: Penguin, 1996)
<i>Papal documents may be found at www.vatican.va</i>	

FOREWORD

THE PATHWAY TO SALVATION is followed, step by step, through the discernments we make from one moment to another. Just as one spark can kindle a fire, so too a single discernment can acquire the power to change the course of human history. Whether grace changes our perception of a given situation, invites us to act according to a certain spirit, or marks us out for some bold action, the stage is set for the work of the Spirit in our everyday lives. Though we live in a world beguiled by political ideology, true power comes into being when we detach ourselves and make a simple assent to the work of God. The salvation of the world will not be achieved through a political programme, but through innumerable discernments of Spirit that, collectively, create the impetus to work for the common good.

James Hanvey invites us to understand the political and cultural implications of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Taking the Principle and Foundation and the Two Standards as a starting point, he explores how our individual selves are enmeshed by intersecting social relations. This understanding of the *Spiritual Exercises* offers us ‘a way of discerning the principles and values that should guide our actions and the means that best serve us and our neighbour to attain our end’. The two meditations form a proposal of the Kingdom of God as a political reality to the whole of humanity, with a leader who cannot be made subject to any state or party. Similarly, Patrick Riordan reveals how the Two Standards meditation enables conflicting political groups to set aside their interests in the pursuit of the common good. By exploring its imagination and rhetoric in the light of the tradition of political philosophy, he shows how it facilitates the transformation of human desire.

The phrase *discreta caritas* or ‘discerning love’ plays a prominent role in the writings of St Ignatius. Mark Rotsaert analyzes its usage to reveal how the never-ending interplay between love and discernment is an expression of the pursuit of the common good that always leads to the greater glory of God. If we are to love in this way then we need to free ourselves from the political ideologies that surround us. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari were two of the foundational thinkers of twentieth-century postmodernism who explained how human desire is constitutive of the social world. Ruth Baigent discovers a new role for the spiritual director by examining the writings of John of the Cross in

the light of their work, emphasizing the importance of helping the disesteemed to disentangle him- or herself from this social world.

From the perspective of catechetical ministry, Luz Marina Díaz reflects upon the narrative of Jesus' baptism when a voice is heard from heaven saying, 'this is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased' (Matthew 3:17). The resonances of this phrase help her to reflect on the indestructible umbilical cord between the human being and God. In the light of the work of Henri Nouwen, she discovers that this originary experience is fostered in moments of communion, community and ministry which allow us, together, to inhabit a rediscovered reality of interconnectivity.

Pope Francis envisions this reality as a deeper recuperation of our human dignity. His most recent apostolic exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, affirms that the climate catastrophe has now been further confirmed by scientific data. Timothy Howles brings us up to date by highlighting the need for a communal discernment that includes voices already marginalised in the debate, as well as those who do not have a voice at all. The global equilibrium can be re-established if interconnectivity is recognised as a component of human dignity.

Michael Campbell-Johnson (1931–2023), who died in October 2023, was a protagonist in making 'a faith that does justice' a requirement of the mission of the Society of Jesus. He was also closely involved with the foundation of the Jesuit Refugee Service, a global organisation at the service of millions of displaced people. In an article republished from our archives, co-authored with the missionary and catechist John B. McCluskey, he addresses the post-conciliar shift in the Church away from the old colonial model of the foreign missionary towards entrusting evangelization to local Churches.

Loan Le, of the congregation of Mary Queen of Peace, tells the story of how religious sisters in Vietnam are accommodating to the matriarchal structure of indigenous communities to place themselves at the service of the poor. This sensitive inculturation of the gospel is testimony to the power of discernment to bring about real change when it is freed from ideological assumptions. When we allow our discernments to get caught up in the deft breeze of the Holy Spirit, we feel their truest power. As we celebrate the season of our Saviour's birth, I wish you a very happy Christmas and pray with you for peace in our troubled world.

Philip Harrison SJ
Editor

A POLITICAL PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE TWO STANDARDS

Patrick Riordan

THE MEDITATION on the Two Standards in the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius is a helpful step for exercitants on the way towards making a life-shaping decision. They are faced with the questions *where do I wish to place myself? Where do I desire to be? Where is God calling me to be?* This meditation comes on the fourth day in the Second Week, along with other exercises that are structured to help focus the decision. The meditation on the Kingdom frames the transition from the First to the Second Week, and sets the context for the choice of a state of life. Another exercise on the same day as the Two Standards is the meditation on the Three Classes of Men; later the reflection on the Three Kinds of Humility also aids the choice.

It is important not to lose sight of this context when reflecting on the Two Standards. The context is choice, the decision exercitants are to make about their state of life, or something comparably serious. I stress this, so that my specific perspective from political philosophy is not misunderstood. I acknowledge the relevance of the Two Standards to discernment as the activity of interpreting the movements experienced by the exercitant with a view to clarifying the features of a freedom to make a decision. There is of course a wider relevance of discernment in life, and that provides the context for this exploration.

From the perspective of the political, what interest might there be in analyzing the Two Standards? There are two at least that spring to mind.

1. The reliance on an imaginative narrative that has resonances, both theological and political, and which shapes the mindset of the decision-maker and, possibly, also the mindsets of directors and preachers formed by the Exercises.
2. In the narrative of the Two Standards there is use of rhetorical structures that have parallels in political argument. How are we to understand those parallels?

My discussion attempts to link the Two Standards, the tasks of discernment and reflections from political philosophy.

Political Structures

The Kingdom

The Kingdom meditation has specific political aspects. First we note that there is a king, and there are subjects. In both cases on which the exercitant is invited to reflect, the human king and the eternal King, the king's project is deemed good and worthwhile, and in both cases the relationship between king and subject is one of invitation, or summons. 'Whoever wishes to come with me ...' (Exx 93, 95) Here there is no mention of 'bad' subjects. All subjects are good, but there is a distinction between the good subjects who have 'judgment and reason', and those more ambitious good subjects who wish to give greater proof of their love and who wish to distinguish themselves in service (Exx 96, 97). The focus in the comparison is on the Eternal King and Lord and the exercitants' desire to offer themselves in service. But the basic political model is one of monarchy, with a hierarchy of ruler and subject.

Secondly, both the human king and the eternal King formulate their project in the militaristic terms of conquest. They wish to conquer land, world, enemies. There is no doubt that this imaginary is conditioned by the times and by Ignatius' own personal history. I am not objecting to these images: I acknowledge they have scriptural bases, and also that the struggle required is to conquer one's 'carnal and worldly love' (Exx 97) in 'bearing all injuries and affronts, and any poverty, actual as well as spiritual' (Exx 98). The question is whether there is an unintended framing of experience consequent on use of these images.

The Two Standards Meditation

Given its title, we might expect the images here also to be both monarchical and military. A standard is a flag, a visible focus of attention around which soldiers on the battlefield can regroup. But in this narrative, it is not the commonality but the contrast between the two that is emphasized.

To Satan are assigned the features of a nasty monarch, more the tyrant than the king in Aristotle's classification.¹ For Aristotle, the distinction

¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, 3.7, translated by T. A. Sinclair (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

is drawn in terms of whether rule is exercised for the common good (king) or for the good of the ruler (tyrant). I will return to this theme later. Satan has a throne; his appearance inspires horror and terror (Exx 140). This feature also makes him more like the sovereign of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, who must inspire terror and awe in his subjects.² Satan's project is deceptive, entrapment leading to bondage in chains for all.

By contrast, 'the supreme and true leader, who is Christ our Lord' (Exx 143) has none of the trappings of monarchy in this depiction. He is in a lowly place, appears attractive and speaks to his followers, who are described as 'his servants and friends' (Exx 146). The narrative of the Kingdom meditation is replaced with another in which there is no longer any mention of conquest or domination. Instead the project is 'to spread his doctrine' among all persons of whatever status (Exx 145). The emissaries are to help all by attracting people to the way of Christ (poverty, contempt, humility). The contrast is marked: invitation by way of attraction, implying that the response must be freely and knowingly given.

Biblical Resonances

Biblical sources contain many uses of a similar polarisation: choose life or death; choose liberty or bondage; light or darkness. These contrasts are familiar from the passages such as those in Deuteronomy on covenant ratification.

Paul's mission was set in the context of the Roman empire, which recognised its *kyrios*, Caesar, as absolute sovereign. Paul proclaimed a different *Kyrios*, inevitably a challenge to the dominance of Caesar and recognised as such by those who opposed Paul. Tom Wright describes it like this, interestingly for our reflection:

People who were used to one kind of political reality, albeit with its own history and variations, were glimpsing a vision of a larger united though diverse world When the new communities spoke of a different *Kyrios*, one whose sovereignty was gained through humility and suffering rather than through wealth and conquest, many must have found that attractive, not simply for what we would call 'religious' reasons, but precisely for what they might call 'political' ones.³

² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), edited by J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford U, 1996).

³ Tom Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (London: SPCK, 2018), 423.



The Temptation of Christ, by Hans Thoma, 1890

The polarisation of the two Lords, Caesar and Jesus, is signalled in Luke's Gospel. The Gospel begins (2:1) with the decree of Caesar Augustus that a census of the whole world be taken, and it ends with the commission of Jesus to his disciples that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached to all nations in his name (24:47). The story moves from the emperor's command affecting the whole world to the Lord's commission to preach to the whole world. This confrontation between two 'Lords' is further documented in Acts and in Paul's own writings.

Augustine's Two Cities

Ignatius' contrast between the Two Standards has an obvious resonance with Augustine's contrast between the earthly city and the City of God.⁴ This is an explicit elaboration of the political significance of the revelation in Jesus occasioned by the disputes over the theological interpretation of the fall of Rome in 410. Augustine contrasts two cities, each of which satisfies a standard definition of city as a society of rational beings united in pursuit of a common love. The earthly city is founded on the love of personal glory and the pursuit of self-interest; the city of God is founded on the love of God's glory and the desire to serve.

The resonances here with the Two Standards are obvious. There are two standards or programmes: on the one side, pride and self-serving engagement; on the other side, humility and service of God and neighbour.

⁴ See Augustine, *City of God*, translated by Henry Bettenson, edited by David Knowles (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

While the earthly city exhibits the same love among its members, it cannot be called a common good, since each one's glory or interest is particular to the individual and indeed they are often in conflict. What is common is only a sameness, the same kind of orientation, but not a shared, common orientation. In the City of God, a genuine common good unites the members of the ordered society since each one desires and pursues the same good as every other. Augustine's analysis is explicitly political as it draws attention to the manner in which these two cities, founded on contrasted loves, are intertwined or intermixed within any political community in history, including the Church itself. But he is also existential in his challenge to his audience to have their own loves clarified and where possible to allow the love of self-glory to be replaced by love of God and pursuit of God's glory.

Political Argumentation

Satan's Strategy

The plan of action attributed to the satanic figure is one of deception leading to entrapment, playing on the interests that people are assumed to have. Ignatius spells out the steps of the strategy, from possession to honours to pride. Covetousness is the starting vice leading to pride, from which all other vices can be acquired.

The strategy attributed to Satan is not one of argument in the normal sense but much more one of manipulation. It may appear in the form of argument or persuasion, using language and relevant words and images, but at heart it is deceptive because it conceals from the addressee what is going on and what exactly is the aim. Note that Satan addresses his innumerable demons, not their targets or victims. The strategy of deception and entrapment, from covetousness to pride, is communicated to the tempters, but not to the tempted. The victims should not be aware of the strategy applied to them, since in that case it might not work.

J. L. Mackie is one of a number of thinkers who reconstruct ethics as an instrument of social control, regulating the actions of people who pose threats to one another but who by accepting the regulation of moral norms manage to live together without doing much harm.⁵

⁵ J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

Mackie follows Hobbes and Hume in denying that there is anything true about value statements (for Hobbes whatever people happen to desire they call good; but there is nothing good or bad in itself).⁶ So, the social construct of morality is illusory, and recognised as such by those who study the matter, but the population in general should continue to live under the illusion so that they conform to social norms instead of disrupting the social order.

Jürgen Habermas also offers us an interesting resonance with the rhetoric of the Two Standards. He contrasts different styles of political argument. Beyond the sheer appeal to authority—do it because I tell you—there can be the giving of reasons, but the reasons in turn can be distinguished by type. One set of reasons is grouped as ‘strategic’. With these reasons those addressed are reminded of the currencies of property and power. Money and political influence are the main currencies. *Where is the pay-off? What do I stand to gain or lose?*⁷

What is objectionable in these arguments is not that they encourage wrongdoing as such; instead, it is that they make goods that are primarily instrumental into the ultimate ends of action. To the extent that they colonise our consciousness, they drown out attention to matters of more ultimate concern, such as the questions Aristotle raised in the same context, challenging the identification of money or reputation or power with *eudaimonia*: what do we want to use the wealth for, what will we want to do with our power?⁸

Christ's Approach

In both the Kingdom and the Two Standards the eternal King is presented as offering something good to which those addressed are invited. The good in question is deemed to be attractive, such that those who recognise it (having reason and judgment) will desire it, and those who are more ambitious will be ever more willing to accept the necessary steps for attaining their desire. The point of contrast is not desire, but the nature of what is attractive and therefore desired.

⁶ ‘But whatsoever is the object of any man’s appetite or desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth good For these words ... are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common rule of good and evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves.’ (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 6. 7)

⁷ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, translated by Thomas McCarthy, 2 volumes (Boston, Ma: Beacon, 1981).

⁸ See Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1.5, translated by J. A. K. Thompson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981). *Eudaimonia*, sometimes translated simply as ‘happiness’, signifies well-being, or the living of a good life.

Another point of contrast between Christ and Satan is that the dynamic of communication from Christ to his messengers to their audience does not require deception but the very opposite: transparency and openness. The friends and servants of the King are charged to attract their audience to poverty, insults and humility. These can only appear attractive when situated in the greater, broader narrative of Christ, his life, death and resurrection, and promised parousia. As in the Kingdom meditation, there is no concealment of the costs of discipleship and there is no pretence of a romantic kind about the steps to be taken in following Christ.

There is no concealment of the costs of discipleship

As Habermas's 'strategic reason' provided us with a modern exemplar of the seductions of wealth and power as motivations for political actors, he offers also a parallel to the persuasive attractiveness of the Eternal King's message. Communicative action, which is orientated towards reaching a mutual understanding (*Verständigung*) is contrasted with strategic action, which is orientated towards success. Strategic action involves the application of a means-goal technical rationality to social affairs, such that social actors seek success over rational opponents with competing interests. This is the type of social rationality which lies at the basis of liberal and utilitarian theories of society, according to Habermas. It can be seen to be limited, in contrast to the rationality of communicative action. I emphasize here that I am not identifying Satan's rhetoric with Habermas's strategic reason: the former leads to evil and wrongdoing; the latter has a perfectly positive purpose that can be correctly fulfilled. The element in common is that they both address the sources of people's interests in their desires to have and to be more.

The fact that strategic action is always mediated by language allows Habermas to apply his argument as a form of immanent critique, namely, that strategic argumentation does not conform to those norms and rules of discourse which are already presupposed and affirmed as valid in the very act of entering into argument. In his elaboration of communicative action and of a society founded on its basis, Habermas specifies requirements for the communication that should take place. Essentially, it should be coercion-free; none should be excluded, and all ideas and interests should have access.⁹

⁹ See Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, volume 1, *Reason and the Rationalisation of Society*.

Habermas's distinction between communicative and strategic rationality offers a parallel in political philosophy to the contrast drawn by Ignatius in his narrative of the Two Standards, and the respective speeches made by their representatives. His approach provides us with a perspective on their different objectives: success or agreement. The goal aimed at by Satan and his demons is that all people be led to all the vices, for which pride is the key. This qualifies as the success comparable to what is aimed at by the implementation of strategic reason. The mission given by the eternal King is that all humankind would receive 'his doctrine' (Exx 145); the method to be employed is to attract by displaying the beauty and goodness of what is proposed. No coercion is envisaged, no deception or manipulation; only a free response to the invitation is sought. This is comparable to the *Verständigung* or agreement by way of mutual understanding that is the goal of communicative action in Habermas's analysis.

Noteworthy in this context is the significant commitment of Vatican Council II's Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis humanae* (nn.4, 10), that the Church would never rely on coercion or on the application of state power to achieve its mission of evangelization. The importance of the Declaration is due to the ambivalent history of the Church's reliance on state power with its coercive instruments. Accepting the abandonment of the Papal States in the twentieth century and Pope John Paul II's prohibition of clergy accepting official political roles marked significant practical steps in realising this doctrine.

Another point of contrast is available if we draw on Augustine's distinction between the two cities founded on two loves, and his point



Effects of Good Government in the City, from *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government*, by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 1338–1339

that only one city exemplifies true unity because it alone has a genuine common good. What are the goods at stake in the two social movements represented by the Two Standards? In that of Satan there is no true communality but only sameness, as each is led by greed and pride to pursue his or her own interests. But in the case of the Eternal King all the emissaries have the same end and it embraces the free adoption by their audience of the same sacred doctrine, drawn by its intrinsic attractiveness. This end has the features of a genuine good in common, one that is both fulfilling of the persons who pursue it together and is a genuinely worthwhile goal of human action. It is a community bonded by holding the same convictions and commitments to the same goods.

Discernment, the Two Standards and Political Analysis

Although I began by drawing attention to the presupposed structures in the Kingdom and Two Standards narratives, and then focused on the contrasting forms of argument or rhetoric depicted, this analysis leads us to acknowledge that the structures of kingship and the militaristic notions of conquest are subverted by the manner of attraction and persuasion employed by the Eternal King. There is an operative internal critique of these images in the transition from the Kingdom meditation to the meditation on the Two Standards. It is as if those having 'judgment and reason' who wish 'to show greater devotion' and to 'distinguish themselves in total service' are led through the meditations to recognise what would count as proof of love and as distinguished service.

The noble-spirited soul may have imagined feats of daring and courage acknowledged in battlefield honours. But from the Two Standards the discovery is made that distinguished service must be without expectation of recognition, and indeed with the expectation of receiving the opposite—contempt—and that grasping for distinction is no less unworthy than grasping for wealth. This subversion and critique is achieved, it is to be hoped, in the exercitant via the depiction of the contrasting rhetorics of Satan and the Eternal King.

In constructing this dynamic Ignatius has both built on and contributed to a philosophical tradition of political reflection. Apart from the sources in Aristotle, one might recall the narrative at the very beginning of Plato's *Republic* where Socrates finds himself constrained

to remain with the friends he has met, despite his preference for returning to Athens (the city representing reason in contrast to the Piraeus, the port, representing the chaos of desires). They force him (with threats, however wittily offered), and he offers to persuade them; but that will not work, they say, if they refuse to listen. The irony is that they do listen, and are persuaded, and their raging appetites are calmed, although it takes a whole night of talking and listening. This is the fundamental dialectic at the heart of social and political order. Persuasion, not coercion, is the source of agreement.

Bernard Crick, among others, has elaborated a view of politics derived from an Aristotelian approach that builds on this contrast between coercion and persuasion.¹⁰ Not everything that appears as talking qualifies as persuasion in the relevant sense, since threats and manipulation can appear in the form of argument. And so, Crick and many others have attempted to elaborate on the forms of political argument that can avoid oppression, domination, subjugation or any form of manipulation. Alas, none satisfactorily meets the challenge posed by Ignatius in his construction of the dynamic of progress in discipleship.

Indeed some commentators, such as Habermas, acknowledge the challenge and the problem. Argument, as a purely rational activity, cannot change fundamental desires and the orientation of the heart. Failing to persuade while relying on communicative rationality, proponents of the good are tempted to resort to strategic rationality, relying on the assumption that there are basic desires that everyone will have, for resources (wealth), for status (honour) and power. And so, what begins as an attempt at persuasion becomes colonised by the dynamics of strategic rationality.¹¹ A rational appeal to assumed pre-existent desires and associated interests cannot be an effective pathway to changing those desires and interests or relativising them for higher purposes. The First Principle and Foundation highlights the assumption on the basis of which the dynamic of the Exercises can work in addressing desires: 'we ought to desire and choose only that which is more conducive to the end for which we are created' (Exx 23).

¹⁰ Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).

¹¹ This notion of colonisation is key to Habermas's critique, and might be useful for nuancing Pope Francis's criticism of the 'technocratic paradigm' in *Laudato si'*. Strategic reason and action can be perfectly good and well used in relevant contexts: the dangers arise when they colonise contexts in which a different rationality is appropriate.

The activity of politics, understood as based on a commitment to managing and handling conflict by talking rather than coercion, presupposes the willingness of parties in conflict to die to self. Without recognising the truth of the message of the cross as integrated in the lives of individuals and communities, there could be no genuine politics, I maintain. This is because politics requires a willingness to let go of prized desires and interests.

Politics ... is an admirable human achievement. It is also precarious, since there are many pressures, especially on those who are stronger, either in military terms or in terms of numbers, to rely on their greater power to achieve their interests. Resistance to those pressures requires not only a valuing of the human achievement of politics, but also a self-discipline in mastery of emotional responses and immediacy of interests.¹²

Politics requires of conflicting interest groups that they are sufficiently distanced from their own interests and preferences that they can allow them to be subjected to rigorous assessment and demand for justification. Transcending one's subjectivity in such a manner is a form of dying to oneself. Accordingly, I argue that the invitation to take up one's cross entails an invitation to be political, to let go of self-preference and of group-preference and be willing to compromise.

I have sketched the way in which the Two Standards illuminates a significant exigency for politics as communicative action (Habermas) or the commitment to manage conflict by talking (Crick). At the same time, the Two Standards, along with the whole Christian message, challenges politics to face its limitations at the level of its preconditions in challenging the conversion of desires and interests. If political actors were to face this challenge, they would need to engage in discernment as part of the striving for freedom that is a prerequisite for good decisions.

If we consider discernment as an activity of knowing, typically in the context of an individual or a community making a decision or facing the prospect of having to choose a course of action, we can note the multiple objects to be known. These can be distinguished into

¹² Patrick Riordan, 'The Language of Politics and the Language of the Cross', in *Talking of Conflict: Christian Reflections in the Context of Israel and Palestine*, edited by Jane Clements (Leicester: Matador, 2012), 64–85, here 83.

exterior and interior objects. The exterior objects are those matters of needs, opportunities, resources, conditions and circumstances with which we have to deal. The interior objects are the desires, spiritual motions, unfreedoms, biases and prejudices of the persons and groups involved in the discernment. This distinction is not intended to imply separation: a chooser's bias of which he is unaware and so renders him unfree to some degree may also cloud his attention and distort his perception of the world around, conditions, opportunities and resources. To make a good decision as to a state of life (*Exercises*) or of a mission to be undertaken by the Society (*Constitutions*) a chooser must undergo a process of discernment, both getting to know the full context relevant to the decision, and becoming aware of the interior resistances and unfreedoms made evident in the spiritual movements experienced as well as the moments of consolation in considering the prospect of the proposed action.

The exploration of resonances between the Spiritual Exercises and political philosophy opens up interesting points of complementarity. The context of each of these discourses reveals a basic communality: it is the need to find an ordering of action and community for the sake of a common good (more universal good), and it is the pathway to appropriate action and order via communication that deliberately seeks the good in freedom by identifying sources of unfreedom and filtering out distortions of knowledge and desire. One fruitful challenge is how basic desires and interests can be revised: if the given is simply to be presupposed, then it seems that politics as communicative action is severely constrained; but if the experience of the Exercises reveals the real possibility of conversion of desires and interests, then communicative action has a chance. In the other direction, there is the possibility of the activity of discernment both at individual and communal level learning from what has been explored and achieved in philosophy about identifying biases and avoiding subtle forms of manipulation.

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LAUDATE DEUM

An Invitation to Live in the Real World

Timothy Howles

IN THE 1998 comedy-drama film *The Truman Show*, we encounter the eponymous character, Truman Burbank, as played by the actor Jim Carrey. From the moment of his birth, Truman has grown up in an artificial world, created for him by a television company, where his daily life is filmed by hidden cameras and broadcast to a global audience. Superficially, life is comfortable and secure. But Truman does not quite feel at home. Eventually he plucks up the courage to head out, sailing away towards an unknown horizon. After some time, and to his great surprise, the prow of his boat strikes a hard surface. It is a metallic wall, the great dome of the TV set in which he has lived for so many years. And so, in the final scene of the film, Truman faces a choice. Should he return to his former life and carry on as before? Or should he pass through the wall to encounter the real world that lies beyond? At stake is his future, his dignity, his very humanity.

In his apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum*, released on 4 October 2023, the feast of St Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis similarly presents us with a choice. We too have an opportunity to step out bravely, if tentatively, in a new direction. But to do so we will first have to recognise that our current situation, however comfortable and secure it may seem, is an artifice. We must find a new way to inhabit our world.

Francis begins with critique of western society and its ‘technocratic paradigm’ (n.20). He is referring here to the widespread assumption, which for some even has the status of ‘ideology’ (n.22), that by means of our scientific, technological and economic prowess we humans have the right to extract from the earth whatever we need and, more importantly, whatever we want. Of course, the planetary boundary concept, developed in recent years, shows that such a mindset cannot



be upheld.¹ The earth simply will not sustain a trajectory of endless growth. And certainly not for all people equally. To believe otherwise is, quite literally, to refuse to live in the real world.

Such a mindset can even carry through to those who are seeking to engage constructively with the environmental crisis. Take, for example, the US-based think tank and lobby group, the Breakthrough Institute, which includes amongst its members prominent scientists and public intellectuals.² The Breakthrough Institute advocates what they call a ‘good Anthropocene’ strategy. The idea is that large-scale, human-devised technologies might be deployed to stabilise and reverse the effects of climate change, even as human societies continue the modes of lifestyle that have generated these harms in the first place. Thus,

... the issue is not whether humans should control nature, for that is inevitable ... rather, we can start to think about creating natures or markets to serve the kind of world we want and the kind of species we want to become.³

In doing so, it is hoped that (Western) patterns of consumption and growth can be maintained just as they are into an indefinite future.

¹ See Will Steffen and others, ‘Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet’, *Science*, 347/6223 (2015).

² See <https://www.thebreakthrough.org>.

³ Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, *Break Through: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007), 235.

The Breakthrough Institute has been influential in the public policy arena in recent years, including at the highest levels of US government.⁴

It is here that Francis invites analysis of the motives that underlie environmentalism in the contemporary world, even where good is intended. For yes, there is no doubt we have made ‘impressive and awesome technological advances’ (*Laudate Deum*, n.28) in recent years. And surely many of these technologies can and should be deployed. But where might such a deployment conceal the need for what Francis calls ‘ecological conversion’?⁵ Here, intentionality is what matters. For ‘not every increase in power represents progress for humanity’ (n.24), especially if the technologies at our disposal reinforce a sense that the world is nothing but ‘an object of exploitation, unbridled use and unlimited ambition’ (n.25). To think this way is to see oneself as master and possessor of the earth. Indeed, to arrogate to oneself a right that is God’s alone (n.73). Francis therefore calls for a reshaping of our fundamental values and orientations. By analogy with Christian *metanoia*, global environmentalism (in all its various forms) must seek a power that ‘transforms life, transfigures our goals and sheds light on our relationship to others and with creation as a whole’ (n.61).

Perhaps like Truman, then, we too are standing at a threshold. We sense that something has been wrong with respect to our relationship with the earth. But if we choose to move forward and live in a different way, what world are we to encounter?

Here, Francis draws upon two concepts. The first is that of interconnectivity (n.57). The technocratic paradigm generated a sense of dislocation from our embedded situation in the world (what Alfred North Whitehead called ‘the bifurcation of humans from nature’).⁶ We came to see the natural world ‘as a mere “setting” in which we develop our lives and our projects’ (n.25). By contrast, we must see ourselves ‘as part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it’ (n.25).⁷ Francis even alludes to the work of the American ecofeminist Donna Haraway in referring to ‘companion species’, and the earth as ‘contact zone’ between human and non-human beings.⁸ Of course, this

⁴ For a recent study see Kristin Hällmark, ‘Politicization after the End of Nature: The Prospect of Ecomodernism’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 26/1 (2023).

⁵ *Laudato si’*, n. 217.

⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 1920), 30.

⁷ Quoting *Laudato si’*, n.139.

⁸ Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota, 2007).

is not to claim strict ontological equivalence between the two. A central pillar of the Catholic Social Teaching tradition is the absolute dignity of human life. But Francis argues that this dignity ‘is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures’ (n.67). For ‘the Judaeo-Christian vision of the cosmos defends the unique and central value of the human being amid the marvellous concert of all God’s creatures’ (n.67). This is a sophisticated vision of theological anthropology where the *telos* of human existence is framed not merely in terms of autonomy, but as attentiveness to a wider set of creaturely obligations and responsibilities.

This leads to the second concept Francis calls upon, which I would tentatively suggest is that of ‘equilibrium’. To understand ourselves as interconnected with other creatures is to understand ourselves as situated within a planetary system that provides the conditions in which life can flourish. Our choices and behaviours—what we buy, what we eat, what we dispose of, where we travel, the way we occupy space—must be evaluated in terms of their potential impact on this equilibrium. Citing *Laudato si’*, Francis writes: ‘responsibility for God’s earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world’ (n.62).

Again, this is not reductive of human agency. For our footprint upon the earth system is uniquely impactful and risks bringing about a tipping point or disequilibrium from which it may be hard or impossible to recover: ‘we have turned into highly dangerous beings, capable of threatening the lives of many beings and our own survival’ (n.28). But human agency only makes sense in the context of this wider planetary configuration. In a complex world, where the impact of our decisions can often be hard to trace, moral responsibility might take the form of asking hard questions about the extent to which we are maintaining or disrupting the delicate balance of our earth system.⁹ It is finely tuned, and highly responsive to what we do.

Just as was the case with *Laudato si’* (published in advance of the Paris climate convention in 2015 and hugely influential on its outcome), this exhortation is clearly designed as a contribution to the COP28

⁹ For more see Timothy Howles, ‘What Kind of Thinking Is Needed to Address the Contemporary Environmental Crisis? Reflections on the “New Political Ecology” and Its Relation to Theology’, *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 110/3 (2022), 503–518.

event due to take place in Dubai in November 2023. Francis therefore offers a number of pertinent observations about previous conferences (nn.44–52) and suggestions for what is to come (nn.53–60).

But these practical matters are all framed by the philosophical, sociological and theological insights traced above. If the world is interconnected, and if our choices and behaviours are to be sensitive to the equilibrium of the planetary system, then a new form of politics might be possible. Here, Francis calls for ‘multilateral diplomacy’ (n.41). This would be based on representation of as many as possible of the stakeholders who occupy the space of the earth, especially those who are often marginalised, and including (we might suppose) those non-human actors that don’t have a ‘voice’ at all (we must heed the ‘cry of the earth’ as much as the ‘cry of the poor’).¹⁰ Thus, Francis calls for ‘spaces for conversation, consultation, arbitration, conflict resolution and supervision, and, in the end, a sort of increased “democratization” in the global context, so that the various situations can be expressed and included’ (n.43). The global scope of the intended audience is clear, as Francis invites ‘everyone to accompany this pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home and to help make it more beautiful, because that commitment has to do with our personal dignity and highest values’ (n.69).

The data is clear. The science is incontestable (n.5). The time to act is now (n.60). And so we stand at a threshold. Like Truman, we have an opportunity to move out in a new direction and to inhabit the world in a different way. Dare we take the first step?

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¹⁰ *Laudato si’*, n. 49.

SOME POLITICAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE *SPIRITUAL EXERCISES*

James Hanvey

WE DO NOT NORMALLY THINK of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius as a political text. Yet Quentin Skinner, a Cambridge historian of political ideas, usefully and insightfully reminds us that key political texts are also interventions in the politics of their time. They have a ‘performativity’, they are ‘doing something as well as saying something’, which makes them generative in political discourse long after their composition.¹ We can see this with the seminal secular texts of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel or Marx. In the same way, the principal scriptures of Judaeo-Christianity have remained a constant source of political as well as theological discourse, shaping ancient as well as contemporary culture.²

The *Spiritual Exercises* ranks as one of the great classics among the spiritual texts of early modern Catholicism, but it is not a politically innocent one. Although it develops from the primary experience of Ignatius at Manresa, it is also marked by the different religious and political circumstances of his time which influenced its language and constructions. It is not difficult to find traces of this in the formulation of the Call of the King and the Two Standards. Not only do these draw upon scriptural eschatological imagery, but they are also clearly marked by memory of the medieval courtly heraldic ideal and the crusades against the ‘infidel’ to recover Spain for Christianity.

The more subtle religious and ecclesiastical ‘political’ dimension of the text is Ignatius’ careful and persistent attention to anything that

A longer version of this article appeared in *Hong Kong Journal of Catholic Studies*, 12 (2021), 30–68.

¹ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, volume 1, *Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2002), 106.

² See N. T. Wright’s essay on Paul and empire in *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, edited by Stephen Westerhold (Oxford: John Wiley, 2011); also Krister Stendahl and Richard A. Horsley, *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation. Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000).

might support the charge of Illuminism.³ There is also the later introduction of the 'Rules for Thinking with the Church' and perhaps the most radical premise of all: 'that God deals directly with the human person' which, in the highly charged situation of a growing Protestant Reformation, could be interpreted as dispensing with priests and the sacramental mediation of the Church.

The *Spiritual Exercises* is neither a neutral nor a purely private spiritual text. The Exercises actively work to re-order desires and values leading to the experience of the *Contemplatio*. They contain a powerful vision of the world as a *theatrum gloria Dei*. The text itself aims at the transformation of human agency and, therefore, it aims to shape political and social agency as well. In more recent times, the work of Ignacio Ellacuría, especially his notes on the historico-politico dimension of the *Spiritual Exercises*, brings this dimension to the fore.⁴

My aim here is twofold: to explore how the Spiritual Exercises are significant for our social and cultural agency and can serve as a basis for judging political and cultural systems; and also to suggest that we do the Exercises a disservice if we confine them purely to the growth of an individual spiritual subject. They certainly are intended for conversion and the development of spiritual freedom, but they also intend that this freedom be placed at the disposal of God's salvific purpose. In so far as the Exercises always direct us to an encounter with a God 'working in all things', they do not allow us to flee from the world. Rather, they encourage us to become active apostles of Christ and his Kingdom within it. The Exercises do not propose any particular political or social system, but offer us a way of discerning the principles and values that should guide our actions and the means that best serve us and our neighbour to attain our ends.

The two places where the text of the *Spiritual Exercises* most directly and economically illustrates this are the Principle and Foundation, which

³ See Moshe Sluhovsky, 'St Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises and Their Contribution to Modern Introspective Subjectivity', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 99/4 (2013). Sluhovsky argues that Ignatius introduced a number of technical changes to the late medieval tradition of undertaking spiritual exercises which significantly widened the retreatant's control over his or her spiritual growth and the access of the laity to spiritual exercises and introspective techniques. However, this 'democratizing impulse' also ignited questions among conservative theologians who saw resemblances between Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises and *alumbradismo*. This led to a dramatic curtailment of the Exercises' 'democratic' potential in the last years of the sixteenth century.

⁴ See Ignacio Ellacuría, 'A Latin American Reading of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius', translated by J. Matthew Ashley, *Spiritus*, 10/2 (2010), 205–242; also Ashley's article on the translation in the same issue of *Spiritus*, 'A Contemplative under the Standard of Christ'.

represents the recovery of the self and the ordering of our freedom, and the Two Standards, with its unmasking of the strategies of Evil. I argue that they cannot be separated from the cross (Third Week), which grounds the counter-strategy of a redeemed, cruciform freedom. What distinguishes this from the freedom recovered through the grace of the crucified Christ in the First Week is that it is the expression of christological freedom realised in obedience and abandonment to the Divine salvific will. It is an active freedom in history which has redemptive power.

The Principle and Foundation: The Gift of Discerning Freedom

Although the Principle and Foundation came to be formulated later in the evolution of the Exercises, there is no doubt that it is central to their whole dynamic.⁵ Not only does it act as a fundamental orientation and measure of freedom at the beginning, but it is also part of the purification of desire expressed in the preparatory prayer of every exercise. Indeed, the formula that ‘all my intentions, actions and operations may be ordered purely to the praise and reverence of the Divine Majesty’ (Exx 46) is a prayer which describes a whole life. It constitutes an act of praise realised in our purified and liberated freedom, expressed in and through the service of humanity and of creation. It captures the soteriological doxology of Christ’s person and life which the graced life of the Holy Spirit realised in us.⁶

Three important features of the Principle and Foundation are relevant here. First, the human subject is set within a relationship to God which defines the origin and telos of a human life. It is a relationship in which all other goods are relativised in the light of this supreme good: ‘to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul’. Secondly, the Principle and Foundation establishes the criterion by which we can judge our proper use of these goods ‘in so far as they help’ towards our end. This is also the measure of our freedom in relation to all created things and to God. Third, The Principle and Foundation effectively maps the drama of our personal history which can also be expanded to frame all human history.

⁵ See Santiago Arzubialde, *Ejercicios espirituales de S. Ignacio. Historia y análisis*, 2nd edn (Santander: Sal Terrae, 2009), 111–124.

⁶ Compare Ellacuría, ‘Latin American Reading of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius’, 212, arguing against the spiritualist, voluntarist and materialist reading to ground the Principle and Foundation in the salvific work of Christ.

Relationship to God

The Principle and Foundation sets out the whole purpose of the Exercises upon which the exercitant is about to embark. It marks a central locus in grasping the subtle interplay between nature and grace: human freedom, its finite condition and desires, and God's salvific will at work, not only in each individual, but within the sweep of history itself. It serves to interrogate the understanding we have of our freedom and how it is exercised. It also alerts us to the intimate relationship between the self and freedom. It pushes us to a deeper reflection on the desires that motivate us and direct our agency, both those we might rationally and publicly profess and those that are not so readily (or willingly) recognised.

The Principle and Foundation presents us with a challenging clarity: if we truly desire the end proposed, we will enter into the school of the Exercises. We will allow ourselves to be taught by God so as to receive the gift of a loving freedom to serve in any state to which we are called. Ignatius describes this freedom as 'indifference'. This does not mean neutrality or lack of commitment; rather, it is a freedom from disordered desires and readiness for whatever might be asked of us to God's glory and the help of our neighbour. This 'indifference', which is actually a love of God in and above all things, is the condition for discerning.

The Principle and Foundation is a universal principle in the sense that it is operative whatever our circumstances, status or abilities. The freedom which it puts before us is *sola Dei gloria*, and this will relativise all political and social claims to which we may be either attracted or subject. It places them in a new framework of value.

Freedom and Created Things

It would be a mistake to think that the Principle and Foundation proposes a purely instrumental 'use' of created things. Rather, it is inviting us to attend to their proper use, which entails an appreciation of their own intrinsic value. It is a refusal to idealize or fetishise them as sources of our lasting happiness, which would be instrumentalising. The world is *given*—both in the sense of 'being there' and in the sense of gift. To inhabit it and use it well is to live conscious of our relational dependence, which refuses to make the world into some sort of god or exploit its givenness as a resource which entails no responsibilities.

Our epistemological, moral and spiritual task is to see and respond to creation in its own proper order. This entails an obligation to understand, respect and value the created order in its own right, as possessing its



Adam Naming the Animals, from a late thirteenth-century bestiary

own telos and worth which cannot be reduced to our need or use. *Gaudium et spes* captures this well when it says, 'For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order' (n.36).⁷ Creation has its own intrinsic goodness and this imposes obligations upon us; we have a moral relationship to all created things.⁸

When we consider the role creation plays in the Spiritual Exercises, especially in the First Week (Exx 55) and the *Contemplatio* (Exx 230), we see it has a soteriological purpose. If creation is the enduring witness of God's providential love for us, witnessing to it even while we continue to reject it through our sinfulness then, in some way, creation participates in our destiny. Creation remains an enduring reason for an outpouring of our gratitude.

In this context, gratitude is more than thankfulness. It is the dynamic dilation of the whole self in openness to creation and its Creator. It heightens our awareness of our relationality, which takes active expression in generosity: the disposition of the self to the care and service of the other. When the soul is flooded with gratitude, not only is it more open to God, but it is disposed to the Divine will. Gratitude

⁷ This is part of an argument for the proper autonomy of scientific investigation on the one hand, and the harmony between science and faith on the other.

⁸ In this regard, our care of creation is to imitate the Creator, which extends beyond a narrow sense of stewardship as conservation and preservation. For a fuller discussion, see Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford U, 2008).

points us towards the sanctifying dimension of mission which every Christian has with regard to creation.⁹ Although it is beyond my scope here to explore the ecological implications of this vision contained within the Spiritual Exercises, we can begin to see the radical personal, political and economic outcomes that such a vision will entail.

Personal History and Salvation History

The Principle and Foundation locates us as active selves participating in a network of developing and intersecting relationships, but its sparse, succinct, 'scholastic' language can easily hide its multidimensionality and the process of conversion and transformation that it describes. Our relationship with God and with others, which takes place within the whole created order of the finite, can conceal the deeper dynamic which marks all our relationships. The individual's personal encounter with Christ is always central; this dynamic, in which and through which our lives are played out, takes place both in the transcendent reality of the salvific activity of the Triune life and in the imminent realities of our 'now' or our 'situatedness'.

As the Exercises progress, the self becomes transparent to itself in the course of loving God which, for Ignatius, is always expressed in the desire for ever greater service. This is the movement articulated by St Paul in 1 Corinthians 13: 12—'Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known'—and it is both noetic and affective. The Exercises do not know a Cartesian autonomous self or self-knowledge: the self is always a self-in-relation. This, too, has its own characteristic knowledge, for the self knows itself in so much as it knows how much it is in need of redemption. Hence, the deeper this awareness, the more we see that Christ is integral to our existence and self-understanding: our knowledge of self will depend on our knowledge of Christ.

In knowing Christ, we cannot separate the cognitive from the affective. As in John's Gospel, knowledge of Christ comes through love. Indeed, the more we love Christ, the more we know Him and our world through His love. Here, the Exercises lead us into the central mystery of revelation: all Christian gnosis comes by way of the cross. 'Conversion', which is the process by which we appropriate this gnosis, is a recovery

⁹ 'Stewardship' has now become a contested term in ecological discourse. Within scripture, stewardship is not domination or subjection but the ways in which humans are called upon to imitate the Divine stewardship of care. See James Hanvey, 'Laudato si' and the Renewal of Theologies of Creation', *Heythrop Journal*, 59/6 (2018), 1022–1035.

and reordering or reconstruction (conversion) of the self. Just as there is no distinction in Christ between His person and His mission, so the Exercises gradually re-form us in the grace of Christ-like integrity. Hence, we will experience a desire to participate in His mission of establishing the Kingdom of God and be drawn into it—we become both elected and electing. Thus the experience of our desire is coordinated with our freedom, which is the work of grace. If we genuinely love Christ and seek our own salvation, we cannot avoid history or society. Indeed, we are firmly located in and committed to the salvific good of all creation. We are reconstituted in Christ as soteriological agents, whose agency is worked out in the unpredictability of times, places and circumstances. For this reason, *discernment* is integral to our graced freedom and agency.

The ‘self’ that emerges from the Exercises has discovered that ‘to praise, reverence and serve’ are not only active verbs that apply at the individual level, but they encompass the whole Divine purpose of ‘working the redemption of the human race’ (Exx 107). The relationship with all created things, established in the Principle and Foundation, is disclosed as mission. We come to see that the way of our salvation, and of becoming more completely who we are, must be through Christ and the service of others; through working for the salvation of the other, we enact the freedom of our graced self. It is now possible to see that the whole dynamic of the Principle and Foundation, which leads us into the mystery of Christ and whose end cannot be realised without him, will have significant cultural and political consequences in practice.

The Political Implications of the Principle and Foundation

The location of the self in both transcendent relationships and temporal relationships with all created things means that St Ignatius recovers two vital dimensions for our understanding of the human person and his or her agency. In this respect, the Exercises represent an authentic Christian anthropology in which the person lives in a relational transcendence to God which is foundational for an imminent relationship with all other things. This holds our relationship with human society and creation in their most dynamic and creative order, while forming a barrier to any reductionism.

Every political, economic and social system contains its own anthropology. Policies, structures and decisions express values; implicitly or explicitly they put forward a vision of the human telos, whether that be expressed in the pursuit of happiness and self-fulfilment or as service to the greater destiny of the state or the system. But neither the

state nor the law (national or international) has the stability to be a keeper of the human soul, for neither has any intrinsic commitment to transcendence. Transcendence, which grounds the non-reducibility of the human person and human freedom, can still be seen even in the secular world, or where God is not explicitly acknowledged and may even be denied. It is exercised as conscience, which is respected even when it is seen as dangerous or inconvenient.

Where humans are understood purely in material terms, not only is their moral responsibility to all created things compromised, but they themselves are exposed to instrumentalisation. Value becomes determined by use and utility; in turn, this becomes subject to political, economic and social power, now liberated from any responsibility to 'the human'. The most egregious examples of this can be seen with slavery and in the creation of classes and castes, which then determine access to legal protection and rights—or their denial. Narratives are developed to legitimate these creations and dehumanise people placed in categories which diminish or erase their humanity but facilitate their subjection to the state or the power-class. We can see this happening in history, especially through the dynamics of colonisation and empire, but it continues today with the Rohingyas, Yazidis, Uyghurs, indigenous peoples and Tribals. Instrumentalisation and reductionism can also take place within societies where particular identities—sexual, social, economic, cultural—can be renarrated so as to degrade their value and make violence or policies of elimination appear necessary and virtuous.

For the Ignatian Exercises, the ultimate guarantor of humanity is the absoluteness of God. Christianity not only maintains the absolute transcendence of trinitarian monotheism but, with the incarnation of Christ, it refuses to allow this to be used to diminish or degrade the value of the human person. God's absolute transcendence marks the boundary between the finite and infinite, and the relation between the two natures in Christ is a paradigm for the way in which the finite (human) is realised in its relationship to the Divine.

God's decision to create that which is not God and, even more radically, to be involved in the history of creation opens up the distinctiveness of the Judaeo-Christian faith. It embeds human freedom in the Divine freedom and preserves the experience of God as liberator not oppressor. This radical freedom of God—which is God's own aseity and transcendence—ultimately subverts any attempts to co-opt God as a product of the state or dominant power group. The whole of the Hebrew

scriptures and the New Testament bear witness to this. The Principle and Foundation is a condensed statement of this history in which it is grounded. In stating the transcendent purpose of the human person, it relativises all other claims. Consequently, the order expressed in the Principle and Foundation ensures the proper disposition of relations between the person and the community, the community and the state.

It also reminds us that we belong to God and are of infinite value to God, a value which is realised and secured in Christ. This transcendent value and, indeed, the transcendent destiny of our whole self (material, spiritual, historical) is realised in Christ's resurrection. We should understand the telos described in the Principle and Foundation as containing an eschatology. If the Principle and Foundation encapsulates the radical nature of the person's transcendent value, it also articulates his or her dependence: first upon God and then upon the community and the whole of creation. It not only characterizes our freedom but entails responsibilities; we are responsible for the good of the other and assisting the other's movement towards God. In this, it opens the way to the central insight of the Christian tradition on the primacy of 'charity'.

Responsibility likewise lies with the community and the state. In ways appropriate to each, there is a commitment to respect the intrinsic transcendent value of each person, whatever his or her status or condition. Equally, there is also a commitment to provide the resources for persons to realise their dignity and their own mission for the greater good. We discover and express the dynamic goodness within us, healed by grace, to be a self-gift to the other. It is in this context that we can understand how discernment is not only necessary for spiritual growth but must become a habitual practice in the exercise of our freedom, especially in our relationships, so that their growth in goodness may become an unfolding dynamic of Christ's indwelling through the action of the Holy Spirit, 'to gather up all things in Him' (Ephesians 1:10).

Autonomy as the unrestricted and independent exercise of personal will has become deeply embedded in Western culture. The 'redemption' or 'healing' of freedom in the Exercises as the praxis of life in Christ just outlined will also act as a critique of the dominant contemporary equation of freedom with autonomy.¹⁰ In many ways 'autonomy' represents

¹⁰ For an extensive discussion of the relationship between freedom and discernment within the theology of liberation and doxology, see Andrew L. Prevot, *Thinking Prayer: Theology and Spirituality amid the Crises of Modernity* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame U, 2015), especially chapter 5.

a rebellion against or denial of our finitude. As the alternative to this, the Principle and Foundation and the Exercises that follow firmly locate us within the finite. However, we come to understand that this does not diminish or restrict us. Rather, it becomes the realm in which we encounter our capacity for self-transcendence and self-gift in love, embracing the responsibilities we have to the other. Here, we begin to see that the incarnation opens the finite to the infinite life from which it draws and where it is established. Thus the finite becomes the condition (christological) of realising our potential for freedom. Not only does it serve our own flourishing but it is also generative of community, because it expresses the creative life-giving *communio* of the good in which we are now established. Freedom becomes self-transcending love-in-action, the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts.

A Journey in History

The Principle and Foundation envisages us exercising our freedom in love and gratitude towards God and all created things. Dependence is not seen as a restriction of our freedom but the condition of its perfection (think of the *Contemplatio*). This understanding of freedom has wide implications for all of our social, political and economic systems, especially when they purport to be the cause, guarantor and means of our autonomy, represented by their apparent ability to offer infinite capacity for choice.¹¹

The Exercises not only offer us a theological anthropology, but show us a way of living it. Ultimately, this is more significant than establishing a vision of humanity, no matter how coherent or appealing it may be. This is where praxis or life is always prior to theory and the vision emerges from the economy of grace in history rather than being an imposition from some other source. If it cannot be realised in history, it remains just one more noble edifice of human reason. It may include a vision of Christ but, if it is not incarnated into history, into the reality and practice of daily life, it will remain just an aesthetic hypothetical construct. Jesus Christ is not only a historical figure; He is a living presence in history, of which He is the Lord. Here we will always be appropriating the inexhaustible event of the resurrection. The resurrection means that history is the place of encounter, transformation and transfiguration.

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¹¹ See Joseph Veale, *Manifold Gifts: Ignatian Essays on Spirituality* (Oxford: Way Books, 2006), 169–170. All of these essays are worth reading.



The Mystical Body of Christ, by Marco Pino,
c. 1571

This is why the whole dynamic of the Exercises is a profound, transformational journey ‘in’ history, into which we are now sent as servant and companion of Christ who is already active within it.¹² It is also why we must never treat the Fourth Week as a sort of appendix, but must live from it.

The Christian life and the Christian community not only articulate this reality, but also present it in the court of human reason. By living it, they create a new space, a new possibility within history. This can only be real if it is sustained by the gift of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. When the Church lives from the Holy Spirit and the presence of the Risen Lord,

it and its members are empowered to realise the freedom that the Principle and Foundation describes. Such a graced freedom, which takes up the cause of the other and his or her dignity and hope, will always be a challenge for ideology—whatever form it may take or whatever security it may offer. This will be as true for religious ideologies as it is for secular and atheistic ones. The Christian life and the community of faith, the Church, which sustains it, are a space of creative hope where humanity comes to know its destiny and is empowered to live it.

If the graced experience of the Spiritual Exercises opens up this new possibility, it also places us at the heart of the drama and requires us to exercise the gift of discerning freedom that we have been given. The Exercises confront us with the ultimate reality of choice: are we for Christ, or not? They do not allow us the luxury of neutrality. This, too, is part of their theo-political character.

¹² Compare the dynamic of the Fourth Week and the *Contemplatio*, Exx 230 following.

The Two Standards: Unmasking the Strategies of Evil

The centrality of the Two Standards and Three Modes of Humility to the dynamic process of the Exercises is well recognised. They are also at the core of the primitive version of the Exercises, indicating their foundational nature in Ignatius' own experience at Manresa; they subsequently shaped the Exercises emerging from that experience.¹³ While these two meditations are certainly there to school the process of discernment and frame the election, they also become the principal tools for the life of service to which we are called. In so far as they shape our understanding of situations and guide our agency they have a political dimension. Here are some key elements.

Knowing and Living in Christ

We have seen how the Spiritual Exercises place us within the drama of history. If the principal grace of the First Week is the knowledge of how sin and evil can entangle us, the subsequent Weeks then take us into a profound and personal knowledge of how God acts to redeem us and the world. This brings us to our 'second conversion': conversion to the person and knowledge of Christ and His mission. We have already encountered Christ in our 'first conversion': knowledge of the abyss of sin in the world, both personal and cosmic, and our encounter with the crucified Christ who is also our redemption (Exx 53). Only in the experience and knowledge of the First Week can we enter into the second conversion of the Second and Third Weeks, which is the way of the crucified Christ.

If the experience of the First Week shows us that the goal of the Principle and Foundation is actually impossible without the salvific grace of the crucified Lord, then discernment, to be effective, must live in this knowledge. To read the world and history without the crucified and risen Christ risks making discernment into an exercise in theistic gnosis or atheistic self-construction: knowledge which may need experience and insight but not an encounter with the revelation of Jesus Christ.

For Ignatius, understanding or knowledge is never purely an intellectual enlightenment. It is a deeper and more complete 'knowing' which engages the affect or the heart; it is a sort of attunement to the

¹³ For the background to the 'Three Classes of Men' (Exx 149–157), see Arzubialde, *Ejercicios espirituales de S. Ignacio*, 401–416, and also Andreas Falkner, 'Nota sobre los binarios', in *Las fuentes de los ejercicios espirituales de San Ignacio. Actas de simposio internacional*, edited by Juan Plazaola (Bilbao: Mensajero, 1998).

person and way of Christ. In this way, our knowing becomes praxis. There is a complementarity between the activity of our reason and our affective or experiential knowledge. We can see this movement set out in the governing petition of the Second Week. It is formulated in the two verbs: *conocer* and *imitar*—to know and to imitate. In their respective ways, they are a knowledge by love and desire which begins first in interior reality and then takes shape in our actions.¹⁴

Through the contemplations of the Second Week, we are drawn into this experiential knowledge. *Imitar* is an integral part of this knowing. Christ is more than an exemplar to be imitated. Rather, the knowledge that is given is a participative knowledge; it entails the Pauline ‘Christ ... lives in me’ (Galatians 2:20). The exercises on the application of the senses serve to renew, sensitise and educate the faculties so that they are now not only open to the world in the normal way, but also open to it as the realm of God’s activity and Christ’s presence. Here, we recognise that one of the fruits of the Exercises is a profound epistemological healing and expansion: to see all things in Christ. Formally, this is the indwelling activity of the Holy Spirit through the growth and reordering of the energies of desire and love.

To be drawn into ever-deeper *conocimiento interno* of Christ is to be drawn into the whole salvific economy of the incarnation, its personal and historical unfolding. Not only is this experienced in the concrete life of Christ but, as the *Contemplatio* indicates, it is the ever-present activity of the divine triune love sustaining, redeeming and sanctifying throughout history—past, present and future. Whatever state of life we choose, following Christ can only be effective through total commitment. This will entail entering into the cruciform reality of His person—His mission *ad extra*, which is grounded *ad intra* in His obedience as Son to the Father and sealed through the Holy Spirit, ‘the Lord and Giver of Life’. The position of the Two Standards and Three Modes of Humility within the Second Week is important if this transformation is to be realised.

¹⁴ For a fuller exploration, see Arzubalde, *Ejercicios espirituales de S. Ignacio*, 347–354; for an informative, concise study, see Adolfo Chercoles, ‘Conocimiento interno’, *Diccionario de espiritualidad ignaciana*, edited by Pascual Cebollada and others (Bilbao and Santander: Mensajero and Sal Terrae, 2007), volume 1, 400–408. Ignacio Iparraguirre, *Vocabulario de ejercicios espirituales. Ensayo de hermenéutica ignaciana* (Rome: ARSI, 1972) is still useful. The entry in the *Diccionario* for *imitar* comes under ‘imitación de Cristo’ (volume 1, 994–100). This gives a useful summary of the tradition with which Ignatius would have been familiar in the devotional movements and teachings. However, it does not deal with the epistemological significance of *imitar* and the critical role it plays in the Two Standards.

The Battle for the Kingdom

At first glance, the presentation of the Two Standards can appear to have the same parabolic character as the Call of the Earthly King (Exx 91 following), but I think they belong to different genres.¹⁵ Although it presents us with a vivid imaginary scene, the imagery of the Two Standards is deeply rooted in scripture and tradition. The meditation opens for us the way in which the advent of Christ unmasks the activity of evil and its strategies. It locates, or relocates, us within the immediacy of the battle for the Kingdom. Those who wish to know and follow Christ will find themselves in a real conflict with the forces named in Ephesians as ‘rulers’ and ‘authorities’ (6:12). We cannot forget the knowledge of the First Week concerning the cosmic and supernatural ‘history’ of sin and evil.¹⁶ As the Gospels make clear, Christ is the unavoidable moment of decision, the moment of crisis which always has a historical and existential reality.

To treat the imagery of the Two Standards as some anachronistic device derived from the piety of a previous age that needs to be ‘demythologized’ risks dehistoricising the reality of the Kingdom and the conflict with evil. In doing so, we remove it from the realm of history to the purely personal and disincarnate realm of the ‘spiritual’. As Karl Barth argues:

To say ‘Jesus’ is necessarily to say ‘history’, his history, the history in which he is what he is and does what he does. In this history, we know God, and we know evil and their relationship the one to the other—but only from this source and in this way.¹⁷

In locating us, the Two Standards also becomes a school where we learn a practical and necessary *discretion*: the knowledge we need to serve Christ and stay true to him. Essentially, this is an apostolic wisdom. While ordered to our own personal growth in Christ, it is also about mission. Indeed, this is what we find in the way the synoptic Gospels present the inauguration of Jesus’ mission under the power of the Holy

¹⁵ Compare Arzubialde, *Ejercicios espirituales de S. Ignacio*, 395, who sees it as a parable.

¹⁶ We should note that, in doing so, the Two Standards recapitulates the ‘history’ of sin in the First Week, and runs through the same dimension: cosmic/supernatural to existential and personal. In this sense, ‘history’ is not simply a temporal category measured only in human terms.

¹⁷ Karl Barth, ‘Jesus Is the Victor’, in *Church Dogmatics*, volume 4, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2009), 69. The whole discussion is instructive for the Two Standards.



Christus victor, mosaic, Ravenna, late fifth century

Spirit. After his baptism, he is immediately engaged in the trial or temptations of the 'Enemy'. The Two Standards likewise inaugurates and shapes our response to the call of Christ and to the unfolding of the Christian mission. Any mission that does not place itself within this eschatological drama will find it difficult to understand itself and its choices. In the Two Standards, the Exercises give us a 'weapon' to be wielded in Christ's service for the salvation of souls. They also show us that the only weapon is the cross.¹⁸

The Wisdom of the Cross and the Discernment of the Two Standards.

In this context, we can see how the drama of the Two Standards is the presupposition for the discernment of spirits. It takes up the cosmic and supernatural history of sin in the First Week and now gives it particular focus in the eschatological drama of another kingdom opposed to that of Christ. The kingdom of Satan exercises power through fear, terror, deception and violence (Exx 140). It also has its 'apostles' and servants; it parallels the contemplation of the incarnation, for it too envisages the whole world (Exx 141).

Just as the temptations of Christ are all sociopolitical and religious possibilities within 'this' world, so the Two Standards offers us a hermeneutic for the concrete realities of our own history, circumstances and choices. In whatever guise evil presents itself, there is an active hatred of human freedom which it seeks to destroy with entrapments and seductions: coveting wealth, vain honour, pride (Exx 142). We can see that the effect of these is threefold:

¹⁸ Hugo Rahner, *The Spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola: An Account of Its Historical Development*, translated by Francis John Smith (Chicago: Loyola, 1953), 95.

1. To destroy human freedom by false knowledge and illusion, especially the illusion.
2. To draw people into the world, which is itself transitory and cannot ultimately fulfil them. This becomes a distortion of the Principle and Foundation because we cease to use created things well. Not only do we destroy our own freedom, but we have a purely instrumental approach which destroys the very good that we seek.
3. To try to destroy the *imago Dei* in each of us through pride, especially as God has chosen us as the object of the Divine Love. Pride is ultimately the illusion of our own power and self-sufficiency. It not only rejects God but, because it sees God as a rival, seeks to destroy God and faith in Christ, who is God's salvific and liberating love. Pride must always exercise its power as violence in one form or another. This is precisely what we see enacted in the figure of Lucifer.

Although the dynamics of evil are presented in personal terms, we come to recognise that it is always an active and immanent power present throughout all our social and cultural systems. Whatever form it takes, especially when concealed under 'the good', it creates a toxic universe which is hostile not only to human flourishing but to the life of all that God has created and blessed as good. The Two Standards operates as a process of unmasking of the personal and systemic deceptions of evil.

In the presentation of Christ, the true leader, we have the exact counter-values and God's *modus operandi*: humility. Here, we gain critical knowledge of how God works: we are not coerced or terrified into subjection. Grace never usurps our freedom but creates new possibilities for it to be realised in service of God's good purposes. There are no limits to the Kingdom that Christ envisages. His power is demonstrated not through violence, but through sacrificial loving service: in poverty (spiritual and actual), suffering humiliation and contempt, and, finally, in humility. This is the way of the cross but, in accepting it, the Christian servant of Christ the King and His mission must also become the servant of His way of realising it.

We can now recognise that discernment not only takes place within the horizon of the eschatological drama of the Kingdom, but is also verified in the way of the cross. It is a profoundly theological act: an act of faith and surrender to the incomprehensible wisdom of a crucified

and risen Christ.¹⁹ As such, it also has its own eschatological character, for choosing to be ‘thought worthless and a fool for Christ’—*de ser estimado por vano y loco por Cristo* (Exx 167)—is a realisation of the Kingdom.

In this way, all acts of discernment must always be measured in terms of how far they advance the Kingdom through the means that Christ establishes: obedience and the cross, the total and uncompromising dependence upon the Father. In some way and at some level, they will be counter-intuitive to the values and wisdom of the world. It will not be sufficient to ensure that any decision or course of action simply resists the traps of the enemy; it will have positively to express the values and means that God’s salvific wisdom disclosed in Christ.

We can now appreciate how discernment is grounded in cruciform knowledge and presupposes it. The ‘rightness’ of discerned decisions cannot be measured by the normal criteria of success but, rather, in the way we are open to the sovereignty of Christ in our lives and in our works. Only this will truly serve the Kingdom. In this way, discernment is not just an instrument, but a test of our desires and our values; it draws us into the mystery of the divine economy. Augustine captures this when, in his discussion of the cross, he argues that God works not by ‘power’ but by righteousness. In so doing, God refuses to be trapped in a worldly logic and remains true to God’s self, paradoxically demonstrating the absolute nature of God’s power as Divine freedom. Against evil God simply asserts God’s self and discloses the infinite abyss of Love where evil cannot penetrate.²⁰

A Messianic Vocation

Even in the light of these initial remarks on some principal elements of the Exercises, we can begin to sense the extent of their implications in the sociopolitical field. I shall make three final observations.

Epistemology of the Two Standards

As we have seen, neither the Two Standards nor the Three Modes of Humility can be thought of as operating purely within a privatised interior

¹⁹ See 1 Corinthians 1:18 following. For an excellent treatment of this theme, see Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

²⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 13.13 following. See also 4.12–13: here, reflecting on the Magi, Augustine ‘anticipates’ the Two Standards. He argues that we should seek to return to our homeland (heaven) by another way, ‘which the humble king has taught and which the proud king, the adversary of that humble king, cannot block’. Augustine also traces the strategies of deceit which characterize the devil.

spirituality. They are set within the struggle for the Kingdom, and it is within the realm of our existence and history that they are lived out. This is a real participation in the immanent work of Christ 'labouring and working' in the reality of each circumstance or moment. Both meditations necessarily contain an epistemology. The full importance of those verbs, *conocer* and *imitar*, is realised: we have entered into 'the mind of Christ' (1 Corinthians 2:16). This is a continuation and deepening of our conversion. At its core is the freedom to enter into an ever deeper self-offering of the *Suscipe* (Exx 234). This self-offering is central to Ignatius' 'apostolic mysticism' and the touchstone of mission.²¹

Discernment as Transvaluation

In this context, we can see that discernment is more than a tool. It is itself an apostolic moment. We cannot ignore the exigencies of our situation or the pressing realities of human finitude. On the contrary, these are precisely the realities whose limitations the incarnation requires us to acknowledge and handle. Yet, as the Principle and Foundation has taught us, by grasping the way in which finitude discloses transcendence, when placed within the horizon of the Fourth Week, these very limitations can become the contingent opportunities to realise the Kingdom. Even so, given our weaknesses and the unfinished business of history, we cannot seek to meet our need for security in the systems and institutions of the world. If they are well established and ordered, they will surely be tokens of the Kingdom, but they can be no more than this. Discernment is always an act of surrender to God in faith.

**Discernment is
always an act of
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in faith**

At another level, when the values of the Standard of Christ are the operative ones in discernment, there is a transvaluation of the counter-values of the world. There is a redemptive power in this. Discernment is a radical practice when we allow ourselves to be poor, despised and humble with Christ. When these become the active values realised in our decisions, especially those about apostolic works and institutions, the Kingdom comes into view. This will always present a threat to the established order and to our own securities. What then would it mean if we could develop our social, economic and educational

²¹ The phrase 'apostolic mysticism' is an insight of Hugo Rahner, *The Spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola*, translated by Francis John Smith (Westminster, Md: Newman, 1953); see also Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, translated by William J. Young (Chicago: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1964), 178 following.

policies guided by these values: values that would prioritise the needs (spiritual, social and material) of the contemporary *anawim*, the powerless and marginalised, the economically and culturally deprived?

The Two Standards and End of Violence

Finally, it could be argued that the greatest transvaluation would be the ending of the cycle of violence in all its forms. René Girard's theory of mimetic violence can serve to underline the relevance of the Two Standards in this regard, not only on the spiritual-theological plane but also in the field of politics. For Girard, societies are founded on primal acts of sacrificial violence (the scapegoat). This violence is rooted in the power of *mimetic desire*, which inscribes it into social structures: 'The principal source of violence between human beings is mimetic rivalry, the rivalry resulting from imitation of a model who becomes a rival or of a rival who becomes a model'.²²

The mimetic cycle is broken by the cross, which refuses to enter into it. What Christianity is able to do through its own counter-mimetic mechanism (*imitar*) is to heal the violence. It can restore peace by absorbing violence and performing those reconciliations that are deliberate counter-strategies to it. The Two Standards provides us with a *praxis of reconciliation*, which refuses violence and the sacrifice of victims. In this sense, we are drawn into the redemptive work of the cross as a political and social reality.

This gives us a way of understanding the Church's mission in the world. It is a mission which belongs to every Christian life. The mark of its liberating power is the act of martyrdom. The prayer to imitate Christ in poverty, in humility and in being despised bears the marks of martyrdom, both in the sense of 'witness' and also in suffering social, political, economic and spiritual violence, if not actual physical violence, while also refusing to return it. As a praxis, this provides an exodus from the mimetic structures of death. The violence of the enemy and the anti-kingdom will always be directed against it. This, too, is an eschatological reality.

The crucified is always the Risen Christ. If this were not the case, the cycle would remain a tragic one; catharsis is not redemption. The power that triumphs over mimetic violence lies in the resurrection, which

²² René Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, translated by James G. Williams (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 11. For a probing analysis and exposition of Girard's mimetic theory, see James Allison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroads, 1998).

comes through the action and gift of the Holy Spirit: 'The Resurrection is not only a miracle, a prodigious transgression of natural laws. It is the spectacular sign of the entrance into the world of a power superior to violent contagion.'²³ Although Girard is primarily concerned to develop an anthropology, this conclusion provides an important direction for understanding the Exercises. He can help us appreciate that the Fourth Week is not only part of a narrative but is actually the necessary and indispensable source from which the salvific power of Christianity is derived.

First, the resurrection ensures that the way of the crucified Christ as redemptive rather than tragic is always a grace. It is a gift that we must seek and it does not lie in our power: 'if your most holy majesty wishes to choose and receive me into this life and state' (Exx 98). As such, it cannot be achieved through practices in which we only imitate, in the sense of playing a part. The same is true for the gift of discernment. It cannot be effective if it is converted into a formulaic practice. It can only be sought as a grace which first requires an interior surrender to let Christ indwell. This, as I have argued, needs our willingness to be relocated in the eschatological drama of the Kingdom as a quotidian reality.

Secondly, the importance and indispensable requirement of the Fourth Week are too often treated in a perfunctory way and rarely discussed in the context of discernment. Notwithstanding all our good intentions and noble desires, if the reality of the Risen Lord and the abiding gift of the Holy Spirit are not our habitual dwelling and the effective horizon of our understanding, then we will remain always prone, in George Herbert's words, to 'feel His death but not His victorie'.²⁴ Without the Fourth Week, we cannot fully understand the reality of the Kingdom and the true purpose of Christian mission; we cannot be Christ's apostles.

To know and imitate Christ, to have deep interior knowledge of Him, is not an exercise in remembrance or imaginative reconstruction of a first-century Palestinian Jewish Messiah. It is precisely to know and imitate the risen Christ, who is immanent and active in our lives and in our histories. This Christ cannot be made the subject of any state or political party. He is the Christ to whom all nations, parties and movements must ultimately come and under whose cross they will be judged.

²³ Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, 189.

²⁴ George Herbert, 'The Dawning', in *The Poems of George Herbert* (Oxford: Oxford U, 1913), 113.

In a reflection given in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben challenged the Church to recover its messianic vocation. Failure to do so, according to Agamben, risks it being swept away like every other government and worldly institution.²⁵ Even from this selective exploration of the Spiritual Exercises, we can see that the Church is not without resources to propose Christ and the Kingdom to humanity. Although its mission must always be renewed, the indwelling life of the Holy Spirit in the lives of men and women is the guarantee that its mission can never be lost or absorbed, either by coercion or by seduction, into the projects of worldly powers.

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²⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *The Church and the Kingdom*, translated by Giorgio Agamben and Leland de la Durantaye (London: Seagull, 2012), 41.

RECLAIMING OUR ORIGINAL IDENTITY

Communion, Community and Ministry

Luz Marina Díaz

ON THE FIRST SATURDAY of each month, from 10.30 a.m. to 11.45 a.m., I offer a class about the sacrament of baptism to parents and godparents of children who are soon to be baptized. The course includes a conversation about the baptism of Jesus; the meaning of baptism in Jesus' times and the meaning of baptism nowadays; the baptismal rite; the meaning of the different symbols used in baptism (water, oils, candle, white garment); and the responsibility of parents and godparents to raise children in the Christian faith.

At the beginning of the class, after the welcome and initial presentations, we pray with the narrative of Jesus' baptism according to Matthew 3: 13–17:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness'. Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'.

After class, participants read the passage aloud, and again silently. This is so that we can detect a word, phrase, image, symbol or emotion that stands out for each of us. Then we share insights, comments and feelings from meditating on this scripture.

Some participants are touched by the image of the Holy Spirit as a dove descending from heaven in association with a sense of peace and harmony. Others talk about the heavens opening as an invitation to new beginnings, to starting anew. Some others talk about the relationship

between Jesus and John the Baptist, and Jesus' baptism as an invitation to be welcomed into a faith community at the beginning of a spiritual journey. Others focus on the last verse: 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'. Finally, we talk about each of us as God's beloved sons and daughters.

Throughout the years, one of the main reasons I pray with this scripture has been God's affirmation, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'. It has become a hallmark of my baptism classes and an inspiration for daily life. I have learnt, with the help of spiritual writers—especially Henri Nouwen, whose work forms the background to much that I say here—and the experiential knowledge acquired through prayer, community and ministry, that this text is more than a message. It expresses who we are: beloved children of God.

My meditation results in the belief that we are born connected to God. The umbilical cord that ties a baby and mother is cut to separate the bodies at birth. But I have the image of a spiritual umbilical cord connecting us to God that is indestructible. Feeling this connection and living a life based on it have implications for how we perceive ourselves and the world, and how we treat ourselves and others (people, animals and nature).

Henri Nouwen explains that 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased' defines not only the identity of Jesus but the identity of each of us. He says that we have the enormous spiritual task of acknowledging that we are God's beloved sons and daughters and living based on that knowledge: 'And that is not very easy. Most of us constantly fail to claim the truth of who we are.'¹ Nouwen explains that humans tend to deviate from this identity—their original identity—ignoring or moving away from it by living identities based on what we have, know, do or produce—on reputation, success, appearance and what others say about us.²

Nouwen reminds us that Jesus was also tempted to depart from his original identity. After his baptism, Jesus ventured into the wilderness to pray and fast, and was tempted three times. Nouwen illustrates how Jesus' temptations are an example of the kinds of temptations we commonly face, especially if we are in leadership positions.

¹ Henri Nouwen, 'Being the Beloved', in *Writings*, edited by Robert A. Jonas (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), 24; and see *Life of the Beloved*, at <https://youtu.be/dWmeQ9cKRVE>, accessed 12 November 2023.

² See Henri Nouwen, *Here and Now: Living in the Spirit* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 134; *Life of the Beloved*.

Jesus' first temptation was to be relevant: to turn stones into bread

The second temptation ... was ... to do something spectacular, something that could win him great applause. 'Throw yourself from the parapet of the temple and let the angels catch you and carry you in their arms' (see Matthew 4:6).

The third temptation of Jesus was ... the temptation of power. 'I will give you all the kingdoms of this world in their splendor', the demon said to Jesus (Matthew 4:9) One of the greatest ironies of the history of Christianity is that its leaders constantly gave in to the temptation of power—political power, military power, economic power, or moral and spiritual power—even though they continued to speak in the name of Jesus, who did not cling to his divine power but emptied himself and became as we are.³

How can we be aware of and cultivate our original identity? How can we listen to God's voice saying, *you are my beloved children*? How do we respond in a loving relationship with God? What is the most effective way to resolve the tension between our original identity and false identities?

Nouwen mentions three things that answer these questions. These are *communion*, *community* and *ministry*. He introduces us briefly to the example of Jesus in each case. First, he says that Jesus spent forty days in the desert to pray and fast, to hear God's voice and to experience God (*communion*). After that, Jesus chose his first twelve disciples to form a *community*. And then, he headed off with his community to speak words of healing, touch people and care for the poor. This is called *ministry*.⁴

Nouwen's message is timeless. It should be heard now. It must be heard again and again. Why? The current global situation in which we live—the destruction of nature, global warming, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, misogyny, hunger, violence and human trafficking, among other social sins—indicates how far we remain from knowing that we are all beloved children of God. It is as if we live unaware that God is constantly inviting us to engage in a loving relationship with Godself and the results that follow.

³ Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 57–60.

⁴ Henri Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts: A Meditation on the Eucharistic Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 87; *Life of the Beloved*.

Communion

One way of entering into communion with God is by praying, and by using contemplative and spiritual practices. All religions have a set of such practices to help believers connect with the Ultimate Reality and live based on that connection. Contemplative and spiritual practices enkindle the desire for personal and social change. They are far from being mere techniques that make us feel good but isolate us in individualistic ways of living—‘spiritual jacuzzies’ as Joan Chittister puts it.⁵ They are intended to help us know ourselves and our relationship with the sacred. They are meant to open the heart, dissolve anger and fear, reduce greed and jealousy, increase joy and happiness, deepen and spread love, diminish anxiety and maintain peace. They also nurture our care for others, encourage us to grow in wisdom and discern more wisely, and sharpen and open our minds to see different perspectives. In sum, they help us to live and die well.

Henri Nouwen writes that a contemplative or spiritual practice ‘is the discipline by which we begin to see God in our heart The great mystery of the contemplative life is not that we see God in the world but that God within us recognizes God in the world.’⁶ According to the Contemplative Outreach organisation, ‘contemplative practices facilitate and deepen one’s relationship with God. They are an opportunity to invite the Indwelling Presence into everything we do.’⁷

In the First Annotation of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius Loyola describes ‘spiritual exercises’ as the name given to various activities such as meditation, contemplation and examination of conscience, among others, which we perform to contact God in our lives. To explain the importance of these exercises, Ignatius presents an analogy with physical exercises. Since Ignatius was a soldier, bodily activity was significant to him. Physical exercises such as running, walking and swimming are effective for toning muscles, improving breathing and circulation, and promoting overall physical health. Similarly, Ignatius affirms that spiritual exercises are beneficial in increasing awareness of the Holy Spirit’s movement in our lives. They help us discover the distorted tendencies

⁵ Joan Chittister, *New Designs: An Anthology of Spiritual Vision* (Pennsylvania: Benetvision, 2002), 85.

⁶ Henri Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome: Reflections on Solitude, Celibacy, Prayer, and Contemplation* rev. edn (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001), 103–104.

⁷ See <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/practice/>.



or habits that hurt ourselves and others, and to strengthen our efforts to respond in thought, word and deed to God's love.⁸

By practising such exercises, we start living religiously or contemplatively. Nouwen explains that the quality of three fundamental relationships mainly characterizes a contemplative or religious life. He refers to the relationships we establish with nature, time and people.⁹

Nature

For a person living contemplatively, nature is a gift received with gratitude for which one should care and from which one can learn. Plants and animals, Nouwen affirms, '... teach us about birth, growth, maturation, and death, about the need for gentle care, and especially about the importance of patience and hope'.¹⁰

Time

In our postmodern age, the concept of time has become a sworn enemy for most people. They live with the strange feeling of always being rushed. Critical decisions are made while sharing a quick lunch. Many families no longer have time to sit together to enjoy a meal. There is no time to engage in authentic conversations with family, friends and colleagues.

⁸ See David L. Fleming, *Draw Me into your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises, a Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading* (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuits Sources, 1996), 5.

⁹ Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 86.

¹⁰ Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 88.

The constant use of technology leaves no time for silence. This comes from what Nouwen calls experiencing time as *chronos*: ‘a chronology, a randomly collected series of incidents and accidents over which we have no control’. In a contemplative life, by contrast, time is experienced as *kairos*, which means ‘opportunity’. Nouwen explains that time spent as *kairos* provides options for changing one’s heart and opportunities to learn, to improve, and to help others.¹¹

Today’s technology can be used positively or negatively. During the pandemic lockdowns, parishes were able to continue religious education programmes, spiritual retreats and social gatherings using virtual platforms. Many people turn to the internet to pray with websites such as *Pray as You Go* and *Sacred Space*.¹² Time spent online is not always *chronos* time; people can go to the internet for the *kairos* experiences it sometimes makes possible. At the same time it can overshadow communication between people. Young people are constantly connected to electronic devices and social media in harmful as well as beneficial ways.

People

One of the biggest temptations for human beings, Nouwen states, is interacting with others merely because they are interesting characters. The word *person*, he maintains, comes from *per-sonare*, which means ‘sounding through’. According to Nouwen, our vocation is to ‘sound through’ to each other a more extensive and profound reality than the apparent one. A contemplative life helps us discover the gifts others have and express to others the love, truth and beauty they reveal to us. A contemplative life is a life of love and compassion for others, including those who harm us.¹³

Poverty, racism, exclusion, hunger, wars, ageism, sexism, nationalism, individualism, deforestation, contamination of the air and water and all the actions that aggravate global warming result from ignoring our original identity. Contemplative and spiritual practices can help us to be aware of these problems and to take action to solve them. When the people–nature–time relationship is improved, we are more inclined to take steps that benefit ourselves and others (human, nonhuman,

¹¹ Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 90–91.

¹² See <https://pray-as-you-go.org/home/> and <https://www.sacredspace.ie/>, accessed 1 February 2023.

¹³ Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 94–95. According to the *OED*, *person* and its Latin etymon *persona* are ultimately of unknown origin.

nature). This can result in an overall improvement in the economic, social, political and ecological aspects of life.

Community

Religious orders carefully select members who are psychologically and spiritually mature. Though they do not always succeed, it is easy to assume that most people entering a religious community can build healthy relationships with others. These individuals' psychological and spiritual maturity has an impact on how they live with others in community. In addition, they are apt to have an interior, intimate and personal relationship with God. This allows community members to learn and grow from problems and conflicts when they happen in the community. Parishes, by contrast, do not select their members. So, it is obvious that we should expect different stages of psychological and spiritual development among people within this kind of faith community. Moreover, a parish is formed by people of all ages, so spiritual and psychological growth will not go at the same pace for all.

For members entering a community to be conscious of their original identity they must develop the discipline of cultivating that identity and living it individually, so they can also live it with others communally. Nouwen says that often people who are not in communion with God and feel alone, in need of affection and love, enter a community seeking to quench this emotional need. Then there may be clashes between these people since they are together in the community but trapped in loneliness. They are frustrated with not fulfilling their needs because they are not living in a relationship with God.¹⁴

Stages of Spiritual Development

I believe God invites each person to cultivate a loving relationship with Godself. Still, each person must respond to this invitation, and the ability to do so depends on his or her stage of spiritual development. For instance, the inability to live their original identity is characteristic of people in the stage that developmental theorists call 'conventional'. Janet Ruffing summarises its features:

¹⁴ See Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1975); and *Life of the Beloved*.

- an external locus of authority;
- an embeddedness in a group whose norms are determinative either as inflexible rules or as affective loyalty to relationships within the group;
- experience of God that is tied to external authority and best expressed by external sources;
- an inability to reflect on and articulate interior experience and to adjust their behavior in response to the insight gained through the reflection.

Some people are in the conventional stage because they are relatively young, and others because they have not had an opportunity to progress to the post-conventional stages. Ruffing describes the characteristics of these:

- a developing interior locus for authority;
- an appreciation of different ideas, thoughts, experiences;
- experience of God that is interior, intimate, and personal;
- an ability to reflect on interior movement and make changes based on that reflection; an ability to tolerate ambiguity;
- an ability to think paradoxically and symbolically.¹⁵

Faith communities help members to enter the post-conventional spiritual stages by offering retreats to teach and practice contemplative and spiritual exercises, and to enable spiritual conversations for sharing prayer experiences. Many churches have a group of spiritual directors who can assist community members in achieving spiritual growth. Thus faith communities offer opportunities for their members to embrace and live their original identities.

How can spiritual practices help a person shift from a conventional to a post-conventional spiritual stage? The writer and mystic Cynthia Bourgeault can help to answer these questions using the classic text *The Cloud of Unknowing*. First, she explains that the anonymous author identifies two spiritual stages—active and contemplative—each of which has two degrees—high and low.

¹⁵ Janet Ruffing, 'Developmental Incongruence: When Directors and Directee Are in Different Levels of Psychological and Spiritual Development', *Presence: The Journal of Spiritual Directors International*, 5/2 (May 1999), 18–28, here 19.

This yields up a fourfold schematic: lower-active, higher-active, lower-contemplative, higher-contemplative. And then, as if to confound schematization altogether, he collapses the two middle rungs into a single overlapping ground, so that in place of four separate strata we have a chain-link fence!¹⁶

Thus, Bourgeault says, a person may not be fully active unless that person is also partly contemplative.

According to the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a person in the ‘lower-active’ stage lives the gospel and is a responsible citizen: ‘The lower part of the active life consists of good and honest bodily works of charity and mercy’. These acts are fundamental to ethics and morality; they are the basis of a sound spiritual education. The lower-active stage explained by *The Cloud of Unknowing*’s author corresponds to the conventional stage described by Janet Ruffing. However,

The higher part of the active life and the lower part of the contemplative life lie in good spiritual meditations and diligent looking into [literally, ‘beholding’] a man’s own wretchedness with sorrow and contrition, [looking] into the Passion of Christ and his servants with pity and compassion, and into the wonderful gifts, kindnesses, and works of God in all of his creatures both bodily and spiritual with gratitude and praise.¹⁷

This way of praying matches that of a person in a post-conventional spiritual stage. So, what is different? A person in the lower-active or conventional spiritual stage does pray, but superficially, reciting prescribed prayers without self-reflection. What is happening in the higher-active and lower-contemplative? Bourgeault answers: self-reflection! Self-reflective practices help us shift from conventional to post-conventional spiritual stages. Bourgeault gives the example of someone who does charitable works, attends church on Sunday, goes to confession, follows the commandments and lives in the world without much thought. In the second half of life, this person realises that life, as it used to be, ‘has become unmanageable’. Then, this person starts asking questions: ‘all of a sudden, you step across the border into “who am I?” “What the

¹⁶ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2016), 170; and see ‘The Heart of Centering Prayer: Part 3 of 4’, at <https://youtu.be/j3tBWfCVoV8>, accessed 12 November 2023.

¹⁷ *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 8.4, edited and translated by Ira Progoff (New York: Delta Books, 1957), quoted in Bourgeault, *Heart of Centering Prayer*, 171.

hell am I doing, anyway?" And sometimes that movement into actually occupying your life with reflection will happen when life upsets you.'¹⁸

Francis of Assisi's and St Ignatius Loyola's conversion stories are examples of this. The young Francis of Assisi's life was turned around by his capture and imprisonment following the battle with the rival city of Perugia in 1202. A changed man, he returned to Assisi without concern for the worldly pleasures of his past and with a deep desire to pray alone. In 1521, Saint Ignatius of Loyola was struck by a cannonball in Pamplona, which changed his life.

Conversion experiences are not limited to saints. It can happen to anyone, even if not in such a dramatic way. It is when we wake up inside. It is when we begin to become self-reflective and ask the questions, *who am I? What am I doing? Why am I doing it?* The Christian tradition offers excellent spiritual practices that cultivate awakening introspection. These include *lectio divina*, which invites us to move back and forth between a scriptural story and our own. What does this story say to me? That is a profoundly liberating question. Likewise, the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola, with their rules for discernment and imaginative prayer, are pathways to self-reflection and transformation: 'what have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ?' (Exx 53)

Moral Identity and Healing the Present

It is vital to be a part of a community to hear the words of God—you are my beloved children—and we should respond to them collectively. Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran write: 'Spirituality is both personal and communal the rootedness of our spirituality derives from being creatures bonded with the rest of creation—persons in community.'¹⁹

Harris and Moran classify contemplative and spiritual practices within the Christian tradition in terms of the personal and communal. They recognise three significant categories:

One set of practices emphasizes individual interiority; a second emphasizes group ritual; a third emphasizes the integration of these. Among the individual disciplines are prayer, contemplation,

¹⁸ Cynthia Bourgeault, *Heart of Centering Prayer: Part 3 of 4*, at <https://youtu.be/j3tBWfCVoV8>, accessed 12 November 2023. And see Bourgeault, *Heart of Centering Prayer*.

¹⁹ Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 109.

and fasting: among the group disciplines are worship, service, and prophetic protest; among the integrating ones are embodiment, memory, and justice.²⁰

Among the practices emphasizing integration, Harris and Moran include healing the present by reflecting on stories from the past, such as biblical stories, and dangerous stories, such as the Holocaust.²¹

Nowadays, for example, healing memories is part of some US faith communities' efforts to respond to the generational harm and injustice that Black people have suffered through racism. Kelly Brown Douglas explains:

In faith communities, reparations must begin with anamnestic truth-telling. Anamnesis means 'memorial sacrifice'. Its origins are in Jesus' words, 'Do this in memory of me' (Luke 22: 19). This is not a passive process but one in which Christians enter into the sacrifice. It is about being accountable to the past in the very present ... anamnestic truth-telling confronts the ways in which the past remains alive in the present, thus paving the way to right the present by exonerating it from contemporary vestiges of the past.²²



²⁰ Harris and Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education*, 116–119.

²¹ Harris and Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education*, 116.

²² Kelly Brown Douglas, 'A Christian Call for Reparations', *Sojourners* (15 June 2020), at <https://sojo.net/magazine/july-2020/christian-call-case-slavery-reparations-kelly-brown-douglas>, accessed 12 November 2023.

In my parish we have organized a series of spiritual conversations on race, racism and racial justice, and presentations on scripture-based racial justice. According to Brown, fostering moral identity and acting as if the future is now are the other two steps of reparations. She states:

Ecclesiastical institutions and faith communities must lead the way towards claiming a moral identity by naming and freeing themselves from their own institutional realities of white privilege Faith communities must also witness to God's just future Faith communities do not have the option, as Martin Luther King Jr once said, to remain 'silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows'.²³

Ministry

Contemplative and spiritual practices connect human interiority with social, political and environmental commitment. They have an apostolic dimension that brings together self, God and community.

You and I are called, not just to communion and community but then to go out and minister and to trust that those you minister will lead you closer and closer and closer to the heart of love—the heart of God.²⁴

Communicating with God through contemplative and spiritual practices is a vital part of the liberating process of cooperating with grace. Furthermore, as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* says, one cannot be fully active if one is not partially contemplative, that is, if one does not engage in spiritual practices that cultivate an intimate relationship with God in Christ. In a series of lectures on the dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises, the Jesuit Howard Gray states that discipleship with Christ is a movement that navigates from the affective to the effective.²⁵

We are God's beloved children. This is our original and true identity that must be reclaimed, acknowledged and cultivated by contemplative and spiritual practices that trigger self-reflection. These practices are sources of communion, community and ministry. They help us grow

²³ Brown Douglas, 'Christian Call for Reparations'.

²⁴ Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*.

²⁵ Howard Gray, 'Dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises Lecture 1: Presupposition and Introductory Annotations', available at <https://youtu.be/5gMTEYHB130>.

spiritually and adopt a contemplative and religious life characterized by a high quality of our relationships with nature, time, and people. Contemplative and spiritual practices allow us to find God in everything and Christ in others. They awaken in us the desire to cooperate with God in building God's reign—a world of justice and peace.

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THE BRIDE OF CHRIST AS SPIRITUAL DIRECTEE

John of the Cross and Spiritual Direction

Ruthie Baigent

The soul in this condition of love is like a sick person In all that sick people think or see they have only one desire, the desire for health, and everything that does not lead to this is a bother and burden to them.¹

THE GOAL OF SPIRITUAL LIFE for John of the Cross is ‘the possession of God through union of love’, and our journey there is pain.² It is pain, as birth is pain, crossing the thresholds between the flesh and the spiritual, the frontiers from nothingness to existence, from death to life.³ When we hear Him, Christ calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him, ‘for what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?’ (Mark 8:34–38) I’ll answer that to avoid any potential for confusion: it profits us not at all! ‘For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain’ (Philippians 1:21).

In order to follow Christ, we must lose ourselves. John is meticulous in his logic, and meticulous in cutting out detritus in the way of that logic (and in the way of the heart, since logic and love take us to the same place in Christ, when we understand the premises correctly).⁴ John gives us a perspective on this spiritual journey to the heart, both from the point of view of logical imperative (in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night*) and from the point of view of lived experience (in *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame of Love*).

Here, I shall focus predominantly on the lived experience revealed to us by John in the *Spiritual Canticle*, and ask the question: *How are*

¹ St John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, 10.1, in *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, translated by Kieran Kavanagh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS, 1991).

² St John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, 2.32, in *Collected Works*.

³ ‘The soul affirms also that she will pass by frontiers, which refer to the natural rebellions of the flesh against the spirit’ (*Spiritual Canticle*, 3.10).

⁴ The premises are the teachings of Christ, which can only be understood through the heart.

the works of John of the Cross helpful to the spiritual director? I shall talk about the directee as the 'bride' of the *Canticle*, and seek to discover what role the director can have in the bride's spiritual journey, especially asking how the he or she can be a help instead of a hindrance. I will begin with a description of what it is to be the Bride.

The Bride

The premise of John's oeuvre is that, once we hear Christ's call, once we are wounded in our hearts, once Christ has ignited our love with His own, we carry this 'wound' of love (a death blow to the earthly life, and a 'life blow' to the eternal life!) forward, and it drives us, unrelentingly, to seek recovery and 'health'. The only place we may find these is in Christ Himself. We may seek our healing elsewhere, being desperate and confused, but we will find no satisfaction. The obvious everyday things and people of life, the things we knew and put our hopes in before, are no longer available to us as consolations, now we are wounded by Love. That dream is over. Death and life cannot coexist, so we must seek life and only life. In order to hope to move into the new life, we must shed the accoutrements of the old: 'All this is the activity of the old life, which is the death of the new spiritual life'.⁵ John is describing what it is to Love.

Christ knows our vulnerability to confusion in this half-way place, wounded but earth-bound, and He calls us to *stay* and look deeper: 'Return, dove, the wounded stag is in sight on the hill, cooled by the breeze of your flight'. And behold! Our beloved is also wounded out of love for us! 'Among lovers, the wound of one is a wound for both.' And with this encouragement, the bride surrenders to the transformation of all her desires: 'Now I occupy my soul and all my energy in his service; I no longer tend the herd, nor have I any other work now that my every act is love'.⁶ It is a plunge into the deep unknown where we are driven by necessity.

The bride, or directee, once wounded, now seeks her love—her life, her health—desperately, obsessively, and becomes insistent, 'Now wholly surrender yourself! Do not send me any more messengers; they cannot tell me what I must hear.' There is (painful and arduous) awareness of every false trail, the 'life, not living where you live', but life lived

⁵ *Living Flame of Love*, 2.33.

⁶ *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 13; 13.9; stanza 28.

instead near death. And there is fear that even when we see our Bridegroom's face, we will take flight ourselves, because in this life we are always so close to death; we must pass through death as a kind of final purgation, to reach full union and be safe in our lover's arms.⁷

The call to Christ is relentless because, once love has been seen and our desire enflamed, there is no peace until we are united with Christ. 'Consequently the soul is dead to all it was in itself, which was death to it, and alive to what God is in himself. Speaking of itself, the soul declares in this verse: "In killing you changed death to life".'⁸ 'I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety' (Psalm 4:8). The appetites are transformed; our desire is for God alone.



The Girl by the Window, by Edvard Munch, 1893

Union with God actually enables us to see all creation with the eyes of God, to respond to every situation in our lives with the heart of Jesus, and to be motivated by the Holy Spirit in all our actions. For John this transformation of our natural powers of knowing, loving, remembering, feeling and acting represents the psychological consequences of St Paul's words when he said: 'I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me' (Galatians 2:20).⁹

The desire is healthy because 'desire for God is the preparation for union with him'.¹⁰ Until we are united to God, every part of life that we

⁷ *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 6; stanzas 11 and 12. The final stage of purgation is union (St John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, 2. 21. 5, in *Collected Works*).

⁸ *Living Flame of Love*, 2. 34.

⁹ Kevin Culligan, 'St John of the Cross: Spiritual Guide', *The Way*, 33/1 (January 1993), 66.

¹⁰ *Living Flame of Love*, 3. 26.

see *without* seeing through God's eyes, is a torment to us: creation is insufficient, and we are insufficient to it.

As John of the Cross, the bride, is led onwards by his love, and takes the courage to draw out and follow Christ's teachings to their conclusion, he is following a logical as well as a loving imperative. He describes a tumultuous journey which is hard to navigate alone. Thankfully, our heart, through Christ, can lead us on this journey into the unknown, where our intellect flails and confuses us. There, our heart, encapsulating the union of love that we strive for and following its deepest desire, is like a homing device to our spiritual home in Christ. The Kingdom of Heaven is within us (Luke 17:20–21). The *Spiritual Canticle* is descriptive of the spiritual journey of the heart; the journey to the heart.

The Role of the Spiritual Director

Two questions naturally arise. The first is whether it is necessary to have a spiritual director when Christ is leading us so well, and in such perfect empathy with us. 'The wound of one is the wound of both, and the two have but one feeling.' It is clear to me that there can be no other person on earth who can be in this perfect empathy. Furthermore, though we hear from John that God 'acts as a guide to the blind, leading it by the hand to the place it knows not how to reach', we also need to remember what Jesus makes so clear to us in John 14, that we *do* know the place we are going to, and we *do* know how to get there.¹¹ Simply by knowing Christ, we know the way, and we *do* know Christ: 'You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you' (John 14:17).

John says 'there are three blind guides who can draw us off the road: the spiritual director, the devil, and the soul itself.'¹² It is *alone*—a word so often used by John—alone in his cell, imprisoned by his own friends, that John experiences 'a new awakening of Jesus himself in the depth of his own being ... a total transformation of his own consciousness in the Son of God'.¹³ John was led to Christ 'more surely than the light of noon' only by the light burning in his own heart.¹⁴ Given the certainty in following Christ and the danger of being drawn off the road by a blind guide, either ourselves, our spiritual director or the devil, John describes a scenario

¹¹ *Spiritual Canticle*, 13.9; *Living Flame of Love*, 3.29.

¹² *Living Flame of Love*, 3.29.

¹³ Culligan, 'St John of the Cross: Spiritual Guide', 64.

¹⁴ *Dark Night*, stanzas 3–4.

where the spiritual director and the soul are never necessarily safe, and must use each other to ensure that they keep to the Royal Road.

The second question is: *can there be a director for us on this journey, aside from God?* Did John himself have a spiritual director? I get the impression of a man living in hope of alliance, yet living in full awareness of the ultimate knowledge that there is no other director but God. Who can provide the hospitality and understanding that the bride (ultimately) can receive only from the bridegroom, according to the words of John? Who can direct and accompany a bride who is propelled forward by her deepest desire, consumed with attraction by the bridegroom's deepest desire for her; a bride for whom everyone and everything else serves only as an arrow of pain for the places where union *hasn't* yet been achieved, even until the day she dies; a bride for whom the things of daily life only serve to show us our growing edge, the life and freedom we *do not have*, and, at best, serve as cleansing in the purgative fires?

The only eyes we seek are Christ's. They can't be replicated, they can't be imitated. Christ is 'the supper that refreshes and deepens love', breathing its balsam fragrance of love through our garden, in this protected space 'bound round with linking dens of lions'.¹⁵ Who can come into this space, which is exquisite, and who can accompany us to where we are so powerfully propelled? What accompaniment is possible here, in the protected space of our committed and exclusive relationship with Christ, as described by John?

I imagine that John lives in hope because, although, as separate individuals on earth, we must exist with each other on parallel planes, we can *meet* in the spiritual. The planes meet in Christ; Christ makes this meeting possible. Simone Weil describes friendship as the meeting of parallels, with reference to the Holy Trinity both as model and as active agent. I would say this was also a good descriptive model of what happens in spiritual direction:

Pure friendship is an image of the original and perfect friendship that belongs to the Trinity and is the very essence of God. It is impossible for two human beings to be one while scrupulously respecting the distance that separates them, unless God is present in each of them. The point at which parallels meet is infinity.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Spiritual Canticle*, stanzas 15, 17, 24.

¹⁶ Simone Weil, 'Forms of the Implicit Love of God', in *Waiting for God*, translated by Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper and Row, 1973 [1951]), 208.

These parallels meet in spiritual direction, in prayer, in any place we are together in Christ. So there is hope for spiritual direction.

The Blind Guide

How can the spiritual director avoid being a 'blind guide'? Let us examine some of the pitfalls. John, speaking to us as the bride, tells us that he is 'no longer [to be] seen or found on the common' and that he will seem 'lost'. But, John says, it is through having lost herself that the bride is found.¹⁷ This guides the spiritual director to drop conventions and social mores when trying to understand and accompany the bride.

In this stanza the soul answers a tacit reproof of those in the world who customarily criticise persons who give themselves entirely to God. They think those persons are excessive in their conduct, estrangement, and withdrawal, and assert that they are useless in important matters and lost to what the world esteems.¹⁸

There are examples of souls being criticised for excessive conduct in the Bible, and two good examples are David (2 Samuel 6:16), and Jesus himself (Matthew 27:39–44).

The director needs not to waste the bride's or directee's time by attempting to guide her back to civilisation, back to the village where the common land is found! It is not in the well-known places, but in concealed caverns in the rocky mountain, deep in the thicket, that the bride/directee will be shown what her 'soul has been seeking', that which she has tasted with the initial stab of love, 'the breathing of the air, the song of the sweet nightingale; the grove and its living beauty in the serene night, with a flame that is consuming and painless'.¹⁹ It was on the cross, mocked as he died and unconsolated by the love of His Father, that Christ won His greatest victory. It is a problem all find when they go off with their beloved, seeking 'union of love', because it places the seeker on a spiritual collision course with the 'rulers' and 'authorities' of Ephesians 6:12. A spiritual director needs to be aware.

¹⁷ *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 20.

¹⁸ *Spiritual Canticle*, 29.5.

¹⁹ *Spiritual Canticle*, stanzas 36–38.

John speaks of how the enemies of the soul seek, with great cunning, to use all earthly creation to attack the bride as she takes on the challenge of crossing the frontiers from flesh to spirit, ‘the devils reinforce themselves with these other two enemies, the world and the flesh, in order to wage a rugged war’.²⁰ The flesh,

... sets itself up as though on the frontier to oppose the spiritual journey. A person must pass these frontiers by breaking through these difficulties and throwing down with wilful strength and determination all sensory appetites and natural affections.²¹

It is essential that the spiritual director is awake to the fact that, in her work, as in her life, the bride/directee cannot rest on her own power or she will be prey to the manipulations of the devil—as illustrated brilliantly in *The Preaching of the Antichrist* by Luca Signorelli.



The Preaching of the Antichrist, by Luca Signorelli, 1500–1504

²⁰ *Spiritual Canticle*, 3. 9.

²¹ *Spiritual Canticle*, 3. 10.

Earthly Powers and Sacred Schizophrenia

In *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari give a sophisticated and detailed two-part description of the structures and mechanisms of this world.²² Their work is a good companion to John of the Cross. Though not writing from a Christian perspective, they do a good job of describing the powers with which the soul struggles as they seek to block its path.²³ Deleuze and Guattari don't offer a sense of the saving power of Christ, or the grace of God, but they *do* offer us a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms of the spiritual forces at play:

- in ourselves in relation to ourselves;
- in ourselves in relation to others;
- in others.

Deleuze and Guattari use an image of the double pincers of capitalism clamping down on anything that dares, and has the passion, to escape (a new business gets bought by a big corporation, and makes a lot of money, but loses its identity), and show us the dangers associated with escape. They use the terms of psychoanalysis to identify escape with a 'schizophrenic' refusal of the structures of the Freudian Oedipus complex, which is a 'double path' in which 'the solution offers no more of a way out than does the problem': 'no way of getting out, neurosis or normality'. 'As to those who refuse to be Oedipalized in one form or another, at one end or the other in the treatment, the psychoanalyst is there to call the asylum or the police for help.'²⁴

Thus, onlookers, John's 'worldlings' of the village common, fear for the bride and try to put safety measures in place, inflicting crippling restrictions upon her freedom, from which she must move away (as Christ moves away from the crowd who are trying to push him off a cliff [Luke 4:30]) if she is to follow her mission.²⁵ *Those to whom the bride turns for help have to first ensure they are not running the machinery of the devil to*

²² The two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* are: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *The Anti-Oedipus*, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota, 1983), and *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota, 1987).

²³ *Spiritual Canticle*, 3. 11–12.

²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 80–81.

²⁵ *Spiritual Canticle*, 29.5.

prevent escape! If they are, they cannot help the bride, and will instead, no doubt with the best of intentions, create great hindrance for her.

Likewise, the spiritual director? ... Likewise, the Church? This draws into focus the vigilance that is necessary to avoid spiritual abuse, which can rear its head in so many interesting and novel ways, following the clever tactics of the devil. If the bride comes to the spiritual director for help, the spiritual director must ensure that he or she proceeds with prayer and self-knowledge.

We're all so sure of what freedom looks like, and delight in attempting to teach it, but what is taught, safely in the classroom, doesn't necessarily sit well with the reality. The reality is that, according to John Piper, 'if you are a Christian, you will spend the rest of your life on this earth with a spiritual condition that may be called *sacred schizophrenia*'. By this he means 'having a self that must be denied, and a self that is doing the denying'.²⁶

This is (or ought to be) our norm. We can be honest and take this to the full logical conclusion, as John describes in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*: 'To come to be what you are not you must go by a way in which you are not'.²⁷ Or we can be lukewarm and attempt to live with our feet in both camps. The devil prefers us lukewarm for two reasons:

- First, being lukewarm means we are weak. 'The appetites sap the strength needed for perseverance in the practice of virtue. Because the force of the desire is divided, the appetite becomes weaker than if it were completely fixed on one object.'²⁸
- Secondly, through weak and lukewarm people, Satan can inflict so much more torture and impediment on those who seek to follow Christ with their full hearts. We only have to look at the life of John to realise this—or look no further than the life of Christ.

The Oedipal double binds described by Deleuze and Guattari are analogies for the acts of the deathly, stratifying forces of earthly powers as they seek to capture what is free, weaponising anything that is available

²⁶ John Piper, 'Sacred Schizophrenia: A Meditation on Self-Denial', at <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/sacred-schizophrenia>.

²⁷ St John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 1.13.11, in *Collected Works*.

²⁸ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 1.10.1.

to them (that is, *anything* that is not emanating from Christ's heart of love). All Christians know that we are not actually stuck in a double bind. Christ sets us free. Freedom is possible only in Christ—but what freedom looks like from the outside, from the worldly perspective, may be indistinguishable from what is known as schizophrenia, and this, against all Christ's teaching, is used by the devil to repress and exclude people.

She calls the world 'wild beasts' because in the imagination of the soul that begins to tread the path leading to God the world is pictured as wild animals threatening and scaring her

Some generous souls will be faced with other wild beasts, more interior and spiritual: hardships and temptations and many kinds of trials through which they must pass Yet the truly loving soul, esteeming her Beloved above all things, trusting in his love and friendship, does not find it hard to say: 'Nor fear wild beasts'. And 'I will go beyond strong men and frontiers'.²⁹

The fervency of the bride may feel disturbing to outsiders. But the spiritual director, too, is an outsider if he or she cannot appreciate the bride's journey and the freedom that she needs on her journey, or cannot see her with Christ's eyes—the eyes of love. The temptation to 'help' is strong. Usually, being good Christians, we think we are acting for the person's own good. But we need to be firmly rooted in *freedom* truly to accompanying the directee where he or she is being led in Christ.

Yet it can be difficult to find loyal and understanding allies. John advises the directee to be careful because, 'From my observations Christ is

**Try to avoid
advice that
does not
come from
God**

little known by those who consider themselves his friends'. Spiritual directors, if incapable of judging correctly, may indeed be dangerous. The director must be aware of when he or she is holding back and fearful or panicking when faced with the contradictions of 'sacred schizophrenia', and try to avoid advice that does not come from God. If formulaic advice is

offered it will be nothing but a hindrance to the directee. The director may also offer too little of what is actually needed. As Christ begged his friends to sit with him *just for one hour*, and they could not manage this, we may beg our director to sit with us *just for one hour*, as we remain in communion with God. We may need the director simply to *be* with

²⁹ *Spiritual Canticle*, 3. 7–8.

us, as the bride sits with her Beloved. The bride is on a road to the completion of good work that Christ Himself initiated; we can trust that Christ holds the bride in His hands. We do not want to get in Christ's way by our lack of faith!

Love, Faith and Trust

If the spiritual director can accompany the bride well and respectfully, then the director will also be blessed. Through duty well performed, the director will be able to seek Christ, through service to His bride—even if the *love* of the director has not yet been enkindled; if the director has not yet 'entered the nous', as the Eastern Orthodox say. Duty, performed with love for the bride, as far as the spiritual director is able, may be the director's own path to Christ, and in this way, the director will become just as much a Bride of Christ as the directee. Christ will look at her with love, and the Bride will be grateful, in eternity. We are all equally loved, regardless of our capacity.

Which brings me back to the second question, *can* there be a director for us on this journey? Even if the director is rooted in freedom, can he or she give guidance? 'In solitude he guides her, he alone, who also bears in solitude the wounds of love.'³⁰

[The devil] can present many false ideas and forms to the memory under the guise of their being true and good. This he does by impressing them on the spirit and the senses through suggestion with much certification and efficacy. They then seem so certain that the soul thinks they cannot be false, but that what it feels is in accord with truth. Since the devil transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), he seems to be light to the soul.

To a blind soul falsehood no longer seems falsehood, and evil no longer evil, and so on, for the darkness appears to be light, and the light darkness (Isaiah 5:20).³¹

John emphasizes that what comes from Satan may seem unimpeachably sensible, but it is still false. We cannot trust our senses. But then, how can we trust the senses of others? Spiritual directors are also human beings.

³⁰ *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 35.

³¹ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 3. 10. 1–2.



The Preaching of the Antichrist, by Luca Signorelli (detail)

by the armour of God; and from there, we feel our way.

With the best of intentions, all human beings can act in our own strength and cause damage. The psychologist Karen Kessel Wegela writes:

We want to remove the suffering when we see it, but our desire to remove suffering is mixed up with our desire to be comfortable and not bothered by others' pain. Sometimes, when our intentions are confused in this way, we end up saying or doing something that makes the situation worse.³²

'The most important thing is to actually help.' This may sound trite, but what more can be said? 'It doesn't matter if we do it right if we are not really helping.'³³

Let us look to Christ. Christ came down to earth from heaven, to a place where He could be with us, communicate with us directly, be our

³² Karen Kessel Wegela, *How to Be a Help Instead of a Nuisance: Practical Approaches to Giving Support, Service, and Encouragement to Others* (Boston, Ma: Shambhala, 1996), 80.

³³ Kessel Wegela, *How to Be a Help Instead of a Nuisance*, 177.

advocate, model *life* for us, and lead us to the Glory of God. As incarnate God, Jesus is one of us, enduring all the pain that we endure, experiencing love, compassion, temptation, a need for friendship and allies, and rejection—everything. Jesus constantly sees us with the eyes of God, by returning to His Father in prayer. Jesus teaches us how to live in heaven on earth. He stops on His way in order to help people, and He actually helps! Questions such as *what do you want?* seek out the heart of the individuals He stops for. He speaks straight to the hearts of those He helps: ‘if you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink”, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water’ (John 4:10); and ‘do not sin any more’ (John 8:11, 5:14). It is concise and it is enough.

Jesus may be the Son of God, and have the power to forgive our sins, but He speaks to us as equals, and He speaks to our hearts as friends speak to one another. He doesn’t lord it over us, or need us to do things a certain way. In fact, Jesus, in His life on earth, shows us what it means to live in the Spirit, and even how His life is *enlarged* by relationship with us, not diminished. Christ models to us a life of openness and relationship, even in unexpected places. Michael J. Nicosia’s meditation, ‘Stations of Justice’, gives a reflection of Matthew 15:21–28, where Jesus appears to have the humility to expose his own failures and learn from *us*:

Some of the conventions that Jesus inherited supported nationalism, war, racism, slavery, misogyny, and heterosexism. On this occasion he might have failed to reach out in answer to a desperate need, but a feisty woman challenged him, broadened his vision, and released his love.³⁴

As spiritual directors, as human beings, we can get things very wrong when we think we are getting them right. To correct ourselves, to avoid blocking others, and to set ourselves on the right course, we must be committed not to any values, works or movements, but *only to the Lord*. The Soul is sick because it seeks its true love. If it is to be accompanied, the Soul must be held in a way which is responsive to the Christ who is being sought, *in* the directee. We must be alert to *truth*, and only to *truth*. We are entering a territory where there are no rules, no boundaries,

³⁴ Michael J. Nicosia, ‘Stations of Justice’, seventh station, available at <https://paxchristiusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/the-stations-of-justice.doc>.

except those that truly exist in the sacred space where the spiritual and material realms meet, where Jesus himself is present with us, and where he listens to us and guides us himself, in love.

We have a promise that we can achieve what we seek, because when two or more gather together in Jesus' name, Jesus tells us He is there with us (Matthew 18:20). This sacred space is a space which is antithetical to the world of the flesh and thus is at once 'dangerous'—from the perspective of the world—and *completely safe*, a space where we find love, peace and joy in circumstances which, from the outside, can look like insanity and chaos. Our painful 'sickness' may look preventable and sensible people will want to protect us from this crazy space, as his friends and family tried to protect Jesus (Mark 8:31–33; Matthew 16:21–23, Mark 3:21). Jesus' response is clear, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

Navigating this ruleless realm as a spiritual director challenges us to become the Bride ourselves. The truth, like a parable, can only be understood in the fertile soil of the open heart. We can't use our human judgment, human experience, or even human tradition to predict the response we need to make for God. God is *life*, bigger than anything we can conceive of. To accompany into this place of *life* is a blessing both for directee and director: a rare and beautiful gift. Though this is a gift available for the taking, we can't achieve it in our own strength. When we are walking on sacred ground, we must do so in abject humility and surrender to God, in love, or risk being a 'blind guide' who is a hindrance at best and, at worst, blocks the gates of Heaven to our directee.

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From the Ignatian Tradition

DISCRETA CARITAS IN THE WRITINGS OF IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Mark Rotsaert

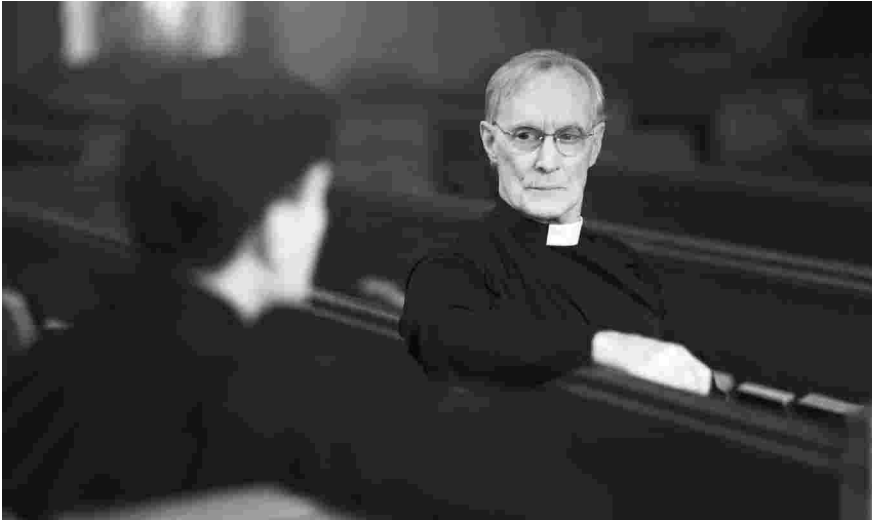
THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES are not only a school of prayer, they are also a school of discernment: during one month meditating and contemplating the life of Jesus, the Spirit will help you to discern how to follow Jesus, how to become a Christian in your daily life. Reading the writings of Ignatius you will discover that he regularly uses the expression *discreta caritas*. This expression refers explicitly to discernment. *Discreta caritas* is not really a ‘discreet charity’ or ‘discreet love’, but a love which is able to discern what to do.¹ Love is not blind. On the contrary, when it is driven by the Spirit it becomes clairvoyant. This is what *discreta caritas* means. It is a typically Ignatian expression: charity helps you to discern.

In different texts, Ignatius uses the expression *discreta caritas* to show how this attitude of discerning love can be a help in taking the right decision in very different circumstances. Quotations from these texts and the context in which the expression is used show the complexity and richness of Ignatius’ writings. To understand more deeply what Ignatius means when he speaks about *discreta caritas*, we will open our perspective to a wider semantic field and read some texts about moderation, prudence, discretion and anointing by the Holy Spirit.

In the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus

Ignatius uses the expression *discreta caritas* four times in the *Constitutions*.

¹ ‘Discreet’ does not mean what it says in the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*: ‘careful and prudent, especially so as to avoid giving offence or attracting attention’. In the Ignatian expression, the word *discreta* comes from the verb ‘to discern’.



Part 2 speaks of ‘The Dismissal of Those Who Were Admitted but Did Not Prove Themselves Fit’. In chapter 2, on ‘The Causes for Dismissal’, we read: ‘The discreet charity [*discreta caritas*] of the superior who has the authority to dismiss ought to ponder before God our Lord the causes which suffice for dismissal. But to speak in general, they seem to be of four kinds’ (II.2.1 [209]) In chapter 4, on ‘The Society’s Way of Dealing with Those Who Leave of Themselves or Are Dismissed’, we read:

In the case of persons who abandon the Society, even if they are judged fit for it, and then enter and take the habit in another religious institute, it does not seem that the Society should attempt or take legal measures to bring them back. Prior to their taking the religious habit, such measures as well-ordered and discreet charity [*discreta caritas*] dictates may be taken to win them back to the place where it is judged in our Lord that they should serve him. (II.3.B[237])

In part 3, on ‘The Preservation and Progress of Those Who Remain in Probation’, we read in chapter 1, ‘The Preservation to the Soul and to Progress in Virtues’:

The procedure to be followed in corrections and penances will be left to the discreet charity [*discreta caritas*] of the superior and of those who whom he may delegate in his place, who will measure them in accord with the dispositions of persons and with general and individual edification, for the divine glory (III.1.15[269]).

In part 6, on 'The Personal Life of Those Already Admitted and Incorporated into the Body of the Society', in chapter 3, on 'The Occupations Which Those in the Society Should Undertake and Those Which They Should Avoid', Ignatius writes:

It is presupposed that those so admitted will be men who are spiritual and sufficiently advanced that they will run in the path of Christ our Lord to the extent that their bodily strength and the exterior occupations undertaken though charity and obedience allow. Therefore, in what pertains to prayer, meditation and study, and also in regard to the bodily practices of fasts, vigils, and other austerities or penances, it does not seem proper to give them any other rule than that which discreet charity [*discreta caritas*] dictates to them, provided that the confessor always be informed and also, when doubt about advisability arises, the superior. (VI.3.1 [582])

In all these texts the context is decision-making. In the first three, *discreta caritas* is a quality the superior should have with regard to the candidate in formation, while in the last, *discreta caritas* should be a quality of a formed Jesuit. *Discreta caritas* has to do with finding the appropriate way to decide ('ponder', 'measure'). Finally, *discreta caritas* dictates what to do.

Before passing to Ignatius' letters, it is interesting to quote two other texts from the *Constitutions* where Ignatius uses a different expression with the word *caritas*. In part 2, chapter 2, he writes:

Should any of those four causes [for dismissal] exist, it seems that God our Lord will be better served by giving the person a decent dismissal than by employing indiscreet charity [*caritas*] in retaining him in whom the causes are found (II.2.5 [217]).

And in part 9, chapter 3, speaking about the superior general, he writes:

He will also have the task of giving correction and imposing penances which he judges suitable for any faults whatsoever. With attention given to the person and other circumstances. The consideration of these is entrusted to his prudent charity [*caritas*], which he will use for the glory of God. (IX.3.11 [754])

In the Letters

In the 6,815 letters of Ignatius the expression *discreta caritas* is used 24 times. This is not a huge number. Nevertheless, the expression seems not to appear at all in other spiritual writings from the first half of the

sixteenth century in Spain, and certainly not in the spiritual books we know Ignatius read. It is a typically Ignatian expression as it is connected with central elements of his spirituality. The content in which the expression is used invites rich interpretation.

Ignatius writes in a letter of 12 January 1555 to Fr Cesar Helmenius:

Concerning your question about what to do if a guest wants to stay in the community, the general rule is that he should not remain more than three days. But this is not applicable for everyone. You have to take into account the motivation (why he wants to stay longer). *Discreta caritas* can always make exceptions. (MHSJ EI 8, 267)²

In the same year, on 29 May, Ignatius gives a positive answer to the question of Fr Francisco Borja as to whether he could accept a candidate whose father was Muslim, adding: 'How to put this in practice, taking into account the aim of edification of the people and the service of God our Lord, the *discreta caritas* will judge what is convenient' (MHSJ EI 9, 87).

The next quotation is a very famous one because of the context where it appears. This at the very end of a long instruction of about eight pages in which Ignatius gives a great number of concrete suggestions for the mission in Ethiopia. He concludes this instruction, sent to the patriarch, Fr João Nunes Barreto, on 20 February 1555, as follows:

All that has been proposed should be taken as advice, but the Patriarch should not be obliged to act in conformity with it. Rather he should follow the dictates of a discreet charity [*discreta caritas*] that takes account of the real circumstances, and of the Holy Spirit, the main directive for him in all matters.³

Discreta caritas 'takes account of the real circumstances'. This is another typical Ignatian statement that we find both in the letters and in the *Constitutions*. Ignatius makes it clear that the many criteria for choice of mission he proposes in part 7, chapter 2 of the *Constitutions* should be adapted to the circumstances of persons, places and times. Every rule should be adapted to the real circumstances. *Discreta caritas* can always make exceptions, as Ignatius wrote to Fr Helmenius.

² For the letters we refer to MHSJ EI and, when possible, to English translations: *Ignigo: Letters Personal and Spiritual*, edited and translated by Joseph A. Munitiz (Leominster: Ignigo Enterprises, 1995); and *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, selected and translated by William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola U, 1959).

³ *Ignigo*, 249; MHSJ EI 8, 680–690.

Exploring the Larger Semantic Field

My next quotation is a long extract from a letter written by Juan de Polanco, Ignatius' secretary, on 23 May 1551 to Fr Arnold van Hees, who is on his way to Cologne, in company of Fr Leonard Kessel. Both, van Hees and Kessel have some health problems. Polanco writes:

Warn Fr Leonard (and take this as said to you too) against spending himself in work to the extent of seeming to disregard his own health. Even when something is undertaken for true charity, and though things may occur which cannot be dealt with without considerable anxiety, he must not rob himself of sleep, either by spending the night in prayer or being unable to sleep much of it, as those who know him well tell us of him. Apply this about sleep also to eating and to whatever else is necessary for keeping in good health, as I have mentioned. What is done with healthy moderation can endure; what does too great violence to the body cannot have a long future. On this subject you must understand our Superior's mind and in all activities—spiritual, academic or even bodily—charity must be moderated by discretion. You must preserve your health of body so as to be able to help the souls of others, and you should keep an eye on each other in this matter, with real mutual concern.

Polanco continues about the studies of van Hees. Should he study at schools or at home? 'How you do this and how you allot your time are left to your discretion.' Then he returns to those of Leonard Kessel:



‘To what extend his studies should take second place to his priestly work, charity itself and the anointing of the Holy Spirit will teach him’,⁴

Charity, discretion, moderation and the anointing of the Holy Spirit seem to have an important place in the semantic field of *discreta caritas*. Whether van Hees wants to go and study outside at school or at home, and how he will distribute his time, are left to his discretion. Could Polanco not have written here: they are left to *discreta caritas*, comparing for example the letter to Francisco Borja of 1555, already quoted, where is said, *discreta caritas* ‘will judge what is convenient’?

Moderation

In part 10 of the *Constitutions* Ignatius writes:

Moderation in spiritual and bodily labors and the middle tenor [*mediocridad*] of the *Constitutions*, which do not lean toward an extreme of rigor or toward excessive laxity (and thus they can be better observed), will help this whole body to persevere and maintain itself in its well-being (X.10 [822]).⁵

Already in part 3, on the spiritual formation of accepted candidates, it is stated: ‘The chastisement of the body ought not to be immoderate or indiscreet in abstinences, vigils, and other external penances and labor, which cause harm or prevent greater goods’ (III.2.5 [300]). Interesting here is the conjunction of ‘immoderate’ with ‘indiscreet’. The positive analogue would be ‘moderate’ with ‘discreet’. Moderation and discretion appear in the same semantic field. Nevertheless, *discreta caritas* is more than just moderation.

In his letters, too, Ignatius insists on moderation. Here are just some examples from the long letter on perfection sent to the scholastics of Coimbra on 7 May 1547, where Ignatius warns against ‘indiscreet’ perfection.

When moderation is absent, good is transformed into bad and virtue into vice, and many problems arise for those taking this path, blocking their basic purpose

⁴ *Inigo*, 171–173; MHSJ EI 3, 484–486.

⁵ The word *mediocridad* sometimes means the golden middle way in Ignatian texts, as here; sometimes, as when he speaks about his poor health, it has a negative meaning.

It sometimes happens that in crucifying the old man, the new man is also crucified, and weakness then makes one incapable of actually living out the virtues

Virtuous practices must be kept a course between two extremes.⁶

To find the just middle between two extremes is undoubtedly a characteristic of Ignatius' way of proceeding. Not too much, not too little: it's a question of finding the right balance, the right measure.⁷ In the text from part 3 of the *Constitutions* (III.1.15 [269]) quoted earlier, it is clear that the superior has to use *discreta caritas* in order to find the measure (of penances) in accordance with the disposition of the candidate, and the edification of the candidate and the community. Even in part 2, concerning dismissal, we read at II.3.B [237]: 'such measures as well-ordered and discreet charity [*discreta caritas*] dictate may be taken to win them back'. Here much will depend upon circumstances. In the letter of 1555 to Francisco de Borja, Ignatius makes clear that *discreta caritas* will judge how to put into practice the general rule. *Discreta caritas* has the capacity to judge what should be done in a concrete situation. It seems necessary to study further the meaning of 'discretion' in the expression *discreta caritas*.

Discretion

The term 'discretion' appears frequently in the *Constitutions* and in the letters. In the *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius only uses this term twice, in the context of discernment of spirits (in the *Autograph* of the *Exercises*, *discreción de espíritus*). He never uses the word *discernimiento* (discernment). The fundamental meaning of 'discretion' in Ignatian texts is an interior illumination, which makes it possible to verify where interior movements are coming from.⁸ *Discreta caritas* signifies, first of all, a new and deeper, a more interior, knowledge, a capacity to discern the inner movements, a capacity to discern what is coming from God. It is fundamentally a gift of the Spirit. A second meaning of the term 'discretion' in Ignatian texts signifies 'moderation', as is clear from some texts above.⁹

A new and deeper, a more interior, knowledge

⁶ *Ignigo*, 77–89; MHSJ EI 1, 495–510.

⁷ See Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, 'Discreta caritas', in *The Lord of Friendship* (Oxford: Way Books, 2011), 216–230.

⁸ Ignacio Iglesias, 'Discreta caritas', in *Diccionario de espiritualidad ignaciana*, edited by Pascual Cebollada and others (Bilbao and Santander: Mensajero and Sal Terrae, 2007), volume 1, 617.

⁹ Iglesias, 'Discreta caritas', 620–621.

If discretion should be a quality of the superior, how much more so for the superior general. In part 9 of the *Constitutions*, chapter 2, about the qualities required of the Superior General, Ignatius writes:

And although learning is highly necessary ... still more necessary is prudence along with experience in spiritual matters, so that he may be able to discern the various spirits and to give counsel and remedies. He also needs discretion in exterior matters and a manner of handling such diverse affairs. (IX.2.6 [729])

‘Prudence’ to discern and ‘discretion’ seem to go together. For spiritual and interior matters the Superior General needs ‘prudence’ to be able to discern the various spirits. This refers to the first meaning of ‘discretion’, as interior illumination. For exterior matters he needs discretion as the capacity to handle ‘such diverse affairs’. Here discretion is used as the effect of the prior meaning.

In an instruction to Jesuits sent on mission of 8 October 1552 Ignatius speaks in a single paragraph about humility, discretion, virtue, love, prudence and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This text shows how complex Ignatius’ vision (and formulation) can be.

[The Jesuit sent on mission] should look for the right way of going about things, making sure that he has the humility to start at the bottom and not meddling with higher things unless called to do so,



provided however that discretion—with an eye on the time, the place, and the person—does not indicate otherwise; this discretion cannot be constrained by any rule, it is also appropriate in this respect to enlist the good will of those with whom we deal by making a show, based on truth, virtue and love, also by gaining authority with them, and adapting ourselves to all with holy prudence. This prudence is chiefly taught by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, but one can help with reflection and careful observation.¹⁰

Here ‘discretion’ is treated as the effect of an interior illumination which makes it possible to adapt the rule in concrete circumstances. The virtue of prudence is presented as a gift of the Spirit.

The Anointing of the Holy Spirit

But you have been anointed by the Holy One As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him. (1 John 2:20, 27)

Ignatius refers regularly to this anointing from the Holy Spirit in the *Constitutions*, as well in his letters.

In part 1 of the *Constitutions*, speaking about the qualities required to be accepted into the Society—which qualities are good, but not necessary and so on—Ignatius writes: ‘But the measure to be observed in all things be taught by the holy unction of the Divine Wisdom to those who are charged with this matter, undertaken for his greater service and praise’ (I.2.13 [161]). In part 4, speaking about the apostolic formation of Jesuit students, we read:

Although all this can be taught only by the unction of the Holy Spirit and by the prudence which God our Lord communicates to those who trust in his Divine Majesty, nevertheless, the way can at least be opened by some suggestions which help and prepare for the effect that is to be produced by the divine grace (IV.8.8 [414]).

Again, prudence is communicated by God.

Here are some examples from the letters. First, a letter written by Polanco on 1 June 1551 to Fr Urbano Fernandez, rector of the college of Coimbra, who asked for some guidelines on government. We read:

¹⁰ *Inigo*, 190–192; MHSJ EI 12, 251–253.

I do not think that I am qualified to speak even of those [matters] which are of least importance. But the Holy Spirit whose ‘unction teacheth you of all things’, who instructs those who dispose themselves to receive His holy illumination, and especially in that which pertains to a man’s office, will teach your reverence. I am sure that He will, seeing that He gives you so much good will to succeed in what is to His greater service.¹¹

We have already quoted the conclusion of that long instruction of 1555 to Fr João Nunes Barreto, Patriarch of Ethiopia: ‘The Patriarch should follow the dictates of the *discreta caritas*, that takes account of the real circumstances, and of the Holy Spirit, the main directive for him in all matters’. There is another letter to the same Fr João Nunes Barreto, concerning the highly demanding mission in Ethiopia. At the end of the letter Ignatius writes:

I hope that the Holy Spirit will give you the instructions you ask for making progress in God’s service on this mission and give it in full measure together with his holy unction and the gift of prudence as circumstances require.¹²

The unction of the Holy Spirit, like ‘discretion’, signifies an interior illumination given by the Spirit, so that one can discern whether or not to follow an inner movement. Looking back to the different texts already quoted, the link between the unction of the Holy Spirit and the virtue of prudence is notable. We saw already the passage from the

**Making the
right decision
in any given
circumstances**

Constitutions saying that the General should have ‘prudent charity’ to take good decisions (IX.3.11 [754]). Two other texts are significant: *Constitutions* IV.8.8 [414], saying: ‘All this can only be taught by the unction of the Holy Spirit and the prudence God our Lord communicates to who trust in his Divine Majesty’; and the letter to Fr Nunes Barreto of 1554 which says: ‘I hope that the Holy Spirit will give you the instruction you ask for ... and give it in full measure together with his holy unction and the gift of prudence as circumstances require’. These gifts of God—discretion, prudence and the unction of the Spirit—are given with a view to making the right decision in any given circumstances.

¹¹ *Letters of St Ignatius*, 233–237; MHSJ EI 2, 499–503.

¹² *Letters of St Ignatius*, 342–343; MHSJ EI 7, 313–314.

Charity, Another Gift of the Spirit

After having seen the richness and complexity of the use of ‘discretion’ in different contexts, let’s have a look at the other aspect of the expression *discreta caritas*, namely, the *caritas*. From texts in the *Constitutions* and the *Spiritual Exercises*, it becomes clear that *caritas*—charity or love—is also a gift of the Spirit.

But first a particularity of Ignatius’ language should be clarified. There is no doubt that in the expression *discreta caritas*, *caritas* is the substantive and *discreta* the adjective. This may give the impression that *caritas* is the more important word in the expression. This is not exactly what Ignatius means. Adjectives and substantives are in Ignatian language sometimes interchangeable, as in *discreta caritas* where both find their source in the same Spirit. Thus, love is not more important than discretion, and discretion is not more important than love. Both are equally important. This is made very clear in the following passage in a letter written by Polanco to Francisco Borja on 25 January 1549. The conclusion of the letter says, in Spanish: ‘Plega a la eterne sapiencia darnos a todos siempre *caridad tan discreta y discreción tan caritativa*, que nunca dejemos de querer ni de acertar a lo que es más acepto y grato en su divina conspecto’. In translation: ‘May the eternal Wisdom give us all—always—a charity full of discretion and a discretion full of charity, that we never give up desiring and achieving what is more pleasing in the sight of the Lord’ (MHSJ EI 2, 322).

Charity and discretion go hand in hand, as is said in the *Constitutions* part 2 about dismissal. To dismiss a professed member should be made very difficult: ‘in whose case the charity and discretion of the Holy Spirit will indicate the manner which ought to be used in the dismissal, should God our Lord permit this to become necessary’ (II.3.A [219]).

Where is this charity coming from? The Preamble to the *Constitutions* speaks about: ‘The interior law of charity and love which the Holy Spirit writes and imprints upon hearts’ (Preamble, 1 [134]). Ignatius refers here to Romans 5:5: ‘God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us’. The love of God is given to us, comes from above, *de arriba*, as Ignatius likes to say (Exx 184, 237, 338). The link between *discreta caritas* and God’s Spirit is explicit in the passage already quoted from the instruction sent to Nunes Barreto. The patriarch of Ethiopia should not feel obliged to act in conformity with the many suggestions Ignatius describes in the Instruction.

‘Rather he should follow the dictates of a discreet charity [*discreta caritas*] that takes account of the real circumstances, and of the Holy Spirit, the main directive for him in all matters.’ The Holy Spirit is the main directive, because it is the same Spirit who is the source of *discreta caritas*.

The first meaning of ‘discretion’ is to be illuminated by God’s Spirit so to be able to discern if an inner movement of consolation is really coming from God. Consolation during the contemplation of the life of Jesus is the language God is speaking to men and women. In true consolation God is touching us. God can give Godself without any cause as, for example, in the first time of making an election (Exx 175), but God can also give Godself in one’s prayer or thoughts. The Creator and Lord can self-communicate to the faithful soul (Exx 15), as we read in what is the core of the way of proceeding during the Spiritual Exercises: ‘to allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord’.

It is not only important to discern where the consolation is coming from; the direction in which the inner movement is taking us is an even more important aspect. True consolation will lead to what is good; false consolation or desolation will lead to what is wrong. In all the texts quoted here, the context is always to do what is promoting God’s greater glory and the common good, and this is what makes the *caritas* into *discreta caritas* and not indiscreet *caritas*.¹³

In the second set of Rules for the Discernment (*discreción*) of Spirits in the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius describes how a person who is going from good to better can learn, ever more easily, to recognise the good Spirit of God in the positive inner movements of consolation that he or she experiences (Exx 332–334). Indeed, when someone becomes accustomed to discerning the tactics of the bad spirit and to recognise the good Spirit at work in his or her interiority, the person will be able—after some time—to refer to the treasure of so many consolations, conserved interiorly in the heart. This ‘reserve’ of consolations will become a point of reference which helps that person to discern, with a growing certainty, when a consolation is true consolation.

This becomes still more clear in the seventh Rule for Discernment during the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises:

¹³ Iglesias, ‘*Discreta caritas*’, 608.

In the case of those who are going from good to better, the good angel touches the soul gently, lightly, and sweetly, like a drop of water going into a sponge When the soul is similar [in disposition to the good spirit], they enter silently, like those who go into their own house by an open door. (Exx 335)

Such a person recognises the good spirit out of a deep familiarity with God. Every true consolation deepens the intimacy with the Giver of all good. The more a person lives a deep familiarity with God and with all that is good, the more he or she will recognise the evil spirit in a false consolation immediately and faultlessly. The deeper his or her familiarity with God, the more the person's decisions will be led by God's Spirit, who is a Spirit of love. *Discreta caritas* becomes somehow connatural to him, to her.¹⁴

Discreta caritas is a gift from the Spirit of God. The Spirit is the fountain from which a more and more profound spiritual sensibility guides a person to find God in all things and to take the right decision in all circumstances. There is, however, no one clear definition of *discreta caritas*, as it should be interpreted within the context where it appears. *Discreta caritas* is the destination of a spiritual journey that never ends.

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¹⁴ See *Geestelijke Oefeningen van Ignatius van Loyola*, edited and translated by Mark Rotsaert, 2nd edn (Averbode: Gooi and Sticht, 2010), 242.

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FUTURE MISSION

An Uncertain Sound

Michael Campbell-Johnston and John B. McCluskey

For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?¹

‘**T**HE MISSIONARY is dead’, proclaims an article in a recent issue of *Christus*. An American missiologist tells an assembly of missionary societies: ‘Go home. Disband. The mission era of the Church is over.’ An elderly missionary from India, returning to his home Church for inspiration and encouragement, hears all this and exclaims with tears in his eyes: ‘I find myself shot down—from behind—by our own artillery’. These three events are symptomatic of an agonizing re-appraisal taking place throughout the Church. In every continent and culture missionaries are finding themselves being expelled from some countries and advised to leave others. Some simply pack their bags and ask to be withdrawn since they feel they are no longer wanted. And within the local Churches themselves, many of the faithful are torn between conflicting emotions of gratitude for what the missionaries have done and resentment that they should have done it, between the desire to be loyal and the resolve to be themselves. It is scarcely surprising that both expatriate and indigenous personnel are emitting uncertain sounds as they try to assess the situation and decide what moves to make.

In his address to missionary societies at their recent general assembly in Nottingham, Fr Musinsky, the superior general of the Divine Word Missionaries, identified three main causes for the present uncertainty.

This article first appeared in *The Way*, 14/4 (October 1974), 258–267; it is reprinted in memory of Michael Campbell-Johnston SJ. The language is of its time and has not been modified.

¹ 1 Corinthians 14:8 (KJV).

He spoke of 'the recognition by the Church in Vatican Council II that the grace of Christ is operative also outside the boundaries of the visible Church'. The implications of this for missionary effort are difficult to assess. Few have concluded to an abandonment of preaching Christ to non-Christians, 'but there is a larger group that speaks so optimistically of non-Christian religions, paints them in so favourable a light, that the only logical conclusion would be that we leave them to themselves'. A second cause is 'the strong emphasis today on human development'. Paul VI has said that development is a new word for peace; and the 1971 Synod of Bishops declared that it is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel. But when, as all too often, it is understood in purely material terms, 'the plea for development becomes anti-mission propaganda'. Let the Church devote its resources to the social and economic betterment of mankind rather than preaching Christ and the world to come!²

Fr Musinsky's third cause is, perhaps, for the individual missionary, the most fundamental and disturbing. He states:

Thirdly, there is the changed and still rapidly changing situation in the developing countries. The people in these countries have become aware of their dignity, their traditions, their culture. They would like to take their destiny into their own hands. And rightly so. They look back with anger on the age of colonialism. The missionary effort came to them from outside; it came together with colonialism; it has not yet completely freed itself of its colonial mentality.³

The crisis facing the missions is, of course, part of the crisis facing the universal Church, and must be seen in this broader context. But it is ironical that it should erupt at a moment when the Vatican Council has, to a large extent, redefined the Church in terms of mission. The very document on the Church is entitled *Lumen gentium*, and it clearly proclaims that the Church is,

Established by Christ as a communion of life, charity and truth ... also used by Him as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth (n.9)

² *The Way Forward*, privately produced by the National Missionary Council of England and Wales (London, 1973), 48–56.

³ *Way Forward*, 50.

The change lies in the meaning of the word 'mission'. It is here that the Council presents a completely new vision.

The old concept of what used to be known as 'the missionary movement' was of a complex and colossal worldwide operation wholly centralised in and directed from Rome. The Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith divided up the unevangelized world and assigned sections of it to the various missionary bodies. The many and varied missionary institutes provided the field units for the operation. The faithful of the home churches provided the backup in terms of prayer and material support.

This is the description of the superior general of the Mill Hill Missionaries in the report referred to above, and he goes on to note:

This was the missionary movement as we have known it, as it still exists in fact. This was the movement that set about winning the world for Christ in the wake of the colonialist expansion of modern times and achieved such remarkable results.⁴

But, as Fr Hanrahan goes on to point out, this movement, though highly professional in its personnel and approach, was exclusively clerical/religious and largely distinct from the life of the Church as a whole. As he rightly says:



'Folk Mass' in Michael Campbell-Johnston's parish, Georgetown, Guyana, 1968

⁴ Noel Hanrahan, 'The Missionary Societies and the Home Church', in *The Way Forward*, 3.

There was the Church—in the Old World—and there were the missions. The missions were an extra, something superadded, something without which the Church could still be the Church. It was not realized that the missions were in a true sense the very thing the Church is all about And so the individual missionary was looked upon, and looked upon himself, as a man apart, singled out by the holy Spirit for a task that did not belong to the general body of the faithful in any way.⁵

The Vatican Council has reminded us clearly that there is but one Church, and one mission which is entrusted to the whole Church. Inside this one Church there are ‘particular’ or ‘local’ churches. But, as Rahner has pointed out, these are not to be considered merely as administrative units of some,

... religious megallo-organization called the Church This is where the Christian of tomorrow will apprehend the actual nature of the Church, for this is where the most original religious and theological experience of the Church will take place: in the local community.⁶

In a recent and, as usual, authoritative study, de Lubac shows the depth of meaning this concept of ‘local Church’ had for the early Christians and how it in no way diminished the vigour of the universal Church.⁷

For this new outlook a new vocabulary has arisen. The Vatican Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church tends to avoid the word *missions* and, still more, *foreign missions*, and speaks rather of *young* or *new Churches*. The word *adaptation* has been replaced by clumsy terms such as *localisation*, *indigenisation* and *inculturation*. In other words, the task is no longer to take the Church, as it has already grown up in one culture, and adapt it to fit into another. The gospel is more like a seed which must be allowed to grow in each culture according to the nature of the place.

Each culture needs to develop a theology and a spirituality proper to itself. This does not mean that there can be no sharing or that dogmas will differ. But it does mean that we should expect the encounter with God and Christ to differ according to the climate, the natural

⁵ Hanrahan ‘Missionary Societies and the Home Church’, 2–3.

⁶ Karl Rahner, *The Church after the Council*, translated by Davis C. Herron and Rodelinde Albrecht (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 48–49.

⁷ Henri de Lubac, *Particular Churches in the Universal Church*, in *The Motherhood of the Church*, translated by Sergia England (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982).

surroundings, the temperament, the thought patterns, the language and the culture of each people. As Lonergan has stressed, the task of the Church is to spread the Christian message in such a way that it becomes 'not disruptive of the culture, not an alien patch superimposed upon it, but a line of development within the culture'.⁸

This is a far cry from the mere change of externals or personnel. People used to think that once the bishop and clergy were locally born and a few changes made in liturgical celebrations more in line with the culture, then the Church and the gospel would truly be indigenised. But the true localisation of a Church is not some quality added on to what already exists, a new flavour thrown into the soup, the superstructure of the house once the foundations have been firmly laid. It is rather an attitude, a way of looking at things, a cultural stance. And it has to begin at square one, with the first question in the catechism.

This applies to the locally born member of a Church, clerical or lay, just as much as it does to the foreign missionary. The vast majority of indigenous clergy are still trained abroad, where they tend to assimilate patterns of thought and attitudes that are inapplicable in their own countries. And when they do study at home, they find a theology and even pastoral methodology that are still dominated by and orientated towards European or North American needs. A positive effort has to be made to strip the gospel message of the cultural accretions with which it usually comes to us. For the process of decolonisation applies not only to the structures of the Church, but to its teaching as well. There are encouraging signs that it is already beginning to take place. In the theology of liberation, the Church in Latin America is developing a school of thought that is unmistakably its own. There was once a time when Rome was worried about 'Chinese rites': the wheel has now come full circle. The Asiatics are very worried about Roman rites—and are pressing their point without losing their oriental cool!

Where does all this leave the missionary societies and the Church 'at home'? A long time ago Ivan Illich, in a now notorious article, suggested that the Church in North America cease sending missionaries into South America.⁹ In the address already quoted, Fr Hanrahan sums

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⁸ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 362.

⁹ Ivan Illich, 'The Seamy Side of Charity', in *Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 53–68.

up: 'From all that has been gathered from the new insights of the Council, it has to be said that our Missionary Societies in their traditional structure belong to a movement or an era that is past'.¹⁰ He immediately adds that this is not to say they have had their day, but that drastic changes are required if they are to continue to serve a useful purpose.

One important new role stems from the universal obligation to mission that had already been mentioned. If each Christian has a duty to spread the Good News (note that this does not necessarily mean going abroad), diocesan and national missionary movements should be taking shape, which send 'ambassadors of Christ' to other Churches. Such a development will require a new relationship with the international missionary societies which, for the time being, still have a monopoly control of the missionary movement. And this, as Fr Hanrahan notes, involves a new perspective.

We must see ourselves as particular instruments or channels through which the local church may want to express its missionary concern. The perspective is quite different: we are at their service, not they at ours.¹¹

Another corollary of the universal Christian obligation to mission is that there is no reason why the exchange should be one way only. We can no longer speak only of giving to the young Churches: we must begin to see how we can receive from them. Why must we only send missionaries? Cannot we also send 'students'? There is real opportunity to explore the possibility that the best training experience for evangelizing Bermundsey or Boston is to be had in Bombay.

This relationship of 'home' and 'mission' is only one of the many fruitful topics open to the missionary societies to explore. There are many more. Decolonisation is not restricted to the political, economic or cultural fields: it has to happen in the Church too. National identity, which is a concern of young nations, must likewise be a concern of young Churches. Ecumenism of the narrower and wider variety creates a new atmosphere to work in, and a new attitude to work out. Secularisation, particularly where the state is taking over functions previously assigned to the Church and missions (schools, hospitals, and so on), imposes a

¹⁰ Hanrahan, 'Missionary Societies and the Home Church', 7.

¹¹ Hanrahan, 'Missionary Societies and the Home Church', 9.

search for new ministries and pastoral methods. All these are vital for future mission.

There is no way of devising a priori guidelines. And the days of referring back to base for further instructions are gone, because the people there are not the ones who know. There is much joint study, experiment and consultation to be done. The missionary societies will serve the Church best at present, it seems, if they give much of their time and effort to this pioneering task, rather than to bolstering up old structures. A recent pastoral study was entitled *Mission or Maintenance*.¹² For missionaries the choice is obvious, or should be.

If the missionary societies are rethinking their role, so also are the local Churches. And the main contribution they seem to be making is an attempt to give a voice to the people. In the past there has been much lip-service paid to the injunctions of the Vatican Council on the new role of the laity in the Church. There are now signs that things are changing indeed. There seem to be two reasons for this. One is that the expatriate missionaries are taking a close look at the results of many years of endeavour. And the ones who are looking the closest are the newer, younger missionaries, who are not content to do 'what has always been done', unless this can show itself to have been effective and to be still suited to the present needs of the people. Secondly, and perhaps more important, is the fact that the indigenous clergy and people are doing their own assessing, and raising questions or making evaluations that have never been made and, it must be said in fairness, could not have been made, before.

A good example of the first process is the assessment made by the Maryknoll Fathers of their work in southern Peru over a period of 25 years.

From the start, our men put great effort and dedication into education. The minor seminary which we established for Indian boys from the Altiplano was run with North American efficiency and in accord with Roman regulations, with little adaptation to the local situation ... hoping to produce numbers of celibate clerics like ourselves—men who would establish Catholic parishes of the type we were accustomed to in the Bronx, Boston or Chicago. We trained lay catechists, but our approach to them was hierarchical and paternalistic

¹² Michael Winter, *Mission or Maintenance: Study in New Pastoral Structures* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973).

We closed the minor seminary at Puno in early 1969. The end result of all the effort we had put into it had been disappointing. Of the eight hundred or so boys who had gone through the seminary in twenty-five years, only twelve or so by 1969 had achieved ordination as priests. And, as of 1969, less than half of the twelve were still active in the priesthood.

The priests who had been ordained seemed in several cases to be maladjusted, alienated from their original Indian backgrounds, and unhappy about serving in or preaching in the language (Quecha or Aymara) of the cultures from which they had sprung. The new theology of the laity ... led us to place more emphasis than previously upon training adult lay people, in addition to seeking new approaches to training clerics Our former lay catechists in Puno have now developed, in an impressive number of cases, into men with a deep faith in themselves and in their own capacity, who understand that they and their people are the local church (with us only in an ancillary position to help them), and who even now and without formal imposition of sacred orders are carrying out all the once exclusively clerical functions, other than saying Mass and hearing confessions.¹³

We have quoted this particular example at some length because it is typical not only of what the same Maryknoll Fathers found in other aspects of their work but also of what other missionaries in other parts of the world have also discovered. A missionary from Africa lists five priorities on the basis of his experience since renewal hit the continent.

1. Put your money, efforts, personnel into building up people, not schools, houses, churches or hospitals.
2. Build them up into self-convinced, self-supporting communities that can make their own way as soon as possible in Christianizing themselves and others.
3. Centre that community on a living Eucharist.
4. Let them be creative of their own style of Church rather than imposing our own western style.
5. Cultivate family as the unit of handing on the faith. This upside-down Church, built on a Eucharist of ordinary folk with their own spark of liveliness, their own genius of race, *is the threshold at which the missionary now stands.*¹⁴

¹³ William J. McIntire, *An Address to the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States* (January, 1971). Compare *Gisra* (June–September 1972), 29.

¹⁴ Desmond Sullivan, 'A Church of the Grass Roots', *The Outlook* (Spring, 1974), 7.

This new missionary, standing on his new threshold, shading his eyes against the warm glow of a setting, or maybe a rising, sun, is not going to give future mission its certain sound on his own. The Belgian Jesuits of *Lumen vitae* are not the authorities they might like to be on liberation theology and conscientisation in Latin America; the Dutch or American anthropologists cannot be the bearers of true indigenisation to the churches of Africa; the pastoral researches of the multinational and multilingual staff of the East Asian Pastoral Institute are important beginners but not the finishers of the job. They and we must, as Paulo Freire has reminded us, 'have faith in the people, solidarity with them'.¹⁵

Indigenisation is less an intellectual exercise and more a brave and humble experiment. It is more a listening than a teaching. It is more an act of faith in the universal salvific will of God and an expressed hope in the power of Christ to incarnate himself and his Church in all cultures. Renewal of mission is coming,

... not so much from the preaching of radical Christian leaders but from the faith of the little ones, and the fierce wind of the Spirit blowing among them. Somehow or other they are the little flock to whom it is our Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom.¹⁶



The East Asian Pastoral Institute today

¹⁵ Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 2000 edn (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard U, 2000), 35.

¹⁶ J. V. Taylor, 'Small Is Beautiful', *The International Review of Mission* (1971), 328.

What Sullivan described above as ‘this upside-down view of the Church’ has within it the potential to clarify the direction for future mission. Culture comprises all the basic elements that make a people themselves. The peoples and races of what are no longer to be categorized as ‘mission lands’ are standing ‘at the threshold of the genius of their races’, confronting and being confronted by the gospel. Time, history, evangelization in all its varied forms—from the positively inspired to the positively absurd—political, technical, social and theological education in all its vagaries, and renewed understanding of the nature of the Church, have all conspired to bring about a tremulous pause, while local Churches begin to think for themselves. Here is the local Church of Trinidad thinking for itself on the ‘Indigenization of the Church: What it is and what it is *not*’.

It is not merely a national or cultural phenomenon with no intrinsic relevance for the Church.

It is not a superficial identification with the tastes and the customs of the people.

It is not a wholesale acceptance of every national trait.

It is not parochialism or insularity—a home-made Church.

It is not an uncritical rejection of what is non-indigenous.

It is a genuine love of the people.

It is putting on the national mind and knowing the soul of the people.

It is concretizing, in preaching, worship, catechesis and lifestyle, this love and knowledge.

It is an appreciation, free from condescension, of national culture and its forms.

It is creating wholeness from the social fragmentation and healing divisiveness.

It is the labour of studying the record of the nation, its history, literature, art, family patterns, social habits etc.

It is labouring to create fraternal communities throughout the country, where each community will be the Church in microcosm.

It is the foreign clergy helping the local church to become itself.

It is the creation and implementation of a diocesan policy suited to the Church’s needs.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Indigenization: An Inescapable Challenge for Proclaiming the Gospel of Christ Effectively in Trinidad and Tobago Today and Tomorrow*, a report to the Priests’ Conference of 1974.

Where is the foreign missionary in all this? Has he still a role to play? Can he make any contribution towards the building of a local church where the emphasis is on indigenisation and increasing lay participation? Cardinal Zoungrana of the Upper Volta answered these questions in the name of the African bishops when addressing superiors general of missionary institutes in Kampala in 1972:

I wish to speak above all to the missionary institutes and to tell them how much we would be indebted to them if they would not fall into the mistake of some missionaries who think they have to leave Africa in order to enable the Church of Africa to become African. What an illusion! They should rather stay on, simply changing their mentality into a spirit of service to the Church of Africa.¹⁸

But the 'changing of mentality' is not so simple. It requires a conscious effort that can prove to be both exacting and painful. In a paper written after an extensive tour of Africa, Fr Victor Mertens, assistant for Africa to the General of the Jesuits, mentions five areas where radical changes in attitude will be necessary. First, a new attitude of service, inspired by the words of John the Baptist before Christ, 'He must increase, but I must decrease' (John 3:30), must be motivated by a conviction on the part of the missionary that his future role is to help the local Church and no longer manage it. This may entail, in the short run, being less efficient and seeing things done at a slower pace. Second, and as a corollary to the above, is a willingness to learn from others. The missionary of the future comes not only to teach and give, but to learn and receive. This attitude is that of St Paul: 'I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you'. Then he immediately adds, as if correcting himself: 'or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine' (Romans 1:11–12). Thirdly, the missionary will have to accept feeling himself, on many occasions, more tolerated than wanted. Fourthly, he will have to accept living on in insecurity with the possibility that his apostolate may suddenly be stopped after many years. Finally, and as a result of the above, is the impossibility of long-term planning.¹⁹

The missionary of the future comes not only to teach and give, but to learn and receive

¹⁸ *Way Forward*, 56.

¹⁹ See Victor Mertens, 'The Society of Jesus in Africa and Madagascar', *Yearbook of the Society of Jesus* (1971–1972), 7–150.

Obviously such changes in attitude call for a great degree of humility and flexibility. They also require an openness of mind and acceptance of change to a far greater degree than was considered necessary in the past. But if the missionary of the future can stand up to this challenge, if he or she can really identify with the aspirations, goals and dreams of the local Church, then there is no reason why the missionary should either disappear or go home. What must disappear is the old mentality.

In the final analysis, however, the task of evangelization and future mission lies more in the hands of the local Church than of the foreign missionary. And while local Churches may still speak with uncertain voices, the fact that they have begun to speak is perhaps the most important and encouraging development of all. In their 1973 annual conference at Lourdes, the French bishops declared: 'This journey towards a Church based on the responsibility of all its members opens up immense perspectives. This journey is possible and urgent. To embark on it is to commit oneself to a road of hope.'²⁰ The hope for future mission is that the emerging local Churches, truly indigenised and with full lay participation, will retune the trumpet of St Paul and give it a certain sound, a catholic sound.

Michael Campbell-Johnson SJ (1931–2023) worked with Pedro Arrupe during the 1970s in developing the Jesuit social apostolate worldwide. He then moved to El Salvador for some years, coordinating the work of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Central America, before being recalled to Britain to serve a term as provincial. His last posting was as parish priest in St Francis of Assisi parish in Barbados, before returning to the UK in 2010. He passed away on 13 September 2023.

John B. McCluskey SJ (1926–1991) spent most of his life as a missionary in Guyana, working in catechetics, teaching and later in the Faith and Justice office. He died shortly after his return to Britain to join the Craighead Institute of Life and Faith in Glasgow.

²⁰ National Catholic Welfare Conference, *New Release* (7 November 1973).

A REFLECTION ON SPIRITUAL MOTHERHOOD

Loan Le

TRADITIONALLY, when speaking of spiritual motherhood, we often think of the task of caring for souls. Donald Guglielmi explores what this meant for the Desert Mothers: ‘The spiritual mother should be “full of concern, and a lover of souls”’; ‘the spiritual mother must pray for her spiritual children’; ‘the spiritual mother must be a teacher of the souls under her guidance, with a view to generating virtue in them’.¹ These understandings of spiritual motherhood are true; nevertheless they seem limited in today’s culture, especially in relation to Vatican II.

Religious sisters in different congregations all over the world have exercised spiritual motherhood in various ways. I should like to use the stories of two congregations in the Central Highlands of Vietnam to illuminate aspects of spiritual motherhood today, and how sisters have taken on this role for Vietnam’s ethnic minorities, helping these people to escape their poverty, to preserve their cultural values while amending some traditional practices, and to enhance their well-being in order to live in the dignity of the children of God.

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country with over 50 distinct population groups: 54 are officially recognised by the Vietnamese government. Each has its own language, lifestyle and cultural heritage. The largest group is the Kinh; the rest are smaller, normally called ethnic minority groups. The Kinh use the Vietnamese language; the rest have their own languages. Most of the ethnic minority groups live in the mountains and plateau areas including the Central Highlands; hence, they are usually called the Montagnards.²

¹ Donald A. Guglielmi, *Staritsa: The Spiritual Motherhood of Catherine Doherty* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2018), 11 (quoting Benedicta Ward), 14, 15.

² The Central Highlands were the place that belonged to the Degar people, whose name literally means the ‘Sons of the Mountains’. The Degar were referred to by French colonists as Montagnard, meaning ‘mountain people’.

Vietnam's ethnic minorities, who tend to live mostly in remote rural areas, typically have lower living standards than the ethnic majority Differences in levels of living are due in part to the fact that the minorities live in less productive areas characterized by difficult terrain, poor infrastructure, less access to off-farm work and the market economy, and inferior access to education.³

Religious Congregations in the Central Highlands

Sisters of the Miraculous Medal

One of the most influential religious communities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam is the Sisters of the Miraculous Medal of Mary. This congregation was founded by Bishop Jean Sion on 6 April 1947 in Kon Tum, a missionary area, out of the need for 'native Catholic mothers' for the Montagnards.⁴ The founder intended that Miraculous Medal sisters should prioritise caring for people who belonged to ethnic minority groups. According to him, 'native mothers' with the same language and culture were best suited to bring the Good News to these people.



The Miraculous Medal sisters celebrate their 70th anniversary in Kon Tum cathedral, 2017

³ Dominique van de Walle and Dileni Gunewardena, 'Sources of Ethnic Inequality in Viet Nam', World Bank Development Research Group: Public Economics and Rural Development, Policy Research Working Paper 2297 (March 2000), 18.

⁴ The account of the sisters of the Miraculous Medal of Mary is taken from the unpublished 'History of the Miraculous Medal of Mary Congregation, Kon Tum Diocese' (in Vietnamese, my translation).

The sisters of Miraculous Medal come from the Jarai, Sedang, Bahnar, Rongao, H'Lan, Yeh, Xơdrăh and Jolon groups.

Since all its members are women from ethnic minority groups, according to sister Imelda Y Biut, its general leader, the congregation is distinguished by a unique cultural 'matriarchiality'. In ancient times most of the ethnic minority tribes were matriarchal: women had a central place both in the family and in wider society. In the matriarchal culture of some minority groups, such as the Ede, 'women have been not only family leaders but also village chiefs in charge of land management and resolution of disputes'. Women also take the initiative in marriage, and children bear their mother's surname.⁵ Although today society has gradually become more patriarchal under the influence of the Chinese, the mother still plays an important role in educating children and preserving the cultural identity of the nation.⁶ Thus, these 'native Catholic mothers' actually perform the role of mother within their villages.

Drawing upon the matriarchal wisdom of their communities, the sisters have helped women and children by opposing the traditional customs of *Dor tom amí* and *Joă ană*. *Dor tom amí* is the practice of burying an infant alive with the mother if she dies in labour. Since life in the deep forest is inherently poor and harsh, if the mother dies, a baby will starve without being breastfed; so it is believed that this custom will help the child go to the world of ghosts to be cared for by his or her mother. This practice mainly occurred among the Bahnar, Jarai and Jê Trieng tribes who live in the jungles of the north west Central Highlands, however, it spread with nomadic groups to the Sedang, S'Ra and Ede tribes in other remote rural areas.⁷

The other custom is *Joă ană* (*Joă* is to step on, *ană* is a child)—step on and kill the child—a practice prevalent in the Jarai tribe. Traditionally, a Jarai teenage girl is free to sleep with her lover. When the girl gets married, if the husband suspects the first child is not his, he has the right to ask his wife or the midwife to *Joă ană* the baby. If she is forced to do this by herself, the woman, who has just recovered after giving birth, will have to take her child to the forest, use a dagger to dig a

⁵ Nga Anh, 'The Ede Matriarchal System', *Voice of Vietnam* (16 December 2013), at <http://vovworld.vn/en-US/colorful-vietnamvietnams-54-ethnic-groups/the-edematriarchal-system-202445.vov>, accessed 11 November 2023.

⁶ Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2005), 32.

⁷ Hoàng Thiên Nga, 'Hủ Tục Rừng Rợn Giữa Thâm Sơn, Củng Cốc', *Tiền Phong* (23 July 2013), at <https://www.tienphong.vn/xa-hoi/hu-tuc-rung-ron-giua-tham-son-cung-coc-637972.tpo>, accessed 11 November 2023.

deep hole, and bury her baby with the head to the bottom of the hole, so that the ghost of the baby will not know the way to come back home. Then she must fill and step on the hole while being supervised by her husband.⁸ Some midwives or poor wives, knowing that a child was about to be killed, have fled their villages and run to the Miraculous Medal sisters for help.

Children who had escaped from these practices were first brought to the Miraculous Medal sisters in 1947. Currently, the sisters have six houses caring for about 800 ethnic minority orphans, children with disabilities and children in difficult situations of various ages. Many were rescued from *Dor tom amí* and *Joã anã*. Each house is considered to be a family for the children, and in each the sisters become mothers, loving, caring for and nurturing them. The sisters also work to abolish *Dor tom amí* and *Joã anã* by visiting and guiding people in the villages.

Knowing their own culture, its beauty as well as its evils, and speaking their own native language, the Miraculous Medal sisters are able to attract the people and move their hearts right in their own villages. As Phu Khang, a journalist, has observed:

There are huge differences in language, culture and *sensum fidei* existing between the Montagnard and the Kinh. The tribal lifestyle, a sense of belonging and gathering with only their own people within a tribe goes deep into the subconscious of the Montagnards These have created barriers when missionaries visit them. When the Miraculous Medal sisters were founded, the difficulty was gradually removed. Coming from the very rural villages themselves, the sisters understand the customs, thoughts and culture of their compatriots well the sisters have created trust and at the same time received love from their own people.⁹

The Sisters of Mary Queen of Peace

The other community to serve the Central Highlands of Vietnam is the Sisters of Mary Queen of Peace, which receives young women irrespective of their Montagnard or Kinh origins.¹⁰ However, since the congregation inherits a Kinh culture, until now it has only had a small number of ethnic minority sisters. This congregation was founded by

⁸ Hoàng, 'Hủ Tục Rừng Rợn Giữa Thâm Sơn, Củng Cốc'.

⁹ Phú Khang, 'Vai Gầy Gánh Vác Thương Yêu', *Công Giáo và Dân Tộc*, http://www.cgvdt.vn/cong-giao-viet-nam/vai-gay-ganh-vac-thuong-yeu_a2396, accessed 11 November 2023.

¹⁰ The account of the sisters of Mary Queen of Peace is taken from the unpublished 'History of the Mary Queen of Peace Congregation, Ban Me Thuot Diocese' (in Vietnamese, my translation).

Bishop Paul Léon Seitz MEP in Kon Tum, and was officially established by Bishop Peter Nguyen Huy Mai in Bon Ma Thuot, Dak Lak on 31 May 1969. According to the founder's intention, the congregation was created 'in the specific context of the Highlands in order to have apostles sent to the ethnic minority groups scattered throughout the region'.¹¹

Ban Me Thuot diocese is extensive, including the provinces of Dak Lak, Dak Nong and a part of Binh Phuoc. All three provinces of the diocese have indigenous people living in them, with more than forty ethnic minority groups. According to Bishop Nguyen,

The congregation must make these people its priority, because they are 'the poor' and 'the little', according to the meaning of scripture: they are to be the first and foremost in the apostolic works of the congregation.¹²

Bishop Nguyen considered that 'living among the ethnic minority people and serving them is a special gift'.¹³ Thus, the sisters chosen and sent to be missionaries among these marginalised people must appreciate the gift of their calling, using their talents in the cause of their particular mission.¹⁴

However, because it is a congregation whose language and culture belong to the Kinh group, at first the Mary Queen of Peace sisters could not enter the villages to serve these people as the Miraculous Medal sisters had done, but had to spend time learning the languages, culture, beliefs and customs of these indigenous people. As the Second Vatican Council has taught:

All missionaries ... each according to their own state, should be prepared and trained, lest they be found unequal to the demands of their future work. From the very beginning, their doctrinal training should be so planned that it takes in both the universality of the Church and the diversity of the world's nations. This holds for all of their studies ... that they may have a general knowledge of the peoples, cultures, and religions; not only a knowledge that looks to the past, but one that considers the present time. For anyone who is going to encounter another people should have a great esteem for their patrimony and their language and their customs.¹⁵

¹¹ Nguyen Huy Mai, 'Commentary on the Constitution of the Mary Queen of Peace Congregation' (unpublished document in Vietnamese, my translation), n. 49.

¹² Nguyen, 'Commentary on the Constitution', n. 49.

¹³ Nguyen, 'Commentary on the Constitution', n. 4.

¹⁴ *Constitution of the Mary Queen of Peace Congregation* (1977), n. 49.

¹⁵ *Ad gentes*, n. 26, quoted in Nguyen, *Commentary on the Constitution*, n. 50.

In 1970 a house of formation for the congregation was established at Ea Kmar, a village belongs to the Ede group. By living among the people, the sisters would be able to learn their language, culture and way of life before being sent to other places on mission. At the same time, they would have opportunities to exercise their missionary tasks.

After the end of the Vietnam War and the beginning of Communist rule, the country went through a painful time with restrictions imposed in many areas, including on religious activity. The sisters could not meet directly with people in the villages. Their missionary work was prohibited, but they continued in a secret and more contemplative way. They saw and met their children in prayer, and in sacrifice through hard, laborious works on farms.

From the 1990s onwards the Mary Queen of Peace sisters were able to go out to the villages again, providing programmes to help people and alleviate their poverty. They addressed illiteracy and, in some villages, the practice of child marriage. Most children were not going to school, or school was a sham: they were still passing classes every year but did not know how to read and write. The sisters gathered the children together and asked educated villagers to help teach them. 'Under the sheltered huts, with the patience of the unlicensed teachers, many children could gradually learn how to read, write and count.'¹⁶ The sisters also took some children to towns and cities to give them a better and fuller education.

The sisters started to establish boarding houses for ethnic minority children. So far, there are five boarding houses for children from many different villages; in the Thérèse Boarding House in Bon Ma Thuot city, for example, there are children from fourteen different ethnic groups. When many children with different languages, customs and cultural backgrounds come to live together under the same roof, it is a big challenge for the sisters. The early days were very hard; the biggest obstacle was to help the children overcome their homesickness. It difficult for children who used to live a free life in the countryside to adapt to a new way of life in a boarding house. In addition, they have to make a big effort to learn Vietnamese (a 'foreign' language for them) in order to go to school. Missing home and not wanting to study, some children ran away and walked more than 100 kilometres back to their villages. With great efforts, the sisters are trying to find better ways to help these children.

¹⁶ Võ Quới, 'Có Một Mái Nhà Mang Tên Têrêsa', *Công Giáo và Dân Tộc*, http://www.cgvdt.vn/cong-giao-viet-nam/co-mot-mai-nha-mang-ten-teresa_a3674.



Girls learning brocading techniques at the Thérèse Boarding House

Gradually, the boarding houses are now becoming the children's second family. The sisters try to make them feel at home, so that the bigger boys and girls serve as big brothers and sisters. They help to prepare meals, clean the house and look after the smaller ones—washing clothes for them and so on. The sisters also help the children to preserve their own culture. Every afternoon after school, the boarding house is turned into a model of village life. Some of the children learn about agriculture; some learn to make handicrafts in the workshop. Girls learn how to brocade: recognising that the traditional brocade-weaving of tribal people is gradually disappearing, the sisters visit the elderly who know how to weave brocade in the villages and ask them to pass on their skills to girls from the boarding house. These young girls have learnt how to weave and even create the brocade of their own tribal regions.

Wishing the children to 'understand perfectly the way of thinking and judging, as expressed in their culture', the sisters have facilitated many different programmes for teaching them.¹⁷ Music runs deep in their blood and their souls. Each tribal group has its own kind of music, which draws people together. Thus, gongs and traditional instruments have

¹⁷ *Gaudium et spes*, n. 62.

been introduced to help the younger generation preserve, promote and gain awareness of the values of their own culture. In order to give them the opportunity to develop their talents and skills, the sisters not only organize talent contests, but also seek contracts at tourist centres so the children can have the chance to perform. As the sister in charge said, 'it is a way to help the children encounter the outside world with confidence, and also to let them be proud of their country's musical culture'.

Following the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, the sisters have sought and found ways to preserve the cultural identity of ethnic minority communities.¹⁸ They have made great efforts to find, collect and promote the cultural heritage of the region, particularly the epics, which are currently in danger of disappearing. The ethnic minority people in the Central Highlands used to live in isolated areas, so epic telling was almost the means of entertainment for them. 'On rainy days, post-harvest days, or during festivals, epics are recited. Sometimes, artists are invited to rice fields to entertain farmers working there.'¹⁹

Most importantly, the boarding house is a convenient environment for the children to be cultivated and nourished in their Christian faith. They regularly attend Mass and receive the sacraments, learning about liturgical life; they are also trained as catechists so they can serve their compatriots when returning to their villages. At the same time, they have the opportunity to learn about vocations in the life of the Church; some are now religious sisters and brothers in different religious institutes.

By taking the children out of their villages to the boarding houses, the Mary Queen of Peace sisters have had many opportunities to interact with their parents and the villagers, thereby helping to suppress unsound traditional customs such as child marriage. Owing to parents' lack of knowledge and poverty, the practice of child marriage continues among some groups in remote areas of Dak Lak province. Some children get married as young as thirteen or fourteen years old; then they drop out of school and stay at home. Step by step, the sisters have also helped the villagers end practices inappropriate to Christian morality, such as couples living together as husband and wife as soon as they are engaged.

¹⁸ See Joachim Pham, 'Sisters Preserve Ethnic Groups' Cultures by Collecting Ancient Artifacts', *Global Sisters Report* (27 August 2015), at <https://globalsistersreport.org/news/sisters-preserve-ethnic-groups%E2%80%99-cultures-collecting-ancient-artifacts-29811>, accessed 11 November 2023; and *Gaudium et spes*, n. 62.

¹⁹ Thu Hoa, 'Epic—A Distinctive Culture of the Ede', *Voice of Vietnam* (13 January 2014), at <https://vovworld.vn/en-US/colorful-vietnamvietnams-54-ethnic-groups/epic-a-distinctive-culture-of-the-edes-208955.vov>, accessed 11 November 2023.

Understanding Spiritual Motherhood

In order to become ‘mothers’ to Montagnard children and so help them escape from physical, material and spiritual poverty, and live appropriately to the dignity of a human-that-God-wills, the sisters, like Jesus, are to live the mystery of *kenosis* (see Philippians 2:6–8). In other words, to give birth to these spiritual children, the sisters, first of all, must learn to *become like* them and to *live like* them.

Through this, the sisters may then help the Montagnard people to adapt to modern circumstances and gradually to eliminate customs injurious to women and children that have been ingrained in their consciousness. Particularly, by inculturation, the sisters have been able to invite them to the Christian faith. Perhaps it is not as easy for the Mary Queen of Peace sisters to approach the Montagnard people as for the Miraculous Medal sisters, given the differences of language and culture, but love conquers and overcomes all. As time passes, these mothers have gradually converted their Montagnard children, by their love, care and patience.

The numerous works that the Miraculous Medal sisters and the Mary Queen of Peace sisters have been doing for ethnic minority people—suppressing injurious customs, preserving culture and promoting cultural values—may appear to be simple and non-extraordinary things, and not ‘spiritual’ at all. But something truly ‘spiritual’ is hidden in all those works because they are drawn from love: love for God and love for neighbour. Maternal care, in a spiritual way, is not limited to the soul but should be active in all phases of a person’s life. Spiritual mothering is loving and serving a person according to the needs of the whole person. Doing simple things exceedingly well under guidance of the Holy Spirit for love of God is the way to exercise spiritual motherhood.

In helping people to preserve their particular and unique culture, the sisters are truly bearers of the Holy Spirit, cooperating to preserve God’s creation, and thus exercising the role of spiritual mothers for God’s people. The rich cultures of the ethnic minorities represent a uniquely democratic and communitarian idea, and also reveal the beauty and richness of God’s creation. These cultures have had a profound and often spiritual effect on the ethnic minorities themselves, and also on the settlers and visitors who have encountered them in recreation and exploration. In preserving them, the sisters have displayed a spiritual commitment to affirm God’s sacred values for all ethnic minority people.

Spiritual mothering is loving and serving a person according to the needs of the whole person



Boys learning to make traditional musical instruments at Thérèse Boarding House

Indeed, it can be seen that these rich cultures are the common treasure of all God's people; they belong not just to the ethnic minority people themselves, but to all of us. As God's creation, these sacred cultural values are the cultural values of all people. Implicit in this is the notion that the beauty of a culture ought to be shared among all people, and that the ideals of God's children oblige us to protect everyone's right to enjoy the majesty and wonder of creation, to savour the beauty of different cultures. To use the words of Nancy Pearcey,

Our calling is not just to 'go to heaven' but also to cultivate the earth, not just to 'save souls' but also to serve God through our work. For God himself is engaged not only in the work of salvation but also in the work of preserving and developing His creation.²⁰

By saving the lives of children and helping people to understand the deeper meaning of marriage, the sisters have gradually helped the ethnic minority people to adapt and integrate themselves into modern society, while preserving the heart of their culture. In doing so, the sisters are participating in God's creation and Jesus' redemption. Again, in this practical reality, the sisters as God's workers, thus, are exercising the spiritual motherhood for God's people.

The spiritual motherhood of the sisters springs from their union with Jesus. By giving themselves 'to Jesus in an exclusive and permanent

²⁰ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 48.

union that expresses itself in nonmarriage to anyone else', religious sisters received from Jesus the capacity of spiritual fertility in order to cooperate with the grace of the Spirit.²¹ This capacity makes the sisters a channel of grace to others. Here, read from the perspective of indigenous, matriarchal wisdom, we can agree with *Mulieris dignitatem*:

Spousal love always involves a special readiness to be poured out for the sake of those who come within one's range of activity. In marriage this readiness, even though open to all, consists mainly in the love that parents give to their children. In virginity this readiness is open to all people who are embraced by the love of Christ the Spouse.²²

The sisters' consecrated celibacy for God's Kingdom is characteristic of a love and fruitfulness which constitutes spiritual motherhood.

When a religious sister discovers her role in the divine marriage with Jesus and expresses this role in her way of life with a spousal love, personally attaching herself to God, she will receive from Christ a supernatural fertility. This is expressed in the life of sisters who live the apostolic life as well as in the contemplative life; they express their spiritual motherhood differently according to their way of life. In the words of *Mulieris dignitatem*:

Spiritual motherhood takes on many different forms. In the life of consecrated women, for example, who live according to the charism and the rules of the various apostolic Institutes, it can express itself as concern for people, especially the most needy: the sick, the handicapped, the abandoned, orphans, the elderly, children, young people, the imprisoned and, in general, people on the edges of society. In this way a consecrated woman finds her Spouse, different and the same in each and every person, according to his very words: 'As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me'. (Matthew 25:40)²³

Applications—What Then Must We Do?

Spiritual motherhood is a ministry of religious sisters. This ministry is, to use Sandra Schneiders's words, 'the prophetic action' through which religious carry out their mission of fostering the Reign of God in a

²¹ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy, and Community in Catholic Religious Life* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist, 2001), 10.

²² John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem*, n. 21.

²³ *Mulieris dignitatem*, n. 21.

concrete historical situation.²⁴ In exercising this prophetic action, religious are therefore not simply proclaiming the gospel in general or in the abstract, but *in a particular situation*.

The role of religious sisters as spiritual mothers has experienced profound change according to ‘the signs of the times’. In the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, the ministerial choices of religious sisters have been increasingly directed towards the poor and the marginalised in society. Their exercise of spiritual motherhood, therefore, has moved from a matter purely of the soul into ‘a matter of sharing deeply in the experience of one’s fellow human beings’, especially those living in conditions of great oppression.²⁵

This new ministry represents the sisters’ love for God incarnated in their love of neighbour. Thus, they do not have a twofold end: their end is love of God and neighbour, which are interrelated. Their ministry of spiritual motherhood is not something they *do* to express who they are but is intrinsic to who they are. Particularly for apostolic religious sisters, the first and the second commandment have become one. Love of God and loving service of God’s people are no longer juxtaposed projects; they are, as Schneiders has put it, ‘the inhaling and the exhaling of one life totally consecrated to God by perpetual profession of the vows and poured out in total self-gift in ministry’.²⁶ For apostolic religious sisters, the ministry of spiritual motherhood must thus become intrinsic to their vocation.

This ministry, is, first, to foster the Reign of God—‘As you go, proclaim the good news, “The kingdom of heaven has come near”. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.’²⁷ (Matthew 10:7–8) When what the sisters do for others involves the proclamation of the gospel specifically through the service of their neighbour, it becomes ministry, which is more than simply something done with a good intention or to produce some good effect. Secondly, this ministry necessarily involves giving freely. ‘You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in

²⁴ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World* (New York: Paulist, 2013), 256.

²⁵ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context* (New York: Paulist, 2000), 326.

²⁶ Sandra M. Schneiders, ‘Discerning Ministerial Religious Life Today: Its Past, Present, and Future’, in *Prophets in Their Own Country: Women Religious Bearing Witness to the Gospel in a Troubled Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2011), 61–62; and see Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 271–272.

²⁷ The notion of ministry discussed here is adopted from Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 258–266.

your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food.' (Matthew 10:9–10) That is, the exercise of spiritual motherhood is to be free; it is not a way of 'generating income but a way of enriching others' by the effective announcement of the Good News. Here Schneiders gives us a good advice:

Ministers of the Gospel are not to take precautions about their support, about making a living, because they have a right to expect that their needs will be adequately met if they are faithful to preaching the Gospel.²⁸

Moreover, the sisters' ministry of spiritual motherhood is 'neither a job nor a career'.²⁹ As an expression of God's mission, this ministry is a participation in Jesus' mission for the coming of God's Reign in this world. Therefore, religious may change from one work to another when serving people, may retire from works, but never retire from the ministry itself.

The art of spiritual motherhood requires concern for the whole being of a person, not just the soul. This leads the spiritual mother to see and discover the spiritual perspectives in things which do not necessarily seem 'spiritual' at all. If the intention to do those things is drawn from love—love for God and love for neighbour—then all those works are in fact truly spiritual. Also, those 'unspiritual' works will be seen as acts expressing the sisters' spiritual motherhood if the sisters let the Holy Spirit lead them to do those works in the Spirit's way.

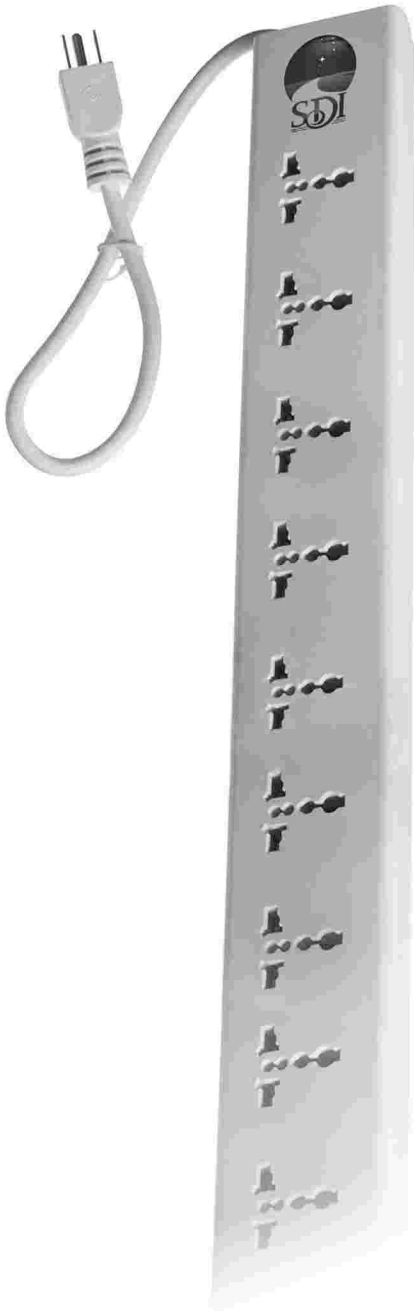
Spiritual works are truly connected with social realities of the kind encountered by the Miraculous Medal Sisters and the Sisters of Mary Queen of Peace. Thus, spiritual motherhood is a ministry of expressing and revealing the love for God and for others in and through ordinary human activity. It is a call to immediacy to God which enables the sisters to see God in all things and see all things in God (Exx 230–237). The central identity of the spiritual motherhood is Jesus and his mission. In this ministry, religious sisters embrace the priority of the seeking God in and through the service of God's people.

Loan Le is a sister of the Mary Queen of Peace Congregation in Vietnam. She is currently teaching theology at the Catholic Institute of Vietnam.

²⁸ Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 279, 260.

²⁹ Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 100.

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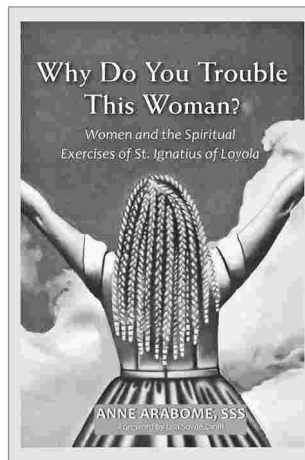


Spiritual Directors International

RECENT BOOKS

Anne Arabome, *Why Do You Trouble This Woman? Women and the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2022). 978 0 8091 5616 0, pp.160, \$19.95.

The title of this book—perhaps off-putting at first glance—could be fine-tuned by the Jerusalem Bible rendering of the same question: ‘Why are you upsetting her?’ The words are taken from the account of the anointing of Jesus at Bethany, when the disciples express their indignation at seeing a woman of ill repute not only engaging with Jesus in what Arabome calls ‘a silent heart-to-heart conversation’ (65), but using all her senses and feelings to do so. Jesus however, far from rejecting the woman, welcomes her extravagant gesture, and asks the disciples why they are troubling her.



Arabome maintains that this scene illustrates two important points: first, a profoundly ‘embodied’ way of relating to Jesus, and second, the fact that ‘women, through no fault of their own, have always had trouble in gaining access to Jesus’ (xvii). Against this background, she sees the *Spiritual Exercises* as a path of deep friendship for women: ‘friendship with themselves, friendship with Jesus, and friendship with the Divine’ (60). It is her view that women have a natural affinity for Ignatian spirituality and she believes that by following Ignatius’ pathway to contemplative prayer, they learn to deepen their relationship with God in a way that is ‘spiritually personal, intimate, fulfilling, profound and life-affirming (xix).

The author’s familiarity with the text and terminology of the *Spiritual Exercises* comes from her involvement in Ignatian retreats, both as directee and director. Her experience in this field has led her to recognise that women are not peripheral to what she calls ‘the adventure’ of Ignatian spirituality, but have played and continue to play a pivotal role in its development. Arabome calls her potential reader ‘the woman of the Exercises’, portraying this person as a conflation of ‘three classes of women’ (a parallel to Ignatius’ meditation on ‘the three classes of men’, Exx 149).

The first is a woman who is curious about the Exercises, wondering whether this spiritual journey is right for her; the second is familiar with Ignatian spirituality, has found it invaluable in her spiritual life, and wishes to revisit the process of the Exercises as a way of deepening her relationship with God; the third is a woman engaged in the ministry of spiritual companionship, happy to guide others on the path to a deeper prayer life by sharing with them the mystical wisdom that lies at the heart of the Exercises.

Arabome has a deep respect for Ignatius' spiritual vision but, recognising that he was a man of his times, she does not downplay the androcentric, militaristic language of parts of the *Spiritual Exercises*, or the 'masculinity' of some scripture texts he recommends for meditation. She believes that certain women played an integral part in his formative years, and that their influence was far-reaching for the development of Ignatian spirituality. She argues that the idea that the *Spiritual Exercises* was composed by a man exclusively for men—with the implication that it would have little to say to women—is seriously flawed. She knows, from her own experience and from her ministry of spiritual accompaniment, that Ignatius' method of scriptural meditation and contemplation—relishing the mystery of God's presence in the retreatant's lived reality and 'finding God in all things'—together with his encouragement to speak to God 'as friend speaks to friend', resonates deeply with many women.

The author, who is Nigerian, makes no apology for what she calls the 'African flavour' of her book, and each chapter starts with an African proverb. She is conscious that it is probably because of her background that she is able to tune in so readily to the style of spirituality fashioned by Ignatius. The whole book is enhanced by the gifts of her culture—a spontaneous openness to the spiritual dimension of life and living, directness (shown, for example, in her frank critique of the male-dominated stereotypes she finds in the text of the *Spiritual Exercises*), and above all, her lively and imaginative storytelling.

In chapter 5 she explains that storytelling is an integral part of life in African countries, where from an early age, 'children gather around adults or among themselves and listen to stories ... each containing a lesson for life' (89). She sees a parallel to this approach in the *Spiritual Exercises*, where Ignatius, in storytelling mode, presents the gospel narratives as events in the life of Jesus, encouraging the retreatant to imagine the scene and, as an active participant, to become involved in what is happening.

An added benefit of *Why Do You Trouble This Woman?* is that the author wrote it not simply as a book about prayer, but as an exercise in prayer. For this reason, each chapter ends with a guided meditation, in which the reader is encouraged to consider prayerfully its Ignatian themes and to ponder the insights received. Arabome concludes with a confident claim: 'were Ignatius

to see what a splendid thing women have made and continue to make of Ignatian spirituality, he would concede that woman trouble is good trouble!' (132) In my view, her analysis of the Spiritual Exercises seen from the perspective of women dynamically supports this claim. Highly recommended.

Teresa White FCJ

Richard Lischer, *Our Hearts Are Restless: The Art of Spiritual Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford U, 2023). 978 0 1976 4904 6, pp.400, £26.99.

Richard Lischer tells us that his superb study of 'spiritual memoirs', *Our Hearts Are Restless*, was shaped by the disorientating experience of the pandemic. When such unsettling times overtake us, we seek personal stories to provide us with a sense of direction. The writing of memoirs thrives as things fall apart. So too does the reading of them. 'As you explore the stories of others', says Lischer, not averse to the occasional little joke, 'you find yourself chasing your own tales' (1).

The 22 chapters of this exceptionally impressive volume, each a substantial monograph, offer close readings of lives lived attentive to the touch of the transcendent, 'lives construed as if in the presence of God' (4). Such lives provide material for the spiritual memoir, a genre met in many forms—Lischer identifies seven trajectories or 'plots' to such narratives—but all to be distinguished from lives lived indifferent to the Beyond. So it is not absurd that between the covers of this one book we meet both Augustine of Hippo and a snake-handling journalist from rural Alabama. Both are stumbling home to God.

And both appeal to our author personally. He is not compiling a standard work for a university reading list in which subjective preferences must be set aside. Above all he is drawn to books written with the grace of which they speak. There are pious writers aplenty who aspire to edify us but do not always ring true. Richard Lischer avoids them. Lischer has a remarkably acute empathy with those whose stories he tells. This rare attunement of writer and subject is nowhere more evident than in his discussion of the two towering figures who resonate most powerfully with him: Augustine and Thomas Merton.



We might have supposed that we knew Augustine's *Confessions* well. Lischer's commentary on this great text repeatedly shows us how much we have missed. Augustine watches Ambrose, bishop of Milan, reading. He notices that the great man doesn't move his lips, 'Oh my', exclaims Lischer, inviting us to share Augustine's astonishment, 'he reads silently!' (38) Thomas Merton is 'the nearest thing to a twentieth-century Augustine' (40), Lischer asserts. Few will challenge this estimate of a writer who continues to thrill us by his peerless account of the journey of faith in a world that has lost its way. Many of us look back on our first reading of *The Seven Storey Mountain* as a kind of rebirth, an awakening to the reality of what we might let ourselves in for if we begin to take Christianity seriously—whether or not we become professed religious. Merton, in lifelong flight from himself, never ceased from writing about himself. And here—if it's not ungrateful to ask for more from such a generous writer—we might wish to draw Lischer a little further.

The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton records Merton's visit in 1968 to Polonnaruwa in Ceylon and his reflections standing before the three mighty images of the Buddha carved there into the granite rock face. Merton comments in his journal, 'I know and have seen what I was obscurely looking for. I don't know what else remains but I have now seen and have pierced through the surface and got beyond the shadow and disguise.'¹ What was to remain was his electrocution a few days later in a Bangkok bathroom. 'I have now seen.' What are we to make of Merton's claim that here—here in this Buddhist holy place—his journey is at last done? No such claim of completion, fulfilment, of what Buddhists call 'enlightenment', is made elsewhere in our memoirs. We wonder what Richard Lischer would say of this confession, unique in the literature about which he is teaching us so much? Professor Lischer, please tell us.

The spiritual life must be lived in a world more or less inimical to its principles and priorities. Some whom Lischer studies pursue their chosen path free from the hostile attention of the powers that be, whether secular or religious—Julian of Norwich, Emily Dickinson, C. S. Lewis or Thérèse of Lisieux, for example. For others to live before God with integrity is possible only at great personal cost. Highlighting much about a mighty spirit that has gone unnoticed before, Lischer instances John Bunyan. He writes too of Etty Hillesum—and we find ourselves drawn to our knees.

To whom should we turn in our own day, when democracies falter and the price of conscience might be asked of any of us? One of Lischer's most powerful essays is his study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, entitled *Last Lessons*. You can visit the Bonhoeffer family home in Berlin. When Richard Lischer and

¹ Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1973), 236.

his wife did so recently, they were the only visitors. Not long ago every other sermon we heard quoted Bonhoeffer. Is it really possible that he should now be slipping from our memory? Lischer's almost unbearably moving commentary on Bonhoeffer urges us to recall his testimony before it is too late.

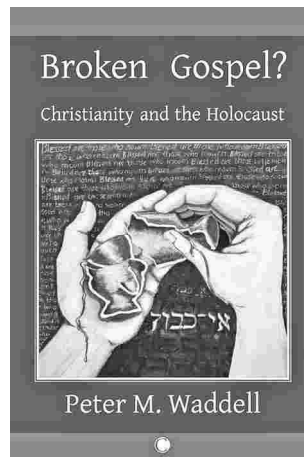
We cannot put this book down without noting two names not yet mentioned—Abelard and Héloïse. 'The price of their love is their ruin', says Lischer. 'Their fall is their radiance.' (125) Here is another story we thought we knew well until Lischer persuades us to revisit it. Look again and we see that Abelard never really understood Héloïse, that she was—and will ever remain—the brighter star.

John Pridmore

Peter M. Waddell, *Broken Gospel? Christianity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2022). 978 0 2271 7847 8, pp.188, £22.50.

Is there really a need for another book on Christian responses to the Holocaust? Peter Waddell thinks so. And he's right. Christians have always sought answers to questions raised by the suffering of the innocent, what the philosophers call the problem of evil. The Holocaust introduces a whole new level of theological complexity, not because the Nazis' barbaric treatment of the Jewish people plumbs new depths of cruelty and violence, but because to speak of whatever is central to our understanding of Christianity is to speak of the faith of Israel. The two are inseparable, bound together by the very action of God. Christians quite rightly confess a faith founded upon a new creation effected in Jesus Christ. But Jesus was a Torah-observant Jew and his teaching, his life and his death—let alone the claims made for his theological significance—cannot be understood apart from the people of the Sinai Covenant, and the complex and contested religious world of first-century Palestine.

Without Christianity, as Waddell reminds us at the beginning of this brutally frank and honest book, the Holocaust would not have been possible. That is not to say that Christianity is alone responsible—and Waddell is at pains to nuance that judgment in his opening chapter, 'Barabbas and His Afterlife'. Enlightenment rationality with its unease about collectives that



remain 'stubbornly other' (22), the baleful effects of modern technology which made genocide not just thinkable but possible, even anti-Christian polemics and strands of atheistic paganism—all are complicit in the systematic murder of some six million Jews. Nevertheless, 'a direct, if twisting, line between the Barabbas story and the Final Solution remains' (26). However one reads that terrible prophecy, 'his blood be on us and on our children' (Matthew 27:25), it is impossible to separate it from centuries of anti-Jewish prejudice and more vicious outbreaks of anti-Semitism that raise a serious challenge to the credibility of a Christian faith that has formed, and in some important ways, malformed Western civilisation.

These are big claims and not the least important aspect of this book is that in a relatively short space Waddell achieves such a dense yet lucid argument. He does not mince his words. The Church is facing a deeply *theological* crisis. Christians have become 'adrift from God' (5), and only the most humble acknowledgement of our guilt and the work of divine grace can bring the resurrection for which we hope. The book tells the story of Christian anti-Judaism with an honesty that is at once angry yet restrained. Engaging with an impressive range of scholarship, from both Christian and Jewish sources, Waddell takes us from that emblematic figure of Barabbas through Catholic and Protestant responses to the killing and its aftermath, before moving to the vexed question of Christian credibility.

None of this makes for easy reading. While focusing on the words and actions of official representatives and theologians, Waddell manages to keep the 'big picture'—the pathology of the Jewish-Christian relationship—in view. St Augustine, Martin Luther and Pope Pius XII are only the more familiar names subjected to sharp examination. More surprising, and therefore more telling, is the inclusion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Widely regarded as the most significant martyr for the Christian cause under Nazi persecution, Bonhoeffer, like so many contemporaries, was content to grant the state a certain legitimacy in protecting the nation against the 'Jewish question'. It's as if in the first half of the twentieth century it was taken for granted that the mere existence of a religious community that doesn't fit into the settled polity was somehow problematic—a smouldering fuse waiting to touch off a violent explosion.

And explode it did, of course. The Holocaust began not with the crazed rhetoric of Hitler and his Nazi bullies but with a resentment against all things Jewish that can be traced back centuries—to the polemics of Melito of Sardis, the strictures of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the Spanish *Reconquista* of 1492. The great merit of this book, however, is not that it brings yet more witnesses to argue the case against a hapless Christianity. While Waddell takes care to acknowledge the danger of indulging in an anachronistic hindsight, his main achievement is to draw attention to a blind spot in Christian culture.

What was it that led thousands of ‘ordinary’ Christians to ignore what was happening in their midst or, far worse, to become actively involved, whether as paid-up members of the Nazi party or as camp guards and low-grade bureaucrats? And what will it take for Christians to acknowledge their complicity in centuries of anti-Jewish sentiment while not, at the same time, lapsing into a guilt-ridden silence that would abandon the very faith in the ‘new creation’ that lies at the heart of the Gospel promise?

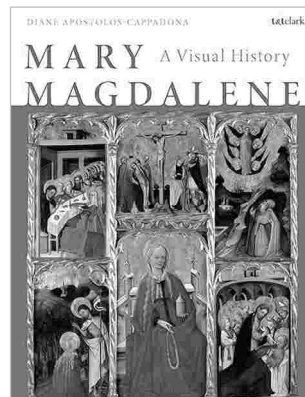
Waddell is sceptical of the value of the apologies that both Catholics and Protestants at various levels of authority have offered for their complicity in the Horror. Something more is at stake. In the course of this book, he touches on a number of theological questions that have arisen for both Christians and Jews since the liberation of the Nazi death-camps: the future of the Covenant with Israel, the significance of the land for Jews, the State of Israel, supersessionism, Christian mission to Jews, universal salvation, the person of Christ and the very nature of God. All are important, but none more so than that question mark which hovers over his title—*Broken Gospel?*

Implied here is nothing as grand as a rhetoric of Jewish–Christian relations. That is the last thing the contemporary Church needs. Instead Waddell commends a more chastened sense of the Christian self, a self that is Jewish as well as Christian, formed as much by the call of Jewish prophets as by the witness of Christian disciples, honouring each others’ memories and traditions, and committed in faith, albeit in terms of different interpretations of theological idioms and symbols, to Good News about a God who is compassionate and ever constant.

Michael Barnes SJ

Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, *Mary Magdalene: A Visual History* (London: Bloomsbury T. and T. Clark, 2023). 978 0 5677 0574 7, 176, £17.99.

The title of this book, *Mary Magdalene: A Visual History*, suggests a collection of interesting and artistic images. The book itself is so much more than that. Richly coloured and beautifully presented, the 65 illustrations are accompanied by an excellent, thoroughly researched text, together with comprehensive footnotes. Each illustration is explained in meticulous detail, as is the history of the treatment of Mary Magdalene in different cultural contexts and throughout different periods in history.



Diane Apostolos-Cappadona introduces what she describes as her 'pilgrimage through the lands of Christian art and Christian cultural history' by describing the Magdalene as 'perhaps the most flexible female figure in Christian art' (1). Exemplifying in one work the multiple stories attached to the Magdalene is the altarpiece of Saint Mary Magdalene from Perella by the Catalan painter Bernat Martorell (c. 1400–1452). The first four panels of this altarpiece illustrate the Anointing at Bethany, the *Noli me tangere*, the Crucifixion, and the central figure, the haloed saint herself. The final two panels depict episodes from the legends of Provence, her death, and what are known as her daily elevations above La Sainte-Baume. A detail from this last image, appearing later in the book, shows the desert monk Zosimas of Palestine (c. 460–560) beneath the elevating figure of Mary of Egypt, now identified as Mary Magdalene.

Apostolos-Cappadona gives us the legend of Mary of Egypt, a female ascetic generally dressed only either in animal skins or her own long tresses of hair. The long golden or sometimes reddish hair, one of the two main hallmarks of Magdalene paintings, serves to conflate Mary Magdalene with Mary of Egypt, as well as with the sinner of Luke 7:37–39. Misidentified by Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) as a reformed prostitute, Mary Magdalene was routinely to be identified with the sinner of Luke 7, who bathed the feet of Jesus with her tears and dried them with her hair, before anointing them with precious ointment from the jar she carried with her. She was likewise conflated with several women in the New Testament who were characterized as sinners. The sins were routinely presented as sins of a sexual nature, and the women as prostitutes. Compounding their sins was their power of seduction, as for example with the woman taken in adultery of John 8:1–11.

The Magdalene's seductive power is frequently suggested by the drape of her garments, and often her hair. In the exquisite marble altarpiece in the Chapel of Saint-Pilon near La Sainte-Baume in the south of France, the marble statue of the penitent Magdalene is entirely nude, covered only by her long hair. She is supported by angels in a state of elevation. Long tresses are a significant feature throughout the artistic representations of the Magdalene. Whether the hair be loose to cover her nudity or to wipe the feet of Jesus, or intricately styled, it is always long and visible. In the 1891 illustration by Jean Béraud, *La Madeleine chez les Pharisiens*, her hair is elegantly piled on her head. Hair arranged on the top of the head could connote spiritual energy, since the head signified the most spiritual part of the body being closest to the heavens. Conversely during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, beautifully braided and carefully arranged

red hair was intended to connote the Magdalene's fundamental lascivious nature before her conversion.

Apart from her long tresses, the other main hallmark of a Magdalene depiction is the symbolic jar containing the ointment with which Jesus had been anointed. The historical Magdalene has been conflated not only with the sinner of Luke 7, but with each of the other women reported to have anointed Jesus at various meals (Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–8). The ointment jar also reminds us of Mary's central role at the tomb, where she had gone intending to anoint the dead body of Jesus.

In addition to these two main symbols—long tresses and the ointment jar—there are further features to look out for, such as her silent penitential tears. Large pearl-shaped tears dripping slowly from her eyes signify that she had been granted the *donum lacrimorum*, 'the gift of tears'. Apostolos-Cappadona describes Caravaggio's *The Penitent Magdalene* (c.1594–1597), which shows her large pearl-shaped tears on her cheek, while her jewels lie discarded on the floor, as 'the visual epitome of metanoia', as she 'moves from sinner to penitent to saint' (70). I have to say I was unable to detect the tears, and would love to see the original in the Galleria Doria Pamphilj, in Rome.

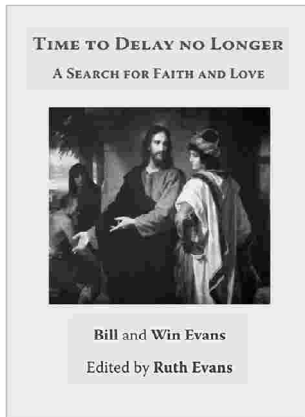
As well as the more familiar associations, there are many that are less well known. The fourth panel of the six-panel altarpiece by the anonymous Master of the Magdalene Legend depicts *Saint Mary Magdalene Preaching* (c.1500–1520). This stunning, yet homely, illustration of Mary Magdalene is held in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Nothing in the painting suggests that it was unusual for a woman to be preaching.

Within the Magdalene tapestry created by threads drawn together over 2,000 years, the historical Magdalene is still to be found. As the first witness of the resurrection, Mary is recognised as the Apostle to the Apostles. In spite of persistent misidentification as a prostitute, the feminist icon, the independent woman, is nonetheless able to win through. Contrary to customary practice, the historical Mary Magdalene is not identified in the New Testament through reference to a male relation, whether it be husband, father, brother or son. Illustrations by the artists Frank Sabatté (2003–2004), Richard Stodart (1995) and Janet McKenzie (2010) are included in the chapter 'Feminist Icon'.

This is a book of stunning beauty and excellent scholarship. It is difficult to imagine how it could be bettered.

Anne Inman

Bill and Win Evans, *Time to Delay No Longer: A Search for Faith and Love*, edited by Ruth Evans (Leominster: Gracewing, 2022). 978 0 8524 4927 1, pp.296, £20.00.



The search for the truth about Jesus lies at the heart of this account of the life and thought of Bill Evans. It is the golden thread that runs throughout a story that begins in the late 1950s. As a student at Durham University, Bill met Win who would later become his beloved wife. Though he came from a Methodist family and she had a Jewish mother, they both embarked upon a spiritual journey that would lead to their reception into the Roman Catholic Church. The first section of this book records that story while the second contains a systematic

overview of the questions that Bill's enquiring mind sought to answer. He died before completing the book so his writing is interleaved with that of his wife and their daughter Ruth. The narrative is infused with details from everyday life and brought to life by the letters they wrote to one another and quotations from the saints, theologians and writers who inspired them.

Both Bill and Win were students of English literature, from which they received inspiration for their journey of faith. They were also exposed to the challenges of post-war Europe through volunteering in refugee camps in Austria. After completing their studies they were married without having found a Church they could call home. It was when they lived in their first flat in Sunderland that they decided to make up their minds about Christianity. As Bill comments: 'conversion takes place in the moral heart of ourselves, when, not only do we see the truth of the Gospel, but are prepared to let it reshape us' (56). His view was deeply influenced by that of St John Henry Newman who helped him realise that faith is not the mere assent to a set of propositions but 'the moral and spiritual compass which shapes our lives' (43).

A famous radio debate between Bertrand Russell and Frederick Copleston SJ sparked both their interests in Catholicism. When they began to delve into the scriptures they became increasingly convinced of the validity of Catholicism. It was at St Mary's Church in Sunderland where they attended their first Mass together and there that they experienced the universality of Catholicism 'in its blinding truth' (79). Both were inspired by their friendly curate Fr John Caden whose 'infectious enthusiasm and total dedication to his vocation' guided them along with other catechists

(88). Win was received into the Church before the birth of their first daughter, Mary, and Bill was received after Ruth, their second.

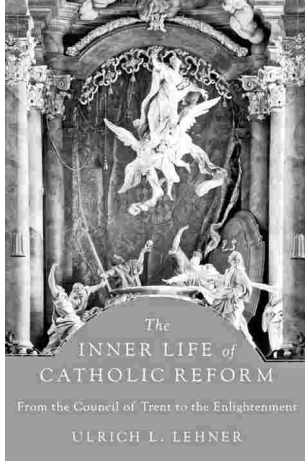
The second section of the book is devoted to the process of enquiry that led to Bill's conversion. It begins with the rational grounds for belief in the testimony of the Gospels and harmonizes Jesus' claims about his identity with his miracles. Bill's arguments are interlaced with quotations from writers from Nobel laureate François Mauriac to the Dominican theologian Aidan Nichols, from Karl Rahner to Raymond Brown. He thus elaborates a Catholic Christology which 'sees the consciousness of Jesus as perfectly integrated' (148). Moreover he acknowledges that rationality alone cannot form the foundation of faith, but must be supplemented by matters of the heart that are 'too deep for words' (151). Even the paradoxes in Christ's teaching and identity can be understood as an integral characteristic of his that 'both challenges and confirms us at the same time' (158).

His enquiries boil down to whether Jesus is the truth, by what authority this is known and the nature of the truth that is revealed. He carefully deliberates on these questions to render a coherent understanding of diverse scriptural texts. Rather beautifully, he acknowledges that the gospel is 'both deeply mysterious, with a language and concepts which are uniquely and strangely its own' (167). Despite maintaining an affection for the Methodism that shaped him, his arguments against the Reformation Churches are unforgiving. However one elegantly worded affirmation leaves ecumenical room for manoeuvre: 'God does not give us his truth either through the Church or Scripture in isolation from one another, but through both in a profound indissoluble relationship' (193).

As I read the work my admiration grew for a man who had covered so much spiritual ground over the course of his life. The relationship between him and his beloved wife is an intriguing story that cannot be separated from his intellectual pursuit of the truth. Perhaps what surprised me most was that his journey of faith took place outside specialised religious institutions. His daughter says that 'he drew on the local resources of the Church: the parish mass, the sacraments, discussions, days of recollection and a prayer group provided through the parish' (264). This reminds us all that faith can flourish when we apply our inquiring minds to our own everyday experience. As I finished reading, I took a step back to gaze at the Jesus who revealed through Bill's writing. He is intellectually credible and psychologically integrated, strong and full of compassion, but above all he shines with the truth.

Philip Harrison SJ

Ulrich L. Lehner, *The Inner Life of Catholic Reform: From the Council of Trent to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford U, 2022). 978 0 1976 2060 1, pp.312, £26.49.



Ulrich Lehner, a German church historian who teaches at the University of Notre Dame in the United States, is best known for his many contributions to our knowledge of the Roman Catholic Church in the ‘Age of Enlightenment’. The debate over whether and how far Catholics engaged with the Enlightenment positively (rather than simply resisting or combating it) owes a lot to the German scholar Sebastian Merkle (1862–1945), who coined the term ‘Catholic Enlightenment’ (*Katholische Aufklärung*). The old assumption was that Catholicism was, by its very nature, anti-Enlightenment, and that ‘the Enlightenment’ (a unitary force) directly led to modern values such as secularisation and separation of Church and state. This picture was fostered both by Protestants and secularists suspicious of Catholicism, and by Catholics equally suspicious of a modern world supposedly created by the Enlightenment. When Merkle argued, in a lecture in Berlin, in 1908 that there had been a Catholic Enlightenment, he was opposed by Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

But, by the 1960s and 1970s, historians and theologians in French-, Italian- and English-language scholarship had begun to employ the term ‘Catholic Enlightenment’ and its variants. Lehner comes directly from the original German tradition. Like Merkle, who was one of the foremost scholars of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) in his day, Lehner understands Enlightenment-era Catholicism on its own terms, but also as the blooming of reformist currents from the age of Trent. Lehner’s manifold works published in English over the last fifteen years have done a great deal to advance knowledge of Catholic Enlightenment and early modern Catholicism more generally in the English-speaking world.

This has been greatly needed. At least in theological circles, the period between (roughly) the end of the Thirty Years’ War in 1648 and the rise of ultramontanism (a papal-centric form of Catholicism) in the early 1800s is not very well understood. Usually, just a smattering of major political and church events receive attention: the persecution of Jansenism; overseas missionary work in the Americas, India and China; the Gallican Articles of

1682; the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773. A handful of political and spiritual elites such as Louis XIV, Blaise Pascal and Alphonsus Liguori are still well known.

What is still lacking for all but academic specialists are accounts of how normal people lived out their Catholic faith in these years. What sorts of religious practices gave the average person meaning? Which elements of Catholic life were beautiful and life-giving, and which were dysfunctional or in need of serious reform? How are our Catholic beliefs and practices today in continuity with our early modern ancestors, and in what ways are we different? Lehner's most recent book, *The Inner Life of Catholic Reform*, answers these and many other questions in an accessible way. The result is a picture of spiritual practice and religious life 'from the Council of Trent to the Enlightenment', that is, from the middle of the 1500s to about 1800. While scholarly and of use to academics, this book, or one of the many topical chapters within it, could serve as the basis for an enjoyable discussion in a reading group. It is destined to be an essential tool for teaching Christian history and religious studies to undergraduates, and in seminary church history courses.

Lehner synthesizes his knowledge of thousands of archival and printed sources for early modern Catholicism to paint a picture of Catholic faith and devotion over two centuries. The result is beautiful and comforting in parts, and sad or challenging in others. To practising Catholics, some elements of Lehner's story are deeply familiar, such as the many continuities between past and present regarding the Eucharist and the confessional (chapter 7). Numerous discontinuities also turn up, such as the much lower levels of bible-reading (due in part, but not wholly, to lower literacy levels in general). Other parts of Lehner's story are deeply unfamiliar, sometimes giving the feeling that contemporary Catholics inhabit a different mental and social universe from our early modern forebears.

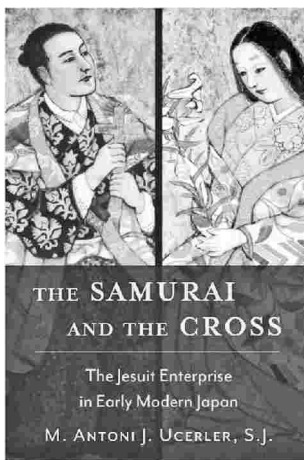
At the same time there are striking moments in Lehner's book when we are reminded that the past is not really past. Some discussions, such as his fascinating exploration of early modern theologies of the priesthood (chapter 2), hit home in an uncomfortable way today owing to a number of factors, including the vocations crisis in Europe and North America. More poignantly, however, the clerical sex-abuse crisis means that contemporary readers will inevitably critically examine the roots of modern conceptions of priestly authority. Many portions of the book are spiritually rich and of great historical interest, such as Lehner's exploration of believers' trust that they could be transformed by God through prayer (chapter 8) and how the figures of Mary and Joseph served as 'images of hope' for people of all walks of life (chapter 10).

Though eschewing the grand ecclesial-political story in favour of the lives of ordinary people, *Inner Life* still has something to contribute to a big-picture, top-down approach to history. Lehner's argument is that fervent spiritual practices, always ultimately undergirded by theological beliefs, were the engine that powered the story of Catholic reform from Charles Borromeo in Milan to Margaret Mary Alacoque in France to the enlightened Archbishop Max Franz in Cologne. That is not to deny that political contexts were (and are) vitally important.

Just as one cannot understand contemporary US Christianity only by studying politicians and elite pastors while neglecting the people doing the voting and filling the pews, we cannot understand early modern Catholicism apart from the beliefs and practices of normal Catholics living at that time. Lehner's book provides us with an accessible, exhaustively researched account that is sympathetic, even tender, with its subjects while also suggesting that if much of the good wheat of early modern reform is still with us, some of the chaff has also endured to the present day.

Shaun Blanchard

M. Antoni J. Uçerler, *The Samurai and the Cross: The Jesuit Enterprise in Early Modern Japan* (Oxford: OUP, 2022). 978 0 1953 3543 9, pp.472, £29.99.



The history of the Jesuits in Japan is a topic that has had significant academic appeal among students and scholars of religion, an allure that appears to have blossomed even more following the visit to Japan by Pope Francis in 2019. Drawing on research spanning several decades and wide-ranging contacts with academics and others, Japanese and non-Japanese, M. Antoni J. Uçerler, a Jesuit himself and currently director of the Ricci Institute for Chinese–Western Cultural History and Provost's Fellow at Boston College, has compiled a work that may well be classed as a compendium or treasury, judging by the profusion of maps, ledgers, portraits, photographs, pictures of folding screens (referred to in Japanese as *byōbu*), medallions, letters and so on that he has presented to his readers. Aside from the introduction, epilogue and

some appendices the book consists of twelve chapters grouped into three parts, and following these are copious notes, an outstanding bibliography, and a glossary of names and terms with items listed both in English and in Japanese.

Readers will find themselves emotionally immersed in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Japanese history, a period generally referred to as the era of the 'warring states' (or *Sengoku Jidai*). This was an age of great Japanese warlords such as Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, but also, at the same time, of eminent missionaries such as Alessandro Valignano, Luís Fróis, Pedro Gómez and Francis Xavier, as well as untold Japanese saints and *beati* including Magdalene of Nagasaki, Paul Miki and Petro Kasui Kibe.

Of the many sources spoken of by the author, I should particularly mention certain present-day members of the Tokugawa family, descendants of Tokugawa Ieyasu the *shogun* or military leader who bore direct responsibility for issuing an edict expelling the Catholic missionaries from Japan in 1614. This, in course of time, compelled the Japanese Christians to go into hiding, and led to the martyrdom of innumerable believers, Japanese as well as foreigners, and giving rise to the faith communities known as the 'Hidden Christians' (*kakure kirishitan*). Their discovery on 17 March 1865 at the co-cathedral of Nagasaki, otherwise known as the Basilica of the Twenty-Six Holy Martyrs of Japan, was described by Pope Pius IX as a 'Miracle of the Orient'.

Aside from the impending threat of martyrdom and their concern for the well-being of their Christian communities, the missionaries had a great many other obstacles to overcome. Political links between the various European nations where they originated were fickle, tenuous and frequently subject to alteration, and this in turn exerted a sizeable effect on their efforts within the mission lands. At times, ties between the heads of different religious orders and congregations and the political powers that were involved grew strained, resulting in the missionaries failing to receive support they badly needed in periods of political turbulence. In the political context, the author points out the curious fact that, despite the great anxiety of the Japanese shoguns about invasion from Spain, there is a total lack of evidence indicating that Spain cherished any ambition to occupy Japan, and neither did Spain or any other Western nation embark upon any serious attempts to do so.

An issue that proved to be a major source of apprehension for missionaries was the moral justification for the use of force. Having duly instructed and baptized the peoples of the mission lands, they felt it crucial on their part to provide them also with due assistance in times of persecution. Given the

precarious and explosive nature of the settings in which they lived and served, would it be morally justifiable on their part to resort to arms in order to protect their helpless Christian communities, or provide assistance to Christian warlords in their battles against non-believers? Could the use of arms in any way whatsoever be justified?

As the author points out, issues such as these were often vehemently debated by the Jesuits, and specifically by individuals such as Alonso Sánchez, Gaspar Coelho, Pedro de la Cruz and Alessandro Valignano. Through *The Samurai and the Cross*, Antoni J. Uçerler guides readers through the spiritual pilgrimage of the Japanese Church, nourishing faith and reason simultaneously.

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