THE WAY

a review of Christian spirituality published by the British Jesuits

January 2026 *Volume 65, Number 1*

LABORATORIES OF THE SPIRIT

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 Ignatian mission, so articles in this area will be particularly welcome.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foreign-language quotations are translated by the article author unless otherwise noted. The scripture quotations herein are generally from the New Revised Standard Version Bible © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

ABBREVIATIONS

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

Papal documents may be found at www.vatican.va

FOREWORD

THE YEAR 2025 MARKED the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of the renowned Welsh poet R. S. Thomas. His 1975 collection *Laboratories of the Spirit*, from which the title of this issue is taken, explored the elusive presence of God in the spaces opened up by language. The collection begins with the poem 'Emerging', in which he proposes: 'There are questions we are the solution / to, others whose echoes we must expand / to contain'. Such questions were also envisioned by St Ignatius when he devised a system of formation for novice Jesuits based around a series of practical experiences that would help them to grow into their vocation before God. The articles in this issue show in different ways how literature, language and experience create experimental spaces in which we can attend to the movements of God deep within us.

In the 2025 Joe Veale Memorial lecture, given at Trinity College, Dublin, Chris Staab pays tribute to a great scholar and teacher. He starts from the search for words and images to express our interior lives, discovering the work of the Spirit in the unexplored territories accessed through education, and in literary texts where the human heart can open up, be nourished and even break. Joe Veale was best known for his research into Ignatian spirituality, and in an article reprinted from our archive, he analyses the text of the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, revealing how 'somewhere at the intersection of those apparent opposites', action and contemplation, 'imagination is set free and enlarged and … prophetic creativity takes place'.

In an article taken from the online journal *Thinking Faith*, another distinguished Ignatian scholar, Philip Endean, examines the creative tension between the 'two vocations' in the life and work of Gerard Manley Hopkins, who sometimes 'seems less a Jesuit poet than a poet who just happened also to be a Jesuit'. Literature was an essential element in the conversion of St Ignatius: reading whatever books came to hand as he convalesced in Manresa opened up the reflective space where he could develop some of his foundational insights. Tim McEvoy draws out the ways in which St Ignatius' early reading and formation in chivalry might have informed his life after conversion, arguing that God was not content to let such a good education go to waste, and rather that it was 'repurposed and refined for new mission'.

A text that created new possibilities within the Church was the papal encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891), authored by Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903). Leo redefined the relationship between Church and society by placing the Church on the side of the poor, and set out the roadmap for the next century of Catholic Social Teaching. Ambrose Mong argues that he offers a template for Leo XIV as he continues to implement the legacy of Pope Francis. Some of the challenges faced by the new Pope will come not from outside, but from inside the Church. According to Mathew Bomki, the work of the Spirit has frequently been stifled by a lack of co-responsibility within the Church, especially in Africa where he works. He enlarges on Pope Francis's declaration that synodality will be 'the defining characteristic of the future Church'. 'Learning to walk with others', as he puts it, offers a theological space where the Spirit can breathe new life into the Church.

In the influential writings of the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, ethics begins with the human demand represented by the face of another person: 'the direct, concrete and experiential encounter with a human being'. He proposes that we can only act ethically when we open up a relational space in proximity to a unique other. Robert Doud offers an overview of his thought, and explores how our response to the other also needs to grow and develop over time.

As part of *The Way*'s commitment to encouraging Ignatian writing, we held our first Writers' Retreat at St Beuno's spirituality centre in north Wales over the summer. It brought together both professional and amateur writers to reflect upon such topics as finding a voice, the process of experiential writing, and the practice of Ignatian writing. Nicholas Austin's article defines such a retreat as 'a time apart to facilitate writing as a spiritual practice and an act of service' and suggests Ignatian practices that help writing to deepen in the presence of God. The next Way Writers' Retreat will be held from 27 June to 2 July 2026. Our hope is that what is written in this issue of *The Way* will open up some new spaces to attend to the movements of God, and give space for the Spirit to breathe in your life.

Philip Harrison SJ
Editor

LITERATURE, IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND NARRATIVE EXPERIENCES

Christopher Staab

AS A TEACHER OF IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California, I am always looking for help in coming up with contemplative, thoughtful and interactive lesson plans for my students. When I found the poem entitled 'Lesson Plan' in Billy Collins's latest collection of poetry, *Water, Water*, I read it, eager to find images and language that could help me introduce a topic in spirituality. In the poem, the narrator speaks of what can only be called the most remote preparation for how he will discuss a poem he wrote 'over 30 years ago'. That preparation involved watching a cat drinking from a swimming pool and snipping off 'a few dead twigs / from a miniature orange tree'.[1] This was not exactly the help I was looking for. But for the narrator, it was; in watching a cat and tending his garden, he found his lesson plan.

We know the feeling hinted at in the beginning of Collins's poem: we too, like the narrator, search for language and images to talk about our experiences and our inner lives. In the context of spirituality, this search for the word returns us to the origins of Christianity. We can think of the disciples asking Jesus, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples' (Luke 11:1); Jesus offered them the simple, direct and concrete prayer to the Father. Similarly, we can think of the desert mothers and fathers, women and men who were sought out for a word that could help seekers find their way.

We can also consider Joseph Veale, an Irish Jesuit and one of the great interpreters of the Ignatian charism in the twentieth century; he too was a man caught up in the search for a new word about spirituality. In one of his finest essays, 'Manifold Gifts', Veale referred to a commonplace in spirituality: the inadequacy of language to talk about God, God's nearness and our hunger for God. 'Our terminology is strange', he said,

[1] Billy Collins, 'Lesson Plan', in *Water, Water* (New York: Random House, 2024), 36.

and 'our language clumsy'.[2] He was right then and he is right now: to talk about consolation, devotion and discernment of spirits—topics that I like to explore with my students—can often feel strange and esoteric.

Veale continued this line of thought in his essay and concluded:

> We need a new word, one we have not yet discovered. It would encompass not only the prayer that opens the spirit to God and leads towards union with Him but, besides, all those other things which open the spirit to the action of God.[3]

For, as clear as he is about finding that new word, he never sketched out what that word or language might consist of; but he did give us a way forward. In the same essay, he offered:

> There are more languages than one, more images than those of one school of thinking, that can be used to attempt to describe the incomprehensible mystery of God's way of giving himself to this person or to that.[4]

I would like to offer you here more languages than one, more images than those offered by the Ignatian school of thinking about spirituality: I want to share narrative experiences with you. In my estimation, the turn to poetry and narrative is one of the ways that Pope Francis has invited us to respond to our times. Speaking to poets, artists and film-makers, he declared: 'we need the genius of new language, powerful stories and images'. Epochal change calls us, in Francis's words, 'to save our imagination from everything that domesticates it'.[5] In short, I aim to move you as I have been moved, so that you can, like Collins at the end of his poem, 'go from there'.

Pondering and Discerning Everything

In his search for a word with which to begin his class on poetry, the narrator of 'Lesson Plan' implicitly reminds us that teaching itself is a creative act. A lesson plan is like a poem: it needs time to emerge. It depends upon study, conversation with colleagues, planning—hours of hidden labour. Sometimes, too, all that silent work does not yield any

[2] Joseph Veale, 'Manifold Gifts', in *Manifold Gifts* (Oxford: Way Books, 2006), 21–32, at 24.
[3] Veale, 'Manifold Gifts', 30.
[4] Veale, 'Manifold Gifts', 31.
[5] Pope Francis, audience with participants in the conference organized by *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 27 May 2023.

ideas that are usable. What often seems so promising sometimes does not make it on to a page or into a classroom discussion.

These hidden hours that go into teaching, or any creative process, are a part of Collins's poem. I believe that hidden hours—or years—constitute the foundation from which Joe Veale did such fascinating work in spirituality. Unlike me and many others of my generation in the Society of Jesus, he did not get a degree from a university in Spain that specialises in the area of Ignatian spirituality. Rather, he entered the field after having been a teacher of English and religion for approximately twenty years.

I do not know for certain the materials that he taught, but certainly it was literature, stories and the Gospels. He may not have been catechizing in his class, but it is likely that the rigour with which he instructed his students gave ample testimony to the Ignatian *magis* that motivated him. But a lot of teaching is much less glamorous than the occasional riveting conversation about a novel or a poem. Grading papers, planning lessons and working with difficult students formed the early history from which he creatively interpreted the Ignatian charism. All of this makes me wonder: what did he learn in those years of teaching that made him such an astute reader of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*? And who were the students who helped him realise that God speaks to each of us in a personal way?

I ask these questions because I too was a high-school teacher, and though I taught in inner-city Chicago, for less time than Joe Veale did in Dublin, I know what teaching is like. It means grading hundreds of essays, disciplining students, adapting lessons to a range of learning abilities—and celebrating students' successes. When I look back at that

time, some memories immediately come to me: Cristina González giving me a hug before class and then stepping back and saying: *Eww, Mr Staab, you're all bones*. I recall too Gracie Pérez who, upon sitting next to the most rambunctious boy in the class, said to me: *Don't worry Mr Staab, I will help you control Juan*. I will also never forget Kevin Maldonado, who upon hearing me reinforce the importance of doing his homework, would say to me: *I got you Mr Staab, don't worry*. To which I would respond: *I do not care if you got me, I just want you to do your homework*. Response: *I got you Mr Staab*.

For those of us who have been teachers, these are the kinds of moments that we carry with us. These students—spontaneous, surprising and maddening—shape our hearts and minds. I mention my stories as a way to consider imaginatively those that shaped Joe Veale's heart and mind. Somehow his stories allowed him to understand Ignatius of Loyola's encounter with God in a new way. Narrative does this: it opens us to the future. It opens us to something new and hopeful, and to that in which the past echoes in the present.[6]

I also imaginatively recreate this part of his life because the spirituality that he studied so well included a spiritual exercise of this kind. In Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises, one of the more fascinating exercises is that of contemplating the hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth. Jesus, the man who advanced in wisdom and age before and with other women and men, becomes real for the retreatant. Jesus too was a child, an adolescent, learning to walk with humility, attention and love on the streets of Nazareth as he would those elsewhere in Galilee. The hidden life of Jesus is never hidden. It is a part of the story. Similarly, the hidden life of Joe Veale—the essays he graded, the students who frustrated, amazed and loved him—is not hidden but silently present in all of his writing and work in spirituality.

There is a Nazareth-like quality to the poetry of Billy Collins, and that simplicity and accessibility is on full display in 'Lesson Plan'. So how did the narrator come up with his plan for teaching his old poem? He was quiet, he listened and, perhaps most importantly, he paid attention to what he was doing. He watched a cat drink from a pool; he plucked off the dead growth of a miniature tree so that miniature oranges could grow. In his search for his lesson plan, he discovered that

[6] Following Byung-Chul Han, *The Crisis of Narration*, translated by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity, 2024), 15.

what he was doing revealed what he needed to know to talk about poetry. When he says at the end that he will start off describing these things and 'go from there', he seems to suggest that he will tell the story of life unfolding around him and let that life take him to wherever it will.

By calling his collection *Water, Water*, a clear reference to Coleridge's poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', Collins tips his hand and reveals that he will be writing about poetry and the poetry-writing process. 'Lesson Plan', like many poems in this collection, draws our attention to poetry itself and to Collins's view that the small, quotidian and insignificant occurrences of life around us are what comprise it. For example, in his poem 'BC/AD', the narrator recounts a humorous class discussion about 'the two realms of Christian time', before Christ and the year of our Lord. Considering the first, students chuckle at the fact that historical figures were going backwards in time. Though the narrator tries to reason with his students, they are clearly having fun imagining men and women going backwards and then starting to go forwards at Christmas. Bemused, the narrator looks out the window and spots 'orange and yellow trees … a few ordinary birds'. And he concludes: 'this was, after all, an introduction to poetry'.[7] Similarly, there is a poem entitled 'Emily Dickinson in Space', in which an astronaut in a space station recites one of Emily Dickinson's poems. And the narrator marvels at, 'her little poem still circling the globe / at seventeen thousand miles an hour, / hands down the fastest poem in history'.[8]

Watching a cat drink from a pool, contemplating a few ordinary birds outside a classroom window and looking up to imagine a poem racing around the earth—these are not especially profound images that take us to some deep existential terrain. For some they may not appear to be the most felicitous images for poetry. Nor are they images that can be turned into pronouncements for a talk about spirituality in a time of epochal change. And that is exactly their appeal.

These are images that turn us *outward* to see the life that is all around us. Using Joe Veale's words that I quoted earlier, these images constitute 'all those other things which open the spirit to the action of God'. The grammar of a new language in spirituality at a time of epochal change might be taking shape in the life that we are actually living. Collins's collection points in simple and playful ways to a language of

[7] Billy Collins, 'BC/AD', in *Water, Water*, 24–26.
[8] Collins, *Water, Water,* 39–41.

depth, wonder and surprise that appears everywhere and in everything.[9] What you see, what you notice, what happens in front of you, might be a language for you, and you can go from there.[10]

The way for you and I to come up with a spirituality that is truly in the Spirit—I mean a spirituality of love, a love that, following St Paul, is not rude, does not seek its own interests, but 'bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things'—is to give importance to who we are and what we do.[11] True to his Ignatian roots, Veale believed in 'an enlivening practice of the examination of consciousness' as a way to renew our lives by seeing and noticing what we are living.[12] The point of the Ignatian Examen is to notice the images and language that come to us from the world around us, and to go from there. Where else could we go from?

We could go from many other places, and one of those is our interiority, cut off from the lives that we live, 'bleared, smeared with toil' as they are.[13] Distrustful of institutions, even ecclesial institutions and organizations, we turn to our interior, to what we feel, and we seek to get to a steady, stable inner place. Yet, the way we turn to our interior is worth discerning. In his astute reading of Ignatius' spiritual vision, Joe Veale caught his awareness of deception in the spiritual life. As a close reader of Ignatius, Veale knew that spiritual images and languages can deceive. Put more colloquially, there can be a lot of fake news in our interior lives, and we would never notice it.

The way we turn to our interior is worth discerning

We can think we are growing, deepening, finding our way, only to discover that we were led by another spirit, one not associated with Jesus of Nazareth. Probably familiar with his own self-deception, Veale pointed out the central place of the meditation on the Two Standards in the *Spiritual Exercises*. In that meditation, one considers the standard of Christ and the standard of the evil one. As Veale rightly points out,

[9] On this point compare Saint Teresa of Ávila: 'I believe that in each little thing created by God there is more than what is understood, even if it is a little ant' (*The Interior Castle*, 4.2.2, in *St Teresa of Ávila: The Complete Works*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, rev. edn [Washington, DC: ICS, 1987]).

[10] See also Patrick Goujon: 'The things that happen to me, if only I can pay them attention, have much to teach me' ('The Spiritual Exercises and Conversion', *The Way*, 61/3 [July 2022], 71–79, here 73).

[11] 1 Corinthians 13:4, 7.

[12] Veale, 'Renewing Jesuit Life in the Spirit', in *Manifold Gifts*, 190–199, here 194.

[13] Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'God's Grandeur', in *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Norman H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 139.

'there is no question here, of course, of choosing between them'.[14] The question runs deeper: the retreatant is asked to consider who Jesus is and, fundamentally, *how* he goes about his mission. The fruit of that meditation often consists in a retreatant's clarity about deception in his or her spiritual life. Also, this meditation reconnects the retreatant with what he or she saw in the meditation on Jesus' hidden life in Nazareth. He is the one that goes about his life in humility, openness and love. He makes a pretentious claim to be the Son of God, but he does so unpretentiously. The meditation on the Two Standards unmasks illusions, deceptions and the fantasies that our ego expertly nurtures.

I mention this meditation because it alerts us to the fact that not every language, from inside or outside, is helpful to us. Languages and images have to be discerned, pondered and considered over time. Yet a reliable indicator of good images and language is that they turn us out into the world and move us towards others. Such a move towards others is never easy, and here the narrative project—if it could be called that—of the Korean writer Han Kang offers us provocative images and languages about our relationship to others, to others near and far.

Something Breaks So That Something New Can Emerge

For Han Kang, a female writer from the global south who was, at the age of 53, one of the youngest recipients of the Nobel Prize for Literature, to 'go from there' is a fraught, terrible, and beautiful venture. Stated in biblical terms: if in the book of Deuteronomy God calls his beloved people to choose between two paths, one that is life and one that is death, Han Kang's fiction makes us painfully, but poignantly, aware that we choose both. The possibilities for life and for death are always in front of us, and for her it is naïve to think that we only traverse one of them.

Yet, the remarkable aspect of her fiction is that she draws us close to both life and death, compassion and violence, and does so with empathy and feeling. In her own words, her fiction presents us with situations in which we face the 'question about human violence and the possibility or impossibility of refusing it'.[15] This is a remarkable achievement, and I believe it opens for us the possibility of a new language and new

[14] Veale, 'Manifold Gifts', 28.

[15] Han Kang, interviewed by Linda Wertheimer, 'Don't Be Fooled, "The Vegetarian" Serves Up Appetites for Fright', *NPR* (13 February 2016) at https://www.npr.org/2016/02/13/466648890/dont-be-fooled-the-vegetarian-serves-up-appetites-for-fright, accessed 18 November 2025.

Wikimedia Commons

Han Kang

images in which to consider a spirituality comprising compassion and human fragility as well as the polarities and contradictions of our own lives.

The themes of violence and love, cruelty and compassion are exemplified in what may be her most important work to date, *Human Acts*, a fictional retelling of the 1980 Gwangju student uprising, when the military opened fire on student protesters and young children in the South Korean city of Gwangju. Through various narrative voices, finally using her own in an epilogue, Han Kang takes on a topic that was taboo in Korean society, and she does so with tenderness and honesty, describing the violence that was carried out and the ripples of suffering that expanded in its wake. From an Ignatian perspective, this book feels like the best kind of contemplation: all of our senses and our heart are engaged as we are placed in various periods of time with diverse characters who have been morally, spiritually and emotionally ruined by the violence.

In the epilogue, titled 'The Writer, 2013', Han Kang tells us that she was born in 1970 in Gwangju and, at the age of three, moved with her family to Seoul. When she was ten, she noticed that her father, returning from a trip to Gwangju, had brought with him a 'photo chapbook', a book that was 'printed in secret and sold unofficially' because it documented with graphic photographs the violence the military had carried out against civilians. As a young child, she sensed the secrecy and taboo around the book. She noticed that it was a book her father shelved by hiding the spine from view. When 'the grown-ups were all sitting in the kitchen' she climbed the bookcase to find it, and in seeing the photographs, she tells us: 'some tender thing deep inside me broke. Something that, until then I hadn't even realized was there.'[16]

[16] Han Kang, *Human Acts*, translated by Deborah Smith (New York: Hogarth, 2016), 201–202.

This too is what happens to us as we read *Human Acts*: something inside us breaks. That something—our heart, our faith in the innate goodness of humanity, or our naïveté that we are somehow not affected by the suffering of others—is ruptured, chapter after chapter. And maybe that is the point: for a new language to emerge, perhaps a former one has to break. At one point we accompany a young woman who was brutalised by the military. Many years after the violence, the woman wrestles with the request to share her experience of imprisonment with a PhD student who is gathering research on the events in Gwangju. She finally decides that she 'will not bear witness' to the violence she experienced; for her it is impossible. She asks, 'Is it possible to bear witness to the fact that I ended up despising my own body, the very physical stuff of my self? … that I willfully ran away … to somewhere colder, somewhere safer. Purely to stay alive.'[17] In another chapter, told from the point of view of a mother who lost her child in the massacre, we see a woman in her old age caressing the school ID photograph of her son. When no one is around, she takes the photograph out, unfolds the creases in it, and whispers the name of her boy, Dong-ho.[18] The loss is like her breath, so close night and day, something she can never escape.

Like the chapbook that Han Kang pulled from her father's bookshelf when she was child, this novel, *Human Acts*, connects us viscerally with one of the more painful episodes of modern Korean history, and the work easily transcends the boundaries of what has been called the Hermit Kingdom; it shatters any sense a reader might have had of the events' foreignness or distance. In the two examples I have given, Han Kang not only presents the language of suffering and the impossibility of overcoming it, but also delineates the way that suffering radiates out and creates more suffering. She says as much in her epilogue: the after-effects of those who have been tortured are '"similar to those experienced by victims of radioactive poisoning" …. Cells turn cancerous, life attacks itself.'[19] We see this in our world: 'the radioactive spread is ongoing'; in my context, for example, one Trump presidency was not enough. We wanted more. The novel does not resolve this violence, rather it presents it under the frighteningly benign title *Human Acts*. The point seems to be: any language about our lives has to consider violence—our violence.

[17] Kang, *Human Acts*, 170–171.
[18] Kang, *Human Acts*, 193.
[19] Kang, *Human Acts*, 203.

Many of these same themes are picked up in Kang's novel *Greek Lessons*. This story, translated and published in English in 2023, is about a woman, who remains unnamed throughout the story, learning a new language: ancient Greek. At the same time that she is learning Greek, she is losing her ability to speak at all. In what seems to be characteristic of Han Kang's style, it is unclear why she is losing her voice. Nevertheless, plausible reasons abound: she has recently divorced her husband and has lost custody of her eight-year-old boy. Moreover, we learn that her mother wanted to abort her, and her proximity to not being born was continually brought to her attention by others. She heard, as if it were a refrain, '*you came within an inch of not being born*'. As an adult woman, she recalls that sentence and considers her life as akin to 'a fragile bubble had coalesced ever so briefly in the nick of time'.[20] Maybe language slipped away from her because, as she says, she did not feel she had the right to exist.

All of these seem like reasons why the protagonist would refuse or lose her ability to speak. Nevertheless, what is unambiguous is her refusal to let others interpret her silence. After she tells her earliest dreams to her therapist, the therapist rolls out boilerplate therapeutic language: 'I understand. You must have felt that it was impossible to withstand everything on your own.' She finds this hackneyed language intolerable, and is terrified by his claim to understand her. Her response is silence; then she picks up a pen and piece of paper and writes: '*No. It isn't that simple.*'[21]

The novel *Greek Lessons* makes us feel the drama of '*No. It isn't that simple.*' And this is difficult for us, since we want to know why and how. Especially in the area of spirituality, we are searching for language and images to understand our times and live them well. Han Kang helps us to search for a language that is not simple. Such a language might be one that comes from an interior, felt knowledge of suffering, violence and resilience. It might also be one where no words are adequate.

One of the reasons that the central character gives for refusing to speak involves her refusal to be reconciled. She thinks to herself: '*Could not be reconciled. The things not to be reconciled with were everywhere.*' And she enumerates a brief list:

[20] Han Kang, *Greek Lessons*, translated by Deborah Smith and Emily Yae Won (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2023), 38.
[21] Kang, *Greek Lessons*, 40.

> *… in the body of a homeless person, found dead on a park bench … in the dull eyes of people riding the subway late at night … in human bodies, so easily crushed … in the exchange of foolish, clipped jokes that are meant to make us forget all.*[22]

Like one of the Old Testament prophets, the character reveals why she is silent, and it is deafening to our ears and hearts. This defiant and lucid posture feels like it coming from Han Kang herself, the writer who refused to hold a press conference for her reception of the Nobel Prize. It appears that she could not reconcile an award ceremony with a world of suffering. In her and her character's silence, what is she telling us? What new language is she offering us?

That question makes me think of a poetic essay that Dan Berrigan wrote about Dietrich Bonhoeffer. According to Berrigan, Bonhoeffer had 'churchy' reasons to come to the United States, but he was not clear about the motives that underlay his decision to return to Germany a month later. Berrigan picked up on this and wrote:

> He returned for no reason. Existence. Fidelity. The Spirit. Destiny. Folly. Whatever it is that draw men and women out of the common rut of rationality and at the same time hides from them every vindication, proof, the lying clarity of the conscious mind.[23]

This helps. The language that Han Kang is offering us is spirit, fidelity, refusal, compassion and existence. And she connects all of these human experiences; they go together.[24] The advantage of such a language is that it points us to a God who is God, not 'the score keeper, band-aid, bonbon, celestial oracle'.[25]

Joe Veale was not far from the sensibility of Han Kang. As Kang grappled with a national trauma in the massacre at Gwangju, Veale did the same with the trauma of sexual abuse committed by members of the Roman Catholic Church. In his essay titled 'Meditating on Abuse', Veale, in prose that boiled up from deep within his soul, confronted the enormous grief, anger and dislocation that these cases of abuse were

[22] Kang, *Greek Lessons*, 130.
[23] Daniel Berrigan, 'The Passion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer', in *America is Hard to Find: Notes from the Underground and Letters from Danbury Prison* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 39–49, here 46.
[24] Han Kang commented that her novel *We Do Not Part*,was about 'connecting dead memories and the living present, thereby not allowing anything to die off'. Quoted in Victoria Kim, 'Mining South Korea's Nightmares, and Her Own', *New York Times* (23 January 2025).
[25] Berrigan, 'Passion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer', 44.

and are causing. He was looking for a language of grief and compunction, as he was in his writing on spirituality. What does it mean, he asks, to ask for forgiveness?

Veale answered this question by positing two conditions that ought to be present before forgiveness is sought. First, he counsels that we acknowledge that 'we are all capable of what the abusers have done'. Secondly, he declared: 'we have to face how we feel'.[26] Regarding the first point, for Veale the *sine qua non* for a way forward is to recognise that we too could have done or could still do what the abusers have done. Like Han Kang's fiction, Veale draws us close to the pathology of the abusers—perhaps too close. Yet, this is the work of his essay: the creation of an awareness that these acts are human acts; they are possibilities for us. Further on in his essay, he wonders about the collusion between seminary formation and men and women who ended up committing sexual abuse, and he asks: 'Perhaps they need our compassion for what we did to them?' Should the reader dodge this question, Veale relentlessly pursues us, making us ask: 'How have I contributed to the abusive behaviour, and to the twisted thinking that favoured sexual abuse?'[27]

In terms of his second point, Veale—who must have been a masterful spiritual director—pushes our attention to our feelings. One way to avoid what Berrigan called 'the lying clarity of the conscious mind' is to notice and attend to what we feel, because with our feelings, it is difficult to deceive ourselves.[28] Near the end of the essay, he returns to this theme: 'until I have dealt with my feelings … and until we share those feelings openly, we cannot move towards an authentic collective repentance'.[29]

Facing how we feel is what a great spiritual director asks of us. It is also, I believe, what Han Kang's fiction does: it places us with characters and situations that make us feel parts of ourselves that we did not know existed. We name these feelings, especially the complex, ambiguous and dark ones, so that they too might not be forgotten in our language about our life with God. Facing, naming and describing emotions that are both light and dark, transparent and opaque is what we might call a narrative praxis, and a narrative praxis, according to the philosopher Byung-Chul Han, creates new bonds among events and a new

[26] Veale, 'Meditating on Abuse', in *Manifold Gifts*, 220–231, here 222.
[27] Veale, 'Meditating on Abuse', 228, 229.
[28] Berrigan, 'Passion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer', 46.
[29] Veale, 'Meditating on Abuse', 229.

configuration of relationships.[30] New bonds and a new configuration of relationship: this is a way to live this time of epochal change.

To Try to Give Voice to the New Language

The topic of learning new languages has been more than an academic or spiritual pursuit for me. I have spent a lot of time in my life learning Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. And I have found that in order to learn a language you have to listen, but you also have to open your mouth, speak and risk making mistakes. Simply put, there comes a time when you have to try to say something.

The time has come for me to attempt to formulate and share my own narrative. I take my cue from Billy Collins who encourages us to experience our lives and to *go from there* with the words and images that come. I am also encouraged by the narrative work of Han Kang. Though it may seem that my description of her novels suggests a certain apophatic tendency in her approach to others and our interior lives, I believe that she points to the beauty and the necessity of formulating our narrative experiences with a language that includes complex, dark and ambiguous feelings. There is nothing to be afraid of in noticing the full range of our emotions, even the scarier ones.

Paradoxically, this is what makes Han Kang's fiction hopeful. 'Unlike positive thinking', writes Byung-Chul Han, 'hope does not turn away from the negative aspects of life. It remains mindful of them.'[31] Moreover, Joe Veale also encourages us not to remain silent about God. In his essay 'The Silence', Veale, again chafing at the inadequacy of our spiritual language, bemoans that 'our words about God are second-hand, third-hand, reach-me-down, ready-made'.[32] But not for that reason does he advocate silence. Rather, understanding the Ignatian charism as a spirituality committed to language, he posited: 'what the Ignatian tradition challenges us to do really is embarrassing. You have to talk about God.' The point is, as he puts it, 'to speak simply about God'.[33]

I have to confess that I would be more comfortable turning to another piece of literature or to more methodological heuristics for

[30] Han, Crisis of Narration, 33.
[31] Byung-Chul Han, *The Spirit of Hope*, translated by Daniel Steuer (Hoboken: Polity, 2024), 7.
[32] Joseph Veale, 'The Silence', in *Manifold Gifts*, 232–241, here 233.
[33] Veale, 'Silence', 239. In even stronger language, Thomas Merton writes: 'Who can dare to be the kind of fool that gets up and talks about him' (*Learning to Love: Exploring Solitude and Freedom*, volume 6 of *The Journals of Thomas Merton* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997], 315).

finding images and language for spirituality than sharing a narrative experience. In spirituality circles, this is often what we do; we describe in erudite ways all manner of things, yet history, rhetorical criticism and methodological concerns can distract us from talking about God in the first person. For this reason, it seems to me that one of the more challenging insights from Joe Veale is also one of his simplest: to speak simply about God. This is what I will do in a story that is (embarrassingly) simple. It is a story about getting my hair cut in Garberville, California.

Garberville, a small village in Humboldt County with a population of 1,815 citizens, is located about 200 miles north of San Francisco. I spent a week in that part of northern California visiting redwood trees. As far as I am aware, Humboldt County is home to some of the oldest, if not *the* oldest redwood trees on the planet. They are, in the true sense of the word, awesome. During a week in October, our school's fall break, I hiked through various redwood groves; I spent the days straining my neck looking up, running my hands across their surprisingly soft bark, and crouching into the base of those that were hollowed out by fires centuries ago. For as tall as they grow upwards, their root system is small in proportion to their height. They are giant, majestic and, pardon the anthropomorphism, humble.

This context is not ancillary to the afternoon when I walked into a barber's in Garberville on my last day in the town. I was third in the queue, waiting behind two young boys. I love listening to the conversation in barber-shops, and this one was moving. The young mothers of the two boys talked about one of their friends who was killed in a war. They commented on this young man, how fun and full of life he was, and how he lost his life in a war that made no sense to them. Though they did not refer to the place of the man's service, they did, however, comment on how the government provided a cheque for $100,000 to the mother on the loss of her son. Finally, after a wait of some thirty minutes, the barber, a woman, announced it was my turn. As I made my way to her chair, she commented: 'You are so polite, you must not be from here'. I had only said, I think, 'thank you' once or twice, but that was enough to suggest to her that I was not from Garberville.

As I sat in her chair, she waved to me in the mirror, and said, 'Hi, my name is Debbie'. I waved back and said, 'Hi Debbie, I'm Chris'. Debbie is a 56-year-old woman, a native of Garberville. She talked incessantly and occasionally she asked me about my life. For once, I was not in a hurry; I was not perturbed by her questions, nor was I put off by her stories; I felt

present and interested. Stated differently, narrative needs listeners; it requires leisure and a state of relaxation, and I was a relaxed listener.[34] I remember asking her about the economy in Garberville, to which she responded: 'Well, it used to be marijuana, but now that pot is legal all across California, we have no income from the former illegal sale of it'. That helped me understand the place, because I had never seen so many people smoking marijuana, especially elderly men and women, as I did on the streets of Garberville.

She asked me about my work, and I told her that I was a teacher of Christian spirituality at a university in San Francisco. Debbie was enthused: 'I like religion; in fact, I'm Jewish'. Intrigued, I asked if her family was Jewish or if she attended a temple. The answer was 'no'. She summed up her Jewish faith in these words: 'My mom liked to read the Old Testament, and I do too'. Immediately the thought came to me: *Debbie, reading the Old Testament does not make you Jewish*, but then I thought, *let her go. Let her be*.

Our conversation continued down this personal path when she shared her experience of the pandemic. Debbie recounted for me, with numbers, the debt she incurred during the lockdown and the subsequent months, and I can assure you that she will never get out from under that debt. Worse than the economic misfortune was the emotional suffering she endured; Debbie spent eleven months alone. Surprised by such a length of time, I asked her: 'You spent eleven months all by yourself?' With tears in her eyes, she said, 'Yes, eleven months, alone'. She tried hurriedly to brush back her tears, but she couldn't. I sat in silence and she resumed my haircut.

[34] Han, *Crisis of Narration*, 5, 48. Also, from Pico Iyer: 'Leisure is where things happen to you' (*Aflame* [London: Penguin, 2025], 81).

And then she asked: 'Are you a priest?' I could only smile inside and think: *Wow, this woman is sharper than she lets on; she does not miss anything*. When I told her that I am a Catholic priest, she immediately took flight again, describing how she liked looking at the Catholic church near her house. Shortly thereafter she finished cutting my hair, and she was proud of the way it turned out. She assured me: 'it is short and it will be easy for you to take care of'. She was right, it was short and it was easy to take care of. I paid her, thanked her and once again, politely, said goodbye.

It occurs to me that when I recount this story, you may be wondering: what's the point? Where's the new image or language about God? The fact that I cannot answer those questions makes me think that it reveals something about the narrative experiences that you and I live. Information gives, well, information. Stories bring us to a conclusion that we can like and maybe learn from. Narrative, however, resists explanation.[35] Even more importantly, it lingers. And this lingered with me and I knew its import or revelation would come in time. And so I hung around it, talked about it, and revisited it in my heart and mind. On one level, Debbie helped me see that Donald Trump was going to win the US presidential election. It is not that she declared her support for Trump, but it was clear to me that Kamala Harris's message of 'let's be joyful' was not going to reach a segment of the population buried financially and bruised emotionally by the pandemic.

Sitting in the barber-shop in Garberville and talking with her was more, however, than a sociological window into my country. It was more than a sharing of information and more than the kind of storytelling that we see on social media and respond to with a 'like' or an emoji. Debbie was both a straightforward and a complex narrator, smiling and crying, transparent but distant. She was open but at the same opaque. For my part, I was patient, letting the moment emerge. And, importantly, by revisiting it, I was able to prolong it, savour it, and let the revelation in it emerge in its own time. It could grow in me because I gave it time.

I am giving it time now to emerge again now. This encounter presses upon me in such a way that it makes me believe that Debbie and I, in the barber-shop, were, in our very lives, a language. We were and are the narrative expression of God's life, and the grammar of that language is the stuff of our lives, all of it: divorce, priesthood, loneliness, debt, tears and kindness. Debbie was pure in her expression, and I

[35] Han, *Crisis of Narration*, 3.

was too. She was herself, with no adornments, or, better yet, she is middle-aged woman with all of the cultural adornments that accompany a woman trying to survive in the rural USA after the pandemic.

To say that she was transparent would be true, but she was also playing the role of a beautician—creating a pleasant environment for her client. And I was taking the role of the polite customer from out of town, reluctant to admit to being a priest, not wanting to play the part of her confessor, but being the Jesuit on vacation who does not want anyone to know who he is. In other words, I am suggesting that we did not inhabit in that barber-shop some special plane of existence, rather we were our complicated, ambiguous and beautiful selves where everything in our lives belonged and we connected. And we did not just experience something *about* God. We experienced that we were the expression of God's life. Earlier I quoted Joe Veale, who encouraged his readers to look for 'all those other things which open the spirit to the action of God'.[36] The search is simpler; it is not for a thing or an object outside you. You and I are the expression of the language that comes from God who loves us and who comes to us in and through our burned or hollowed-out centres, as well as in the majesty of the warmth, softness and large-heartedness that we can show another human being.

You and I are the expression of the language that comes from God

Inhabited as I have been by my encounter with Debbie, when I think back on it now I see Debbie's wave to me in the mirror as akin to that visit by three men to Abraham in Genesis. He knew they were special visitors and, in his welcome of them, his life changed. The promise that was always out in front of him, so close, but never realised, changed. It was not a thing to happen, it was his being. His life was the sign of God's promise to the people. And he went from there. I hope you can too.

Christopher Staab SJ is a member of the Midwest Jesuit Province of the United States. He is an adjunct associate professor of Ignatian spirituality at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California.

[36] Veale, 'Manifold Gifts', 30.

From the Archive

HOW THE *CONSTITUTIONS* WORK

Joseph Veale

THE STORY OF THE EXPERIENCE of St Ignatius and his early companions, of the movement from Manresa to Rome, is the story of a process by which their experience is translated into the *Constitutions*. Their spirit is given a body. A charism is embodied in an institution.

But institutions can be a tomb of the spirit. In all human life, and especially in the life of the Church and of religious orders, there is a tension between the charism and the institution. How can you harness an earthquake or regulate a tiger? If you try to domesticate a tiger, do you risk turning it into a kitten? St Ignatius was well aware of the fact that religious enterprises which begin with spiritual energy can, with the passing of years, become humdrum and depleted of life. Routine and legalism can choke the original vitality. Efficient administration can try to impose by regulation what in the beginning had its source in a shared spirit. Impersonal authority can supplant spiritual government. Obedience, in response, can grow dispirited. Or, indeed, the body can continue with some juridical semblance of life while from within it can simply disintegrate and decompose.

The Decision to Be a Body

The document that we call the 'Deliberation of the First Fathers' describes what happened when the early companions came together in Rome in 1539 'to seek the gracious and perfect will of God according to the scope of our vocation'. They could not go to Jerusalem as they had planned. They had offered themselves to the Pope to go wherever he might send them. He was about to send them to different places:

This article first appeared in *The Way Supplement*, 61 (1988), 3–20. It was reprinted in Joseph Veale's essay collection *Manifold Gifts* (Oxford: Way Books, 2006). *Manifold Gifts* is available from The Way Ignatian Book Service: please go to https://www.theway.org.uk/bookservice or contact the editorial office.

> Would it be better for us to be so joined and bound together in one body that no physical dispersal however great could separate us? … Finally we decided affirmatively, namely that since the most kind and loving Lord had deigned to unite us to one another and to bring us together—weak men from such different places and cultures—we should not sever God's union and bringing together, but rather every day we should strengthen and more solidly ground it, forming ourselves into one body.[1]

That was quickly decided. It took longer to decide whether 'to pronounce a third vow, namely to obey one of us'. Their eventual decision to obey one of themselves was the equivalent of deciding to become a religious body. It was a decision to be permanent. They expressly wished to pass on to later generations the particular experience they had shared with one another.[2]

The only way to do that is to institutionalise. How, otherwise, do you communicate and conserve the original spirit? Spirit needs to be incarnated, to be given a local habitation and a name. But how do you wed the charism and the institution without killing the charism?

The Divine and Supreme Goodness

'We think it necessary that constitutions should be written' is a clear statement at the opening of the document (Preamble, 1[134]). The Formula says:

> They had become companions … [and] exerted themselves in the Lord's vineyard for many years … performing with much praise in whatsoever countries they journeyed, and each one according to the grace granted him by the Holy Spirit Himself, all the services of charity which pertain to the edification of souls. *Therefore* our predecessor approved, confirmed and blessed their Institute … *that thus* the bond of charity and the unity might be preserved both among the companions themselves and among others who would desire to follow that same Institute.[3]

'Therefore … that thus …': the object of the institution is to aid the bond of charity to be preserved. You institutionalise in order to

[1] 'Deliberation of the First Fathers', translated in John Carroll Futrell, in *Making an Apostolic Community of Love* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), 189–190.
[2] See Formula of the Institute, 2; Examen, 4.1[53]; 4.27[82]. These and subsequent quotations come from St Ignatius, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, translated by George E. Ganss (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970).
[3] Formula of the Institute, 2 (my italics).

sustain love. The *Constitutions* are, in a sense, a Contemplation for Obtaining Love addressed to the body of the Society of Jesus. The bond of love is *de arriba*. This quintessentially Ignatian phrase points to what St Ignatius experienced as entirely given from above, as something that could never be the object of human achievement or striving.

> The chief bond to cement the union of the members among themselves and with their head is the love of God our Lord. For when they are closely united to His Divine and Supreme Goodness, they will very easily be united among themselves, through that same love which will descend from the Divine Goodness and spread to all other men and particularly into the body of the Society. Thus from both sides charity will come and in general will come all goodness and virtues through which one proceeds in conformity with the spirit. (VIII 1.8 [671])

The companionship and the mission are a participation in the love of the Three Persons, 'as rays descend from the sun and waters from a fountain' (Exx 237): 'The Society was not instituted by human means; and neither is it through them that it can be preserved and developed, but through the omnipotent hand of Christ' (X.1 [812]). At all important junctures of the *Constitutions* the same theme recurs: the primacy of the divine initiative and activity. The vocation is experienced as being totally contemplative.

The response to the love of the Supreme Goodness is, therefore, *Deum primo semper ante oculos habere*:

> … first of all to keep before his eyes God and then the nature of this Institute which he has embraced and which is, so to speak, a pathway to God; and then let him strive with all his effort to achieve this end set before him by God—each one, however, according to the grace which the Holy Spirit has given to him … (Formula of the Institute, 3)

The first movement is from God, and the constant response to that is to keep God always before one's eyes. *Deinde*, in the second place, is the Institute; the particular way of living, and the law that endeavours to put words on it, are secondary and subordinate. 'And then let him strive': the ascetical comes third; it is consequent upon and dependent on the previous contemplation of God. 'To achieve this end set before him by God': it is God who gives the vocation and specifies the end.

The whole movement of the *Constitutions* is here. It can be seen in particular parts and chapters and within single paragraphs as well as

within the document as a whole. The movement is from God to the human means, then to the person's appropriation of the means, and finally back again to God.

There too is the characteristic Ignatian emphasis on being clear about the distinction between the means and the end. It is helpful to notice how frequently St Ignatius reiterates the end: 'This is the order which will be followed in the *Constitutions* … while keeping our attention fixed on the end which all of us are seeking, the glory and praise of God our Creator and Lord' (Declaration on the Preamble [137]). The end is absolute and invariable. Then, so long as one purely desires the end, one can be flexible with regard to the means. Besides, not all the means have the same importance; they have a hierarchy of value.

The Constitutions *and the* Spiritual Exercises

The *Constitutions* do not stand alone. They are an elaboration of the Formula of the Institute, which expresses the outcome of the Deliberation of 1539. They are linked with the preceding General Examen. They presuppose, above all else, the experience of making the Spiritual Exercises, which was the experience the early companions had shared, the experience by which 'the most kind and loving Lord had united us to one another and brought us together'. It is not surprising, then, that the *Spiritual Exercises* are printed as part of the Institute:

> To maintain faithfully the grace of our vocation as described in the Institute, the *Spiritual Exercises* of our holy founder stand in first place, both as a perennial source of those interior gifts upon which depends our effectiveness in reaching the goal set before us, and as the living expression of the Ignatian spirit which must temper and interpret all our laws. (GC 31, decree 4, n.1)

The *Constitutions* are unintelligible apart from the experience of making the Exercises. Indeed, without that experience the *Constitutions* are dead. There is an organic relationship between the two. It is helpful, as one reads the *Constitutions* and tries to live them, to see the Exercises coming through and to see the differences—to see how the *Constitutions* cast light on the Exercises and how the Exercises cast light on them.

'To seek God and to find Him in all things.' St Ignatius' own words are the best summary of his relationship with God. From the beginning, in Manresa, his mystical experience was of the Three Persons. In the Contemplation on the Incarnation at the opening of the Second Week

Saint Ignatius of Loyola praying and in ecstasy beneath the Holy Trinity and the Madonna and Child, Novo-Hispanic school, seventeenth century

of the Exercises, the Three Persons behold, contemplate the world, the whole of creation and of human history, the reality of all our human experience. St Ignatius never sees the Three Persons apart from creation, *todas las cosas*. He never sees creation apart from the Three Persons.

It is integral to St Ignatius' experience of God that the smallest event in our human lives is governed by the providence of God. God manifests His concrete and particular will, His providence for our lives, in many ways: through the gospel; through the believing community of the Church; through the circumstances of our lives; through the demands of service, the needs of God's people; through obedience; and also through the interior leading of the Spirit.

The Freedom of the Spirit

What did St Ignatius hope would be the outcome of making the Exercises? Of the many ways in which an answer might be given, the one closest to his expectation would be: someone who had been given the freedom of the Spirit, the inner freedom that enables one to be led by the Spirit in all situations and circumstances: 'through that same love which will descend from the Divine Goodness … in general will come all goodness and virtues *through which one proceeds in conformity with the Spirit*'.[4] To one who is familiar with the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions* it is evident that behind them is always present a distinctive or particular experience of God. For St Ignatius, this experience of God, rooted in his time in Manresa,

[4] *Constitutions*, VIII. 1. 8 [671] (my italics).

found a focus in the meditations on the King and the Two Standards. One cannot read the *Constitutions* without being aware of them.

Exercises and Experiences

There are three stages, inseparable and interdependent, of entering into a spiritual appropriation of the Jesuit vocation. Firstly, making the Exercises. Secondly, doing what St Ignatius called the experiences or experiments. Thirdly, returning from these two experiences to the text of the *Constitutions*.[5]

The Exercises without the experiments could be detached, olympian, antiseptic, self-centred, self-preoccupied, individualist. If that is what they become, then this is not in harmony with St Ignatius' hope and intention. The whole thrust of the Exercises is towards mission, towards the apostolic contemplative life: 'that filled with gratitude for all, I may in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty' (Exx 233). For St Ignatius, 'to love and serve His Divine Majesty' is inseparable from 'to love and serve people', and from 'helping souls'—*ayudar a las ánimas*. What ensures that the fruit of the Exercises does not lapse into spiritual egoism or a disembodied spiritualism is the experience of finding God in the limited, messy, disordered, unsatisfactory, illogical and passionate reality of people's lives.

It is the interplay of the Exercises and the experiments that, in the intention of St Ignatius, reconstitutes the contemplative experience of the early companions. What comes first is the experience, what they were accustomed to call *nuestro modo de proceder*, our way of proceeding. It was this that they articulated in the process of election (discernment) that is recorded as the Deliberation of the First Fathers, and then put into words in the Formula of the Institute. The Formula is the substance of the papal document that founded the Institute. The *Constitutions* are, in turn, an elaboration of the Formula.

The *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions* are typically Ignatian in that they are not concerned to expound a doctrine; they avoid the abstract and look to concrete living and choice. They embody a dynamic. The *Constitutions*, like the *Spiritual Exercises*, lead into a set of experiences or, more properly, suggest the conditions under which such experiences may

[5] *Editor*: Technically the Exercises themselves are the first of the six experiences or experiments named in the *Constitutions* but (as here) the word is more commonly associated with the other five: ministry in hospitals, pilgrimage, humble service in the novitiate house, teaching catechism to boys and the illiterate, and (where appropriate) priestly ministries of preaching and hearing confessions.

be given. For St Ignatius, this began with mystical experiences in Manresa, which then led to his pilgrim searching alone for the particular way of service those graces entailed. This involved his constant prayerful reflection on experience, leading to decision and action; his discovery that the Exercises could dispose others to be given the same kind of grace; the experience of companionship in grace in Paris, issuing in the months of menial service and poverty and street preaching in Venice and Vicenza and the northern towns; the decision to go to Rome, to the Pope, and then, as Paul III was about to scatter them, the Deliberation, the election to form a body and to pass on the founding experience to later generations.

There are evident differences between the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions*. The *Exercises* are addressed to all Christians; they engage individuals; they may, as happened from the beginning, issue in a Carthusian or a Dominican or a lay vocation. The *Constitutions* are addressed to a body in its members, each of whom has been given the same spirit, has experienced being called by God in the same way and towards the same end, to seek Him and to find Him in a life of service, to be an instrument of God's saving work in the world. The *Constitutions* have as their purpose the health, the well-being, the energy and growth in the spirit of the body.[6]

Structure and Meaning

The *Constitutions* are like the *Spiritual Exercises* in that they cannot be described in terms of any literary genre. It is easier to say what they are not than what they are. Fr Pedro Arrupe wrote:

> The book of the *Constitutions*, though it contains juridical elements, is not a *code*. Though it possesses many ascetical-spiritual elements, it is not a *book of devotion* nor an *ascetical manual*. Though it offers many directives that are apostolic on the human level, it is not a simple *textbook* for the apostolate or for pastoral ministry.[7]

Jean Beyer, formerly dean of the faculty of canon law in the Gregorian University, said of the *Constitutions*, 'We have a law that is not a law, a code that is not a code'.[8] If they are not any of the above, then what

[6] See the Preamble to the *Constitutions*, and all of Part X.

[7] Pedro Arrupe, 'Apostolic Mission: Key to the Ignatian Charism', in *A Planet to Heal: Reflections and Forecasts* (Rome: CIS, 1975), 273.

[8] Jean B. Beyer, 'Originalità e dipendenza delle Costituzioni', in *Introduzione allo studio delle Costituzioni SI* (Rome: CIS, 1973).

are they? The key to understanding them and to interpreting any part of them is their structure.

The *Constitutions* are so structured that if we want to understand them we need to see each part in the whole and each part in organic relationship with all the other parts. The summary of the *Constitutions* served us well, but it was defective. It was as though someone had taken *King Lear* and extracted the great speeches and lyrical passages, arranged them in some rough logical order, dismembered the text, dislocated the dramatic structure and destroyed the story, and had then said: *there you have the essence of* King Lear. Moreover it is as though the dismemberer of *King Lear* had omitted: 'And take upon's the mystery of things / As if we were God's spies'. Unaccountably, the summary left out three of the most characteristically Ignatian passages in the *Constitutions*: the reference in the context of apostolic training to the need for the unction of the Holy Spirit, with the suggestions offered in the text presented merely as opening a way (IV.8.8[414]); the flexibility of the directives regarding the prayer and austerities of the formed members (VI.3.1[582]); and the passage already quoted about the love of God our Lord serving as a bond between the members and their head (VIII.1.8[671]).

The Road, a Path, the Way

The General Examen explores the level of desire of one who wants to enter the Society (Examen, 4.44[101]). To desire the end is to have a desire to set out. It is the beginning of a journey. The image of the road, a path, the way, recurs throughout the text. It recalls the *Autobiography*, where St Ignatius speaks of himself always as 'the pilgrim'. That metaphor came naturally to men who knew that it was to be their vocation to be constantly on the road, moving from place to place, never settling or putting down roots, always to experience the insecurity of having no permanent roof, to live 'in journeyings'.

The Institute, *via quaedam ad Deum*, is, as it were, one road to God. 'We think it necessary that *Constitutions* should be written to aid us to proceed better … along the path of divine service on which we have entered' (Preamble, 1[134]). The novice or the young scholastic will 'endeavour always to go forward in the path of the divine service' (III.1.10[260]). But he may 'run too rapidly' and need to be restrained; or he may need to be 'stimulated, urged on and encouraged' when he flags (IV.6.15[386]). The formed members will be 'men who are spiritual and sufficiently advanced to run in the path of Christ our Lord to the extent

that their bodily strength and exterior occupations and obedience allow' (VI.3.1[582]). In experiencing what is characteristic of the poor,

> … where the first members have passed through these necessities and greater bodily wants, the others who come after should endeavour, as far as they can, to reach the same point as the earlier ones, or to go farther in our Lord (Examen, 4.26[81]).

The early companions,

> … made that fourth vow … in order that his Holiness might distribute them for greater glory to God. They did this in conformity with their intention to travel throughout the world and, when they could not find the desired spiritual fruit in one region, to pass on to another and another, ever intent on seeking the greater glory of God our Lord and the greater aid of souls. (VII.1.B[605])
>
> For he gave us an example that in all things possible to us we might seek to follow Him, since He is the way which leads men to life. (Examen, 4.44[101])

The novice or scholastic begins with a desire to set out.[9] But it is as yet unclear what will be the conditions of the road, the climate, the encounters and adventures, the incidents, the hazards of the journey. He cannot know them until he meets them, and no one can tell him beforehand because no one knows. The constant interior climate of the pilgrim is to find his assurance and security only in the Supreme and Divine Goodness and in the certainty of being sent by obedience and guided by the Spirit. All the rest is uncertain; he lives with insecurity. He is freely undertaking to be led into, and accompanied in, an experience, to be incorporated step by step, integrated into the companionship of the body on mission.

It is this that underlies the ten-part structure of the *Constitutions* and the mode, without precedent, of its composition.

How the Body Is Formed for Mission

In part I the individual is admitted. It may be that he is dismissed (part II). He is cared for that he may go forward in spirit and in virtue (part III). He is given the equipment of learning that he will need and begins to be

[9] See Ignacio Iparraguirre, 'Caminare in spirito per la via delle Costituzioni', in *Introduzione allo studio delle Costituzioni*.

Allegory of the World Mission of the Jesuit Order, *by Franz Anton Maulbertsch, c.1760*

apprenticed to the mission of the body (part IV). Part V treats of his final incorporation.

The first five parts deal, therefore, with the formation and growth of the one who will be sent on mission. In treating of the formation of the individual members, the *Constitutions* describe how the body is being formed in its members. They are approaching the point at which the body is dispersed in its members on mission. But first, part VI treats of the fully incorporated members in their relationship with God and with the other members, with the body.

Part VII deals with the ways in which the members are dispersed 'in Christ's vineyard and their relations with their neighbours'. This is the end towards which all the rest has been moving. It is the end for which the Society was brought into being. And so it is the heart of the *Constitutions*. It is also the most primitive part of the text and the most indisputably Ignatian. The body, now fully formed, is articulated in its mission.

The last three parts of the *Constitutions* deal with the whole body in its life and mission. First, how the members so dispersed are to be kept in union, in coherent and cooperative action (part VIII). Then, in part IX, how the body is to be governed and given a head who will send the members, keep them in union and care for their growth in the spirit of the body by being,

> … closely united with God and intimate with Him in prayer and in all his actions, that from God, the fountain of all good, he may so much the better obtain for the whole body a large share of His gifts and graces and also great power and efficacy for all the means which will be used for the help of souls (IX. 2. 1 [723]).

The tenth and final part, 'how the body can be preserved and developed in its well-being', repeats those elements that are essential if the earthen vessel that holds the spirit is to be sustained in continual and constant growth.

The Order of Execution

This description of the process of formation of the body, of the dispersal and the union, of the good government and vigour of the body, follows what in the Declaration to the Preamble [137] St Ignatius calls 'the order of execution', not 'the order of intention or consideration'. The 'order of consideration first considers the end and then descends to the means to attain it'. Characteristically, St Ignatius rejects that way. He prefers to keep to the process of experience. He prefers the concrete to the abstract. He looks to the means in constant contemplation of the end: 'while we keep our attention fixed on the end which all of us are seeking'. He is therefore concerned with the less perfect on the road to the more perfect; he implies imperfection in the traveller at the start and makes allowance for it. Michael J. Buckley has pointed out how St Ignatius is not here presenting ideals; he insists rather on contemplating the end, something that is spiritually and psychologically different. This method has to be flexible to adapt itself to the person, to his capacity and pace, 'according to the measure of divine grace imparted to each'. God is found in the reality of our human condition, and one finds God and serves Him by obeying it. The more abstract 'order of consideration' tends to be rigid. The way favoured by St Ignatius demands flexibility, in that the prescriptions of the *Constitutions* are to be implemented 'according to the circumstances of persons, times and places'.[10]

The order of consideration would properly proceed by topics: a chapter on obedience, another on prayer, and so on. That St Ignatius does not express himself in that way has puzzled many a lawyer who comes to the *Constitutions* without the experience of trying to live them, and

[10] See II. 1. C [208]; II. 2. A [211]; II. 4. C [238]; III. 2. C [297]; IV. 4. B [343]; IV. 5. 1 [351]; IV. 6. K [382]; IV. 7. 2 [395]; IV. 13. 5 [462]; VII. 2. H [626]; IX. 3. 8 [746]; IX. 3. 11[754].

has led to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. St Ignatius' method entails repetition, requires him to take up the same topic in changing contexts and at different stages of a Jesuit's life. To the man who likes things clear and distinct or who is more at home in abstract thinking, or to the legalistic mind, this method is unsatisfactory. In 1551, when a first draft was submitted to the founding group in Rome, the peppery Nicolás Bobadilla said it was like 'a confused labyrinth'. Even Alfonso Salmerón, who was learned and wise, said it had too much repetition.

The same theme is treated more than once. A good example is obedience. Part X treats of obedience in its function in preserving the well-being of the whole body; part IX of the correlative to obedience, good government; part VIII of obedience's function of maintaining the union of the dispersed members; part VII of its function for mission; part VI of the obedience of the formed and incorporated Jesuit; part IV in the context of studies; and part III of the obedience of novices. It is made clear that the obedience of a novice is not the same as the obedience of one who has been 'long tested' and who has been given the responsibility of a mission. It does not follow, of course, that what is said of obedience for novices has no meaning for the older men. Indeed, the full Ignatian teaching on obedience of the judgment is given only in part VI. The earlier teaching is to be taken up and transmuted by the maturer man at a different level of experience.

The Preamble

The Preamble is given to help us to understand the nature of the text and how to interpret it. It is to the *Constitutions* rather as the Principle and Foundation is in regard to the *Spiritual Exercises*. The reality that it expresses underpins all that follows and is to be kept in mind as a guiding norm of interpretation, as a compass to hold one on course.

It would seem, says St Ignatius at the beginning, that constitutions are unnecessary. The Society was not founded by human means (X.1[812]); therefore it must be 'the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness of God our Creator and Lord which will preserve, govern and carry forward in His divine service this least Society of Jesus'. The principal means used by the divine Wisdom is 'the interior law of charity and love which the Holy Spirit writes and engraves upon hearts'. This interior law is effective 'more than any exterior Constitutions'. 'Although' all this is true, 'nevertheless … we think it necessary that Constitutions should be written to aid us to proceed better … along the path of

divine service on which we have entered'. The interior law of the Spirit is primary. The exterior law is useful and necessary.

There is the same relationship here between the human means and the divine initiative and activity as we find in all the central statements of the *Constitutions*. 'Nevertheless, since the gentle arrangement of Divine Providence requires cooperation from His creatures ….' Our created and redeemed reality must be true to itself; we do what we can do; the human must be reverenced and its goodness honoured.

A passage concerning the apostolic formation of young Jesuits, omitted from the Summary, is one of those that shows St Ignatius' sense of the relationship between the human and the divine. In the eighth chapter of part IV, which deals with 'the learning and other means of helping their fellowmen', it is said that towards the end of their studies scholastics should begin to accustom themselves to the spiritual arms they will employ. Since they will have to associate with so great a diversity of persons throughout such varied regions, they need to learn about the Society's way of proceeding. They should be able to foresee the opportunities which can be grasped for the greater service of God by using some means at one time and others at another. They are to be flexible and adroit in using a variety of human means. St Ignatius comments on the purpose of the text:

> 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 aid and dispose one for the effect which must be produced by divine grace (IV.8.8[414]).

Such an approach is especially familiar to anyone who has given the Exercises. He knows that he can 'open the way by some suggestions'. What is humanly done is itself the fruit of the action of the Spirit and what is accomplished is wholly God's. As in the opening of part X (X.1–3[812–814]), and in the Preamble, and in VIII.1.8[671], the spirituality calls to mind the eighteenth-century aphorism which attempted to capture the uncapturable: 'Trust in God as though nothing depended on Him but all on you. But so give everything you have to the work as though God alone were doing it and you not at all.'[11]

[11] *Editor*: On this aphorism see J. P. M. Walsh 'Work as if Everything Depends On—Who?' *The Way Supplement*, 70 (Spring 1991), 125–136.

Incarnation

At the heart of all Ignatian spirituality is a vision of the goodness of created reality and of the earthly and earthy reality of the incarnation. It is, as one might say, a concrete and contemplative experience of the continuing Incarnation, of the Church. St Ignatius takes creation seriously; he never disdains the human, the real, the concrete, the historical, but sees them as sacramental, the channel of God's presence and power. All human reality, all human experience, is sacramental. The spirit seeks a body.[12] 'Neither a disincarnate spiritualism nor a merely secular activism truly serves the integral gospel message.'[13]

Here we come back to St Ignatius' contemplative grasp of God's action in the world, of the creating and redeeming action of the Three Persons *ad extra*, of the supreme Wisdom and Goodness as our Providence. On 11 February 1544 he wrote in his Spiritual Diary:

> There came to me further understandings, namely how the Son first sent the apostles to preach in poverty, and then the Holy Spirit, giving His spirit and tongues, confirmed them, and so the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit, all three persons confirmed that mission.

God is the one who enters into, and is present to, and cares for our lives in every detail, who has a will in regard to our lives and mission, if only we can learn to seek and find it by 'proceeding in conformity with the spirit' (VIII.1.8[671]).

Experience Discerned

So, to return to where we were at the beginning. The writing of the Formula, the General Examen and the *Constitutions* is a human means designed to pass on to future generations the contemplative experience of the first companions. But it is not raw experience. It is prayed experience, reflected upon together and discerned in the Deliberation, before it is written down. Between the experience and the text comes the election, *discretio*, a process of discernment.[14]

[12] See Dominique Bertrand, Un corps pour l'Esprit: Essai sur les Constitutions de la Compagnie de Jesus (Paris: Desclée, 1974).
[13] GC 33, decree 1, n.36.
[14] See Maurizio M. Costa, 'Costituzioni: esperienza ed ermeneutica' in *Introduzione allo studio delle Costituzioni*. To anyone who has read that article it will be clear how greatly my reflections throughout are indebted to it.

An analogous process, in reverse, is required if the text is to be understood, interpreted and lived. It is the same with the *Spiritual Exercises*, and indeed with the other Ignatian documents. To interpret the text, to bring it to life again, to continue to found the order, to animate and to deploy the body demands, in a post-Enlightenment, post-Darwin, post-Freud, post-Marx world, a sensitivity to 'the interior law of charity and love' which is the Holy Spirit. Between the text and the living of it comes the election, a process of spiritual discernment repeatedly named in the text itself, *discreta caritas*. The written law is a useful means, an instrument. But the primary instrument is the body in its members, to the extent that they are *instrumenta coniuncta cum Deo* (X.2[813]). The *Constitutions* are not for speculative contemplation but for contemplative decision and action. It is this that embodies them, gives flesh again to the word, always 'according to the circumstances of persons, places and times'.

To bring this about one needs to be in tune with the text, with the *Autobiography* and the letters, above all with the *Spiritual Exercises*. A little erudition can help us to be somewhat more exact in understanding the sixteenth-century language, its culture and its theological assumptions. That knowledge will be imperfect at best. We need, too, naturally, to be as clear as we can about our contemporary world and the direction in which it is moving, its different cultures and theologies, the sense of the believing community and the needs of God's people now. Those are the human means. At least as important is the need to be affectively involved in the *Constitutions* and their satellite documents. We learn their meaning by living them.

It is in deeds more than in words that the *Constitutions* come to be understood. Their meaning comes alive in an experience together of 'proceeding in conformity with the spirit', of our way of proceeding. It is *discreta caritas* in action that opens the *Constitutions* to us. It is in that contemplative procedure that we are to seek and find God in what we are brought to decide and to do as we seek to meet new needs in a different world, in missionary action that embodies the same spirit in another time.

Not a Rule

In that sense the Ignatian *Constitutions* are not a rule, a law that would prescribe in detail what must, as a rule, be done. For example, in part VI, where you would expect to find some description of what it would be like for a formed Jesuit to live in a Jesuit house, all you find is the following:

> In regard to the particular rules which are employed in the houses where they happen to be, it is proper that they should endeavour to observe the part which is expedient either for their own progress and edification or for that of the rest among whom they find themselves, and which is proposed to them according to the judgment of the superior (VI.3.3 [585]).

And in part VII: 'What pertains to the offices of a house and other things more particular will be seen in the rules of the house' (VII.4.12 [654]).

The fact that the *Constitutions* do not prescribe details of common life does not mean that there is no common life. St Ignatius held common life to be important. He would expect common life to be arranged by the local superior in communication with the Provincial, in the light of circumstances, and in view of the particular apostolic function of the members who happen to be residing in the house. Nowadays, too, the arrangements would certainly be made in consultation with them. That Ignatian obedience is with a view to mission does not mean that one's day-to-day living does not come under obedience. There are some structures that have to be in place in order to ensure the human and spiritual well-being of people who live together and so as to ensure the vitality of the mission.

The *Constitutions* are to be observed and implemented. 'Hence all of us should exert ourselves not to miss any point of perfection which we can with God's grace attain in the observance of all the *Constitutions*.' (VI.1.1 [547]) But that implementation is not a mechanical or literal conformity. The *Constitutions* do not say what must invariably be done; they are not in that sense a juridical code. They are aimed at dealing with concrete realities. They are to be pondered rather than executed unthinkingly. They cannot substitute for *discreta caritas*; they require it, demand it, ground its necessity. They provide criteria for that discernment. They describe and prescribe those interior attitudes and dispositions

Ignatius with the book of the* Constitutions*, by Nicolas Bazin after Nicolas de Largillierre, 1703

before God that are needed if one is to use *discreta caritas* according to the circumstances of persons, places and times. They are not just useful spiritual counsels lacking all authoritative and juridical value. They are meant to be prayerfully used.

The Body Discerning

The *Constitutions*, then, are a kind of law. But they are a law that provides explicitly for the transcendence of the law by giving first importance to the interior law of charity and love, to the Holy Spirit. They are an instrument for missionary discernment, decision and action.

This discernment is never carried out, of course, independently of the body to which one has been joined as a member. Certainly a man must take responsibility for himself; that ultimate responsibility to God may not be supplanted by law or by obedience. He must stand over all his choices and be open to being led by God—yet always as a member of the body. Discernment is always done in the body. One's mission needs to be in harmony with the mission of the body. To be made a member of the body is to surrender one's unredeemed preferences and desires. The link between personal responsibility and the mission of the body is the communication and relationship between the member and his superior.

We come back once again to the relationship between the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions*. The *Constitutions* presuppose the apprenticeship to discernment experienced in making the Exercises. It can be said that the primary note of Ignatian spirituality and of the charism of the Institute is *discretio habitualis*.[15] Just as the *Spiritual Exercises* are not a treatise on spirituality or prayer, but rather a programme initiating a person into an experience of seeking God in seeking His will, and just as the various prescriptions in the *Spiritual Exercises* are various ways of disposing the person to receive gifts from God, so the various prescriptions in the *Constitutions* are designed to facilitate an experience of the body, to dispose the body of the Society to receive gifts from God 'through that same love which will descend from the Divine Goodness and spread to all other men and particularly into the body of the Society'. It is a contemplative experience of the whole Society in apostolic action. The prescriptions, the themes, the topics

[15] GC 33, decree 1, n.13.

are functional; they are means to something different, namely to the growth in the spirit of the body of the Society in doing what it was called together and sent to do, to respond in love to God as an *instrumentum conjunctum* in serving His people.

A Tension of Opposites

It has been shown by a French commentator that the *Constitutions* and their parts, the chapters within the parts and even single paragraphs within the chapters, have a structure that is *genetic, relational and dialectic*.[16] *Genetic*, in that the *Constitutions* are so structured as to show a process of growth. *Relational*, and therefore personal, since the individual member grows through a series of relationships. You could say that the whole *Constitutions*, certainly parts I to V, are a document on formation, a set of guidelines aimed at forming a certain kind of man who will be an instrument united with God. The process of formation and integration into the body is, like St Ignatius' own formation, a process of reflecting on experience and praying it. But that is not done alone. It is done in relationship with a guide who, as in the Exercises, has been travelling the same road, and it is done within a wider network of relationships with the other members of the body. The formation is individual and personal, not an assembly line. Without that, the essentially contemplative nature of the life is almost certain to atrophy or disappear.

Then, finally, the structure of the *Constitutions* and the reality it reflects are *dialectic*. They operate through seeming contradictions that are in fact opposites in interplay. It is easily seen how, for example, part VI, which treats of the personal life of the incorporated member, moves into part VII, in which the members are dispersed. And that in turn gives place to part VIII, in which the scattered members are sustained in union, a juridical union of the body and a spiritual union of hearts. The dialectic can be shown in operation in the language itself. We have seen how frequently St Ignatius expresses his sense of that in the characteristic verbal construction 'although … nevertheless …' whenever he confronts the mystery of the relationship between the freedom of God and human freedom.

[16] François Roustang, 'Introduction à une lecture', *Constitutions de la Compagnie de Jesus*, volume 2 (Paris: Desclée, 1967), 122.

We began with one of those pairs of apparent incompatibles, the charism and the institution, and wondered how they might be wed. The divine and the human we have also seen. There are many others: the individual member and the body; the discerning body and the Church; the spirit and the body; the mystical and the ascetical; passivity and activity; the freedom of the gospel and the law; the union and the scattering; a personal life and mission that require the deepest level of freedom, responsibility and initiative in seeming contradiction with total obedience; inner enlightenment and rationality; the norms of intelligent reflection and discernment that are at one and the same time subjective and objective; contemplation and action; the most efficient and professional employment of the human means, whether of learning or of skill, and at the same time the realisation that it is only God who can make the fruit grow.

St Ignatius was too realistic, he had too keen a vision of the concrete, to be unaware of the tensions between these polarities. The human tendency is to grasp one pole strongly and to relax one's grasp of the other. What St Ignatius wanted was that both be held both gently and strongly. Our minds tend to think in terms of either-or. It is never easy to sustain our grasp of both-and. However, it is not a question of balance or compromise between two opposing poles; balance and compromise can lead to dilution and apostolic debility and then you have neither one nor the other. It is rather a question of holding firmly to both and waiting upon God to work in us a transcendence of the polarities, a resolution of the tensions, a compenetration of one with the other.

This points inescapably to the difficulty, the pain and the challenge of the life we are called to. We live in the insecurity that lies at the heart of the tensions, the most familiar of which is between action and contemplation. It is somewhere at the intersection of those apparent opposites that we are crucified to the world and the world is crucified to us. But it is also somewhere in that tension that imagination is set free and enlarged, and that prophetic creativity takes place.

Joseph Veale SJ (1921–2002) was a leading figure in the rediscovery of the individually given retreat, and in the modern renewal of Ignatian spirituality. He moved into the ministry of the Exercises and into Ignatian scholarship after some twenty years as a charismatic teacher of English in Dublin.

WRITERS' RETREATS

An Ignatian Perspective

Nicholas Austin

FOR A WHILE IT SEEMED as though every graduate student or academic I knew was heading off to a writers' retreat, except me. I lacked the opportunity but certainly felt the attraction. A time away from daily responsibilities and distractions, in a beautiful and prayerful location, with the fellowship of colleagues: what was not to like?

Writers' retreats have indeed become popular recently, not only for creative writers but also for academic ones. I suspect the reason lies in the challenges of contemporary academic life. Alongside their teaching responsibilities, academics usually carry a heavy administrative burden, while research students often have to take part-time jobs to support the costs of their degree. More than that, however, work requiring undivided attention is seriously threatened today by the distracting daily immersion in the stream of e-mails, notifications and social media. For academic writers in the digital age, then, the chance to get away, switch off the phone and clear the metaphorical desk of the mind is not mere luxury but something approaching a necessity. The good news is that much can be achieved in even a brief time when the conditions for sustained, uninterrupted focus are present. What is true in the spiritual life also holds for working life: retreats are a gift to be savoured.

Unexpectedly, it was not long before I found the opportunity to do my own writers' retreat. I had set aside five days in a Jesuit house by the sea for a praying retreat. When the time came, I had to give up that plan, as I had an article to write with a fast-approaching deadline. Instead of abandoning the retreat altogether, however, I decided to repurpose it. I still went to the solitude of the villa house and kept the three Zoom sessions I had booked with my spiritual director. Instead of praying, I wrote; instead of talking about my prayer, I talked about my writing.

As a result, my sense of what was possible with such a practice changed. What if a writers' retreat could be not just an aid to the writing process but a retreat in the deeper sense? Encouraged, I set

about designing such a retreat for academics on Ignatian principles, drawing on the Spiritual Exercises, and was soon leading one for the students and fellows of Campion Hall, Oxford, where I am currently based. Drawing on these two experiments, I would like to elaborate an approach to writers' retreats from an Ignatian perspective, one that may be of help to those desiring such an experience themselves. I propose that we can adopt and adapt from Ignatius Loyola, the patron saint of retreats, principles and practices that can make a writers' retreat far more than a tool for encouraging 'productivity'.

One Experience of a Writers' Retreat

I arrived at Pevensey Bay, south-east England, entering the solitude of an empty house by the sea, somewhat in trepidation. The article I had been asked to write was on a grave topic, and I felt its weight on my shoulders. Patrick Goujon, a French Jesuit who is editor of *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, was putting together a journal issue on forgiveness and justice in relation to ecclesial sexual abuse.[1] This theme was chosen to aid reflection in the French Church, and especially among the French bishops, on how to integrate justice more adequately within the Church's response, following the independent report on sexual abuse in the Church of 2021.[2] As Patrick is himself a survivor of clerical sexual abuse, I could hardly refuse the request.[3]

On the first day of my retreat, I was anxious, not only about the article, but also about my initial spiritual direction session on Zoom. I would have to tell my director that I was not doing the praying retreat I had asked him to accompany but had decided to use the time to write. I worried that he would see my switch from prayer to writing as a spiritual cop-out. But the glimmer of a hope led me not to cancel the three sessions I had booked: the thought that these five days might not only be a way to finish an article ahead of the deadline, but to do this work in a more spiritual manner. After all, I had previously reflected on the Ignatian spirituality of study in an article I had written some years before.[4]

[1] 'Pardon et justice de Dieu, dans l'ombre des abus en Église', *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 112/1 (January–March 2024).
[2] Jean-Marc Sauvé and others, *Sexual Violence in the Catholic Church: France 1950–2020. Final Report: French Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church (CIASE)* (Paris: CIASE, 2021).
[3] See Patrick Goujon, *Precarious: A Survivor of Clerical Abuse Remembers*, translated by Joseph A. Munitiz (Washington, DC: Georgetown U, 2023).
[4] Nicholas Austin, 'Mind and Heart: Towards an Ignatian Spirituality of Study', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 46/4 (2014).

Then, I was concerned with how it is possible to study in consolation. It would be an odd form of Ignatian spirituality that believed we can find God in all activities except academic ones! This was a suitable time to put into practice more fully the conviction that I preached: that study and writing could be a genuine spiritual practice.

My director's response not only put my anxieties to rest, but was also positively encouraging. He was quite happy with the switch from praying to writing, and agreed to keep all three spiritual direction sessions. His skilful direction extended my understanding of what it means for academic work to become a spiritual practice. In the first session, he made a simple suggestion that I believe influenced my experience quite significantly: he prompted me to use the Preparatory Prayer from the *Spiritual Exercises* before each session of writing. *Lord, by your grace may all my intentions, actions, and operations, be for your service and praise*. (compare Exx 46) The prayer that my writing be an act of service infused each period of work with a new sense of meaning for what I was doing. Each time I prayed that my writing would serve God, I had in mind potential service to the Church and to the survivors of ecclesial abuse. The act of offering helped me to trust that the writing process, even in moments of uncertainty or frustration, would eventually bear fruit. The heaviness of the responsibility was lifted. By making an offering of my work, I was leaning on God more than going it alone.

My retreat director suggested applying a second practice from the Spiritual Exercises: to incorporate into each day the Examen or review of experience. Instead of a review of prayer, my Examen was to be a review of the writing process. Through this practice I became more aware of the ebb and flow of my work. At times I experienced relish in the process; at other times I was unable to move forward. The Examen helped me to navigate the tides of energy and malaise, insight and uncertainty, during the five days.

More importantly, the Examen helped me to notice and be more open to a spiritual process that was going on in me. A sign of this was that my image of God was shifting. Especially significant for me was encountering for the first time Thomas Aquinas' astonishing commentary on the woman caught in adultery from John's Gospel.[5] Aquinas reads the story as a dilemma posed to Jesus by the Pharisees and scribes: either

[5] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, translated by Fabian Larcher and James A. Weisheipl (Washington, DC: Catholic U. of America, 2010), 8.1.

he is the merciful one who seeks out and saves the lost but bypasses justice by ignoring the demands of the Law of Moses, or he is the just one, adhering to the Law and so failing to be merciful. On Aquinas' reading, it is only Jesus' wisdom (*sapientia*) and discretion (*discretio*) that are able to resolve the trap, the dilemma: 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her' (John 8:7). This sentence, this judgment, this interpretation of God's Law, is simultaneously merciful and just on Aquinas' reading: Jesus protects the woman from an unjust punishment under unjust circumstances and aids her to find a righteous way forward: 'from now on do not sin again' (8:11).

As I read this text, what I believe was a discernment of spirits was taking place. A false image of mercy—a 'cheap' mercy that bypasses rather than motivating and fulfilling justice—was falling away. I experienced a new wonder at Jesus, whose discretion reveals a God who is simultaneously merciful and just in every act. I also saw its application to the question I was trying to address: the ethic of mercy practised by the Church needs to be an ethic of just mercy, or merciful justice, if it is to respond adequately to the survivors of ecclesial abuse as well as to the accused and to perpetrators. A cheap mercy that bypasses justice will not suffice any more than a cruel justice that lacks mercy.

The article got written and, by the end of the month, I had submitted it to the journal: it was well received. But the Examen had helped me to realise that the retreat was not just fruitful in producing an article. I had experienced in a new way what it means to write as a spiritual practice, not just looking for consolation but seeking to serve God through serving others. My sense of God had changed, and consequently my relationship to God. What had been for me a conviction thus became more of an experience, namely, that it is possible to learn to attune oneself to the action of the Spirit in the very practice of writing. My writing retreat was not just about writing; it was, truly, a retreat.

Monastic and Ignatian Approaches in Dialogue

Encouraged by my experience of a writers' retreat, I began to consider offering a similar opportunity to others. I conversed with several academics who had participated in similar retreats, both religious and secular. Most helpful was a conversation with Karen Kilby, Bede Professor of Catholic theology at Durham University, who together with Clare Carlisle, professor of philosophy at King's College London, has led six writers'

retreats for theologians. They situated most of their retreats at Douai Abbey, a Benedictine abbey in England, and published their findings in *Phenomenology of Theological Practice: Modelling Enquiry and Poesis. A Report*.[6] At the end of their report, they generously share their model, in case others are interested in designing their own writers' retreats.

Carlisle and Kilby shape their approach through two principles and six or seven investigative themes within an overall framework. First, then, they explain the principles:

> Our method was informed by two principles embedded in the project's vision for the discipline [of theology]: phenomenology and ressourcement. Taking a phenomenological approach meant drawing our data from writers' experience and doing our best to set aside both theoretical speculation and normative ideas or expectations about 'good practice' in theological writing. Ressourcement, for us, meant a recovery of spiritual practices, in particular practices of silence drawn from monastic life.[7]

These principles resonate with Ignatian spirituality. First, what is called the 'phenomenological approach' is familiar under the name Examen of Consciousness.[8] The Examen, especially as it is practised today, is a way of reflecting on actual experience. Both the phenomenological and Examen-based approaches offer a way of moving forward by learning from one's own experience, a way of proceeding that is driven not by strongly prescriptive ideals but by engaging with a dynamic energy within the process of writing itself.

[6] (Durham: Durham U, [2024]), available at https://www.dur.ac.uk/media/durham-university/research-/research-centres/catholic-studies-centre-for-ccs/Phenomenology-of-Theological-Practice-Modelling-Enquiry-and-Poesis.pdf

[7] Kilby and Carlisle, *Phenomenology of Theological Practice*, 3.

[8] See George A. Aschenbrenner, 'Consciousness Examen', *Review for Religious*, 31 (1972), 14–21.

Helpful in facilitating this phenomenological approach is the articulation of experience. Kilby and Carlisle explain their practice:

> Retreatants would spend most of the day writing, then the group would gather for 90 minutes each afternoon to talk about the process of writing as it had manifested to them that day. This method helped to maintain a phenomenological orientation to practice and experience.[9]

This is very consistent with the current Ignatian practice of meeting in groups for spiritual conversation and, in general, with Ignatius' encouragement to articulate spiritual experience.

Secondly, Kilby and Carlisle adopt the principle of *ressourcement*: a recovery for today of more ancient Christian traditions. Their retreatants were invited to adopt the monastic daily rhythm, taking part in the liturgy of the hours with the monks and adopting a similar practice of silence during the day. As with the renewal of monastic spirituality, many laypeople as well as religious and priests have benefited from an Ignatian *ressourcement*. A deeper understanding of the text of the *Spiritual Exercises* and the renewed practice of individually accompanied retreats has been especially fruitful.[10] It would be an exercise in this Ignatian ressourcement to apply the principles of the Exercises to other contexts, such as a writing retreat.

Kilby and Carlisle helpfully identify six investigative categories to help academics explore their experience of the process of writing: desire, resistance, agency, relationship, temporality and forms of life. They discovered that an additional category was pertinent: 'one theme emerged which we had not anticipated, and which we came to see as central: the importance of maturing into self-understanding as a writer'.[11] I found that these themes could helpfully deepen the practice of the Examen during a writers' retreat. Participants were encouraged to keep a journal, not only about the writing process during the retreat, but also reflecting on their more customary experience of academic writing through the lens of these themes. Two more themes not directly touched on by Carlisle and Kilby are suggested to me by the *Spiritual Exercises*:

[9] Kilby and Carlisle, *Phenomenology of Theological Practice*, 3.
[10] For one interpretation of this history, see John W. O'Malley and Timothy W. O'Brien, 'The Twentieth-Century Construction of Ignatian Spirituality: A Sketch', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 52/3 (2020).
[11] Kilby and Carlisle, *Phenomenology of Theological Practice*, 5.

consolation and service. I shall elaborate on how these may be pertinent in a writers' retreat below.

Finally, Kilby and Carlisle adopt a framework which proved useful to their project: a distinction between writing as 'finding' and as 'making':

> We noted that in the world of creative writing where 'making' is primary, significant attention goes to the process of writing and to the experience of writers. In academic contexts, by contrast, there is often a default to a science-influenced understanding of research as 'finding' (cf. the language of 'outputs' and 'writing up research' commonly adopted in the UK's Higher Education sector). This prevailing academic culture seems to give little attention to writing itself as a practice.[12]

I do not share Kilby's and Carlisle's way of expressing this shift of focus to writing as a practice. While they acknowledge that finding and making are 'intertwined elements of theological practice', their way of characterizing 'finding' is perhaps restrictive in being based on the hard sciences: 'finding' can also be done in a process-orientated way. Both aspects are integral to theology and other humanities, since these disciplines are concerned with seeking—and finding—the truth.

Nevertheless, the underlying concern of Kilby and Carlisle remains legitimate: to focus on the process and practice of academic writing, not merely on its outputs or impacts. This focus is indeed a helpful corrective to an increasingly technocratic academic culture. A writers' retreat, which can be simultaneously creative and truth-finding, focuses less on results than the practice and process of research and writing itself.

Designing a Writers' Retreat with the Help of Ignatius

In designing an Ignatian writers' retreat, then, I drew both on the work of Kilby and Carlisle and also on my experiment in making such a retreat myself. I searched the *Spiritual Exercises* for Ignatius' wisdom in setting up a retreat process open to the action of the Spirit. To date, I have offered one such retreat. We were blessed to occupy the Jesuit house in Barmouth on the Welsh coast, where one goes for 'mountains, sand and sea', as the old advertising slogan has it.

I characterise an Ignatian writers' retreat as *a time apart to facilitate writing as a spiritual practice and act of service.*

[12] Kilby and Carlisle, *Phenomenology of Theological Practice*, 5.

The underlying principle of such a retreat is a particular expression of the Ignatian maxim, 'finding God in all things': the conviction that writing is an activity in which God is potentially to be found. Many writers are aware of the closely parallel natures of prayer and writing, for example, in the periods where 'trying to make something happen' is fruitless and one is reduced to waiting, trusting, hoping.[13] Writing, like prayer, can be the kind of process that combines the active and passive: while writing is something that is 'done' in active mode, it also involves a more passive or receptive listening to and receiving something that is asking to be expressed.[14] If the Spiritual Exercises give us wisdom for finding God in a prayerful retreat then, with adaptation, we should expect them to offer useful guidance for a writing retreat.

One significant piece of evidence for writing as a spiritual practice is found in the letter written by Ignatius to Francisco Borja as he was coming to the end of his novitiate. Borja had been going to extremes in prayer and penances, and Ignatius gives the striking advice to cut out half of them. He explains:

> I would therefore think it better that you make over half of the time you are currently spending on [prayers and penances] to study (for there will always be a need and a use for the knowledge we acquire, as well as for what God infuses directly), to the administration of your property, and to spiritual conversations …. There is no doubt that it is a greater virtue in the soul, and a greater grace, for it to be able to relish its Lord in a variety of duties and in a variety of places, rather than simply in one.[15]

The negative part of this counsel (to pray for less than fifty per cent of the time he had been spending in prayer) is less apposite for the contemporary

[13] Thanks to Brian Mac Cuarta for conversation on this point.
[14] Thanks to Patrick Goujon for conversation on this point.
[15] Ignatius to Francisco Borja, 20 September 1548, in *Personal Writings*, 299.

Ignatian than it was for Borja the novice and saint in the making. But the positive part is helpful: that study is one of those activities in which it is possible to relish the Lord. And if study can be an activity in which the soul may relish the Lord, then academic writing can surely be also.

Ignatius' own experiences, recorded in his *Autobiography*, shaped his conviction about the need to combine spiritual piety with rigorous intellectual training to serve and help souls more effectively. The early Jesuits continued this combination of the spiritual and the academic in the ideal of *pietas* (devotion) and *eruditio* (learning), which has characterized Jesuit education and intellectual work ever since. Consequently, Peter Hans Kolvenbach refers to 'the binomial idea of *pietas et eruditio*', the attempt to hold the tension between the spiritual and academic, as characteristically (although not exclusively) Jesuit.[16] An Ignatian writers' retreat can be seen as one expression of this long tradition.

Another way of expressing this core principle is that a writers' retreat, conducted in an Ignatian manner, is an exercise in the cooperative spirituality that suffuses the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions*. The ideal is of a 'human instrument' united to God (*Constitutions*, X.2 [813]). Activities done in an Ignatian manner are therefore always apostolic, orientated towards serving others. They are also spiritual activities, attempts to follow God's leading Spirit rather than one's own agenda. Writing in an Ignatian manner depends upon a simple intention to love and serve God in all things, and a discerning mind to attune the writing activity to the creative Spirit already at work.

Three Core Practices: Offering, Examen, Discernment

What are the practices that can support this attunement to the Spirit in a writers' retreat? I propose three core practices and four supporting ones, each adapted from the Spiritual Exercises.

The first core practice is *offering*. A key Ignatian principle is that 'insofar as it depends on us, the eye of our intention ought to be kept single' (Exx 169). Adapting the preparatory prayer of the Exercises, one may make an offering of one's work and writing as an act of service to God and others each retreat day—for example, at the beginning of the day and during the eucharist. This offering may be deepened during

[16] Peter Hans Kolvenbach, 'Pietas et eruditio', *Review of Ignatian Spirituality (CIS)*, 115 (2007), 11–26, here 11. First published in French in *Gregorianum*, 85/1 (2004).

the writing process, for example, at moments of challenge or crisis, when handing it all over to God can grow in authenticity.[17] By making the offering, a retreatant leans on the help of God in trust and hope. The offering is therefore a way into the cooperative spirituality that prays, 'Here I am, O my God … I delight to do your will' (Psalm 40).

The second core practice is *Examen*. In an Ignatian writing retreat, participants are not given instructions on how to write. Rather, the retreat adopts the Examen, or the review of one's experience. Examen is about noticing what has happened and what the writing process was like each day. A journal in which to record experience can be helpful. What is recorded is the basis for a spiritual conversation group each evening. Building in reflection on such investigative themes as those suggested by Kilby and Carlisle can be an additional help to the writer's Examen. I agree with Kilby and Carlisle that a focus on the actual experience of the writing process is more fruitful than a strongly prescriptive approach. Discernment begins with non-judgmental noticing of what experience turns out to be, rather than defining in advance how it should or should not develop.

In the exercise of the Examen, then, it helps to avoid identifying too strongly with 'shoulds', 'oughts' and 'musts': *I should get rid of distractions*, *I ought to be writing for five hours a day*. Such self-imposed necessities and rules are often unhelpfully fixed, unrealistic about how I or the world should be, and carry a burden of anxiety about how bad it would be if these expectations were not to be met. To circumvent the risks of this unhelpful thinking, it is possible to adapt the counsel ascribed the Benedictine monk Dom John Chapman, namely, 'Pray as you can, not as you can't'.

The injunction, *Write as you can, not as you can't*, may help academics to circumvent the discouragement of judging themselves harshly against some imagined blueprint of how they should be writing, or falling into negative self-comparisons with those who appear to be more proficient.[18] Each person is called by name, not asked to become someone he or she is not. The Ignatian approach is to start from where one is, not to fit the mould of some abstract, prescriptive ideal or force oneself into the shape of one's role models. Before one gets to the practice of discernment and judgment,

The Ignatian approach is to start from where one is

[17] Thanks to Sarah Ogilvie for conversation on this point.
[18] Thanks to John Berkman for helpful conversation on this point.

one does well to stay with actual experience. The spiritual process is not driven forward by wilful observation of strong prescriptions but by attunement to the dynamic energy within the experience itself.

The third core practice is therefore the *discernment of spirits*, which can arise out of Examen.[19] Ignatius is acknowledged as one of the most important exemplars and teachers of discernment. Discernment can be introduced to retreatants as *the process of sifting through one's experience to find what helps and what hinders in moving forward, so as to integrate the former and set the latter aside*.[20] The accompaniment of a spiritual director, whether a writer or not, can be especially helpful for the participants in this sifting process. 'Moving forward' here means not only progressing in the writing process, but advancing along the path of the divine service.[21] Retreatants may hope to leave the retreat, not only having made some valuable discernments but also having grown in the habit or quality of discernment, which they can continue to exercise in their writing long afterwards.

As Rob Marsh has argued, it is easy to be blown off track by a natural fascination with counter-movement rather than movement, a tendency that is exacerbated by our therapeutic culture.[22] Indeed, a discerning approach would arguably entail a preferential attentiveness to experiences of ease and consolation over those of resistance and struggle, as from an Ignatian perspective these are more likely to signal a dynamic worth staying with.[23] For it is characteristic of the good spirit to remove obstacles to moving forward and make all things easy (Exx 315).

I do not mean to categorize ahead of time all experiences of struggle in writing as desolation (something that needs to be discerned in particular cases). I also do not deny that it helps to note counter-movements that undermine the good. A continual self-judgment that diminishes one's competence, for example, may come from a spirit that masquerades as

[19] While Examen can legitimately be seen as a practice of discernment of spirits, here I distinguish the two practices, mainly for pedagogical reasons. Examen can be taught as the non-judgmental attentiveness to experience that is required in order to discern, that is, to distinguish the diverse 'movements of the soul'.

[20] See Exx 313.

[21] Nicholas Austin, 'The Ignatian Art of Moving Forward', *The Way*, 61/3 (July 2022), 8–22.

[22] Robert R. Marsh, 'Receiving and Rejecting: On Finding a Way in Spiritual Direction', *The Way*, 45/1 (January 2006), 7–21; reprinted in *Imagination, Discernment and Spiritual Direction* (Oxford: Way Books, 2023).

[23] I gave an initial characterization of consolation in study through the category of 'flow' in Austin, 'Mind and Heart', 26–32.

humility but hinders forward movement.[24] Yet it is easy to focus on the difficult and hard at the expense of noticing experiences of the easy and delightful. Too often we tie ourselves up in knots by trying too hard and making excessive efforts rather than submitting to the yoke that is easy, the burden that is light (see Matthew 11:30).

Supporting Practices: Seclusion, Structure, Embodiment, Accompaniment

In addition to the three core practices of offering, Examen and discernment, there are at least four supporting practices that may be drawn and adapted from the Spiritual Exercises: seclusion, structure, embodiment and accompaniment. Together, these provide facilitating conditions for the attention and discernment required to practise writing spiritually.

First, there is *seclusion*. An Ignatian writers' retreat is a time apart, away from the normal distractions that prevent undivided attentiveness. Ignatius points out that relative seclusion and withdrawal from preoccupations to engage in spiritual exercises or practices can be fruitful:

> By being secluded in this way and not having our mind divided among many matters, but by concentrating instead all our attention on one alone, namely, the service of our Creator and our own spiritual progress, we enjoy a freer use of our natural faculties for seeking diligently what we so ardently desire. (Exx 20)

A focused mind is as necessary for prayer as it is for writing. Silence and solitude are employed as much as they help to cultivate this mental state of attentiveness rather than distractedness.

Seclusion is not an absolute value for Ignatius, but is to be employed *tantum quantum*: as much as it serves the goal. In our six-day retreat, we talked at lunch and supper, and occasionally at evening socials. I do not see these accommodations as compromises. The greater commitment is to a wholehearted and whole-minded search for the grace of the retreat. Participants found working together in silence especially helpful, but also appreciated the mental relaxation and social support that can come from conversation and conviviality with one another.

[24] See Ignatius' diagnosis of this temptation in his letter to Teresa Rejadell, 18 June 1536, in *Personal Writings*, 129 following.

Today the annotation in the *Spiritual Exercises* about avoiding distraction applies especially to our habitation of the digital world. Retreatants can be invited to think about their use of smartphone and computer for messaging, e-mail, surfing and social media. Some may prefer to unplug entirely. Others may restrict use to a single period, such as early afternoon. A retreat is a good place to learn a temperate use of one's devices, 'to order oneself henceforth' (Exx 210) as regards digital devices.

A second subsidiary practice is that of *structure*. Structuring the day can help facilitate creativity, clarity of thought and focus. I adopted the following structure: *magnum silentium* until lunch at 1.00 p.m.; afternoons *ad libitum*; eucharist at 6.30 p.m. followed by supper. The spiritual conversation group met either before Mass or after supper. The Spiritual Exercises encourage the use of discretion in the application of structures. The discretion-guided approach requires participants not to attach themselves too strongly to any specific rule or resolution. Retreatants are trusted to use their own judgment on when to work or rest, when to converse or keep silent—and when to use devices or switch them off. A rigid approach can reflect an undue attachment to control which may become a barrier, creating unnecessary tension, anxiety and guilt. An Ignatian writers' retreat is structured but adaptable, taking place in an atmosphere of trust, purpose and freedom.

A third supportive practice is *embodiment*. As in the Spiritual Exercises, the body and its surroundings are called in to support the dynamic process of the retreat (Exx 76, 79, 229). A conducive environment has its own effect on the mind and heart. To enjoy the sound, smell and sight of the countryside has an uplifting effect on the spirit. A walk, alone or with another, can be a recreative practice after the mental exertion of writing. It is often in such periods that, unbidden, new insights may emerge.

Finally, there is *accompaniment*. It is, no doubt, possible to have a fruitful writers' retreat entirely alone. Nevertheless, the Ignatian wisdom of retreats highlights the value of accompaniment. Even individual retreats can benefit from the accompaniment of spiritual direction, as in my first experience. Talking to a spiritual director provides the opportunity to articulate one's experience more adequately and to be helped to discern both obstacles and graces. Communal writers' retreats offer their distinctive graces. Retreatants can enjoy the encouragement of working in fellowship with others. Shared prayer and liturgy deepen

the fellowship of the group. The spiritual conversation meetings aid in the discernment of spirits as each develops his or her spirituality of writing. Individual graces are enriched by the graces given to the group as a whole.

Beyond the Retreat

This title of this essay employs the indefinite article: *an* Ignatian perspective. The model I propose is flexible and could be developed by adapting additional practices from the Exercises. For example, a prayer period each day could enrich the experience through praying for a grace connected to the investigative themes, entering into gospel scenes in the imagination or practising colloquy, all adding new possibilities to the Examen and discernment.

I end by reiterating my conviction that a writers' retreat can be a genuinely spiritual experience. There is a continual temptation to see a time apart simply as an opportunity to aid the writing process, to get the work finished. This aim is valuable on its own level but misses, I believe, the deeper graces for which one can hope. A writers' retreat, conducted in a way inspired by the *Spiritual Exercises*, can infuse writing with a heightened sense of meaning, cultivate self-awareness, enable growth in discernment and lead to a greater sense of flow and ease in writing. These graces can continue to be deepened beyond the retreat itself. The real fruit of the retreat, then, may not be what is produced on paper, but the deepening self-identity of a writer called to serve others, sharing in the creative work of the Spirit.

Nicholas Austin SJ is a theological ethicist and master of Campion Hall, Oxford. His research has focused on Thomas Aquinas and the virtues, and the connections between ethics and spirituality.

THE FACE OF THE OTHER IN EMMANUEL LEVINAS

Robert E. Doud

EMMANUEL LEVINAS (1906–1995) has contributed greatly to the study of ethics in modern and postmodern European philosophy. For him, the question of the rightness or wrongness of our actions begins as we are challenged by the demanding face (*le visage*) of another person. The human face is the direct, concrete and experiential encounter with a human being: Levinas speaks of 'the epiphany of the face'.[1] This encounter places a demand or a series of demands upon me. It forces me to change as I experience the face of the Other (*autrui*).

Levinas affords a total revision of ethics in the Western philosophical tradition, which may, in fact, amount to a complete repudiation, especially as that tradition begins in the ancient Greeks. He effectively denies himself the strong foundation for ethics found in the writings of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus. Western philosophy has roots in both the Greek and the Hebrew traditions. In it the search for happiness, for justice and for moderation in the pursuit for pleasure, along with an elaboration of the cardinal virtues, affords a rational foundation for ethics. The Christian tradition absorbs the best of what the Greek or Western one has to offer. The thinking of Levinas, by contrast, is almost completely Jewish, although it is given a greater breadth so as to become accessible to a larger audience.

He belongs in the category of ethicists who would be considered as voluntarist or emotivist, rather than to those who are rationalist or metaphysical. His methodology is that of phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks to provide a trenchant description of its subject matter, to the extent that appeal to abstract principles and arguments is unnecessary. Levinas is not interested in providing a study of ethics that is historical or critical in the sense of analyzing the arguments of other philosophers.

[1] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 51, 213 and elsewhere.

Even so, we can see the influence of figures such as Descartes and Kant between the lines of his discussions. For Levinas, philosophy begins as ethics, and begins with a description of the human face and its meaning. I shall meditate here on what the face of the Other means to me in order to lend clarity and give context to what Levinas has to say.

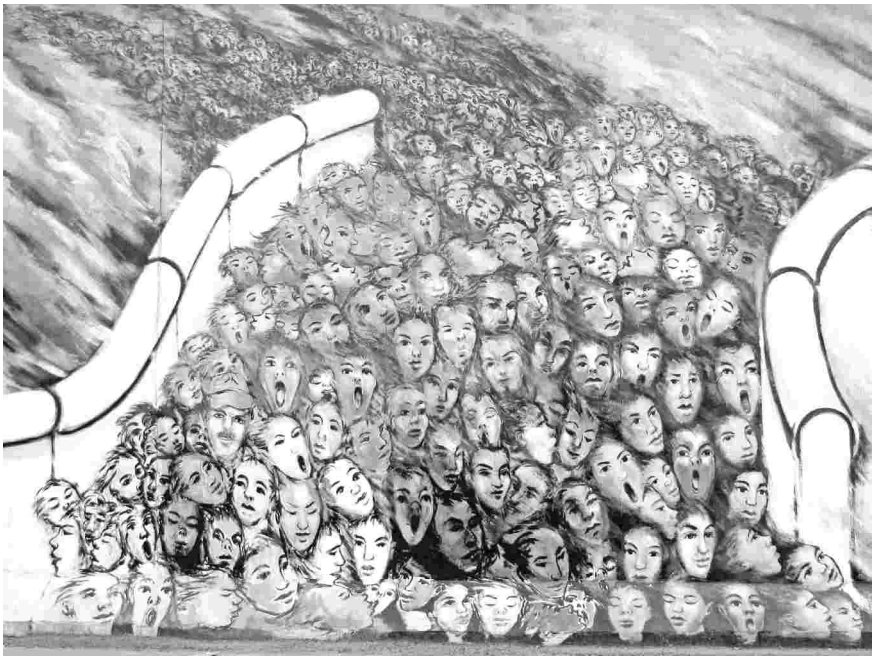
The Face, Faces and Ethics

The *face* in Levinas designates the actual experience of confrontation with another human being, most typically with someone in need, whose need also represents a claim placed on me for help. All principles are left behind; what I must do is urgent and immediate. The circumstance in question is like that of meeting a prisoner during the Holocaust. What can I do to remedy the situation, to give aid of some kind, if not to save, the individual—the face—who stands in need of my help? One thinks of the philosopher Heidegger, who taught Levinas and was an important influence on him, but became a member of the Nazi party. He had Jewish friends and colleagues, and did little or nothing to help them in the dire circumstances of Nazi Germany.

To Levinas, ethics was the *first* philosophy; it came before any other consideration.[2] For him, *the Other*, the poor, the disadvantaged, the shunned and disparaged, comes before me and deserves consideration from me. Especially when there is no advantage for myself in being kind, I owe kindness to others, to *the Other*. Kindness is a primordial obligation, not an arbitrary nicety. He uses the phrase 'the primordial phenomenon of gentleness'.[3]

The face and its understanding are beyond reason, but this does not mean that they are unreasonable. Fairness and kindness are due basically to every face and, thus, that face transcends the mere fact of being a person standing before us. For Levinas, there is also a trace of divinity in every human face.[4] Behind everything Levinas says, there seems to be the anonymous horde of Jewish prisoners who were abused by the Germans during World War II. Indeed, the victims of the Holocaust were treated as faceless nuisances rather than as human sisters and brothers.[5]

[2] See Emmanuel Levinas, 'Ethics as First Philosophy', translated by Seán Hand and Michael Temple, in *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).
[3] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 150.
[4] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78.
[5] See Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights', in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, translated by Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U, 1990), 152–153.



Mural by Kani Alavi, East Side Gallery, former Berlin Wall

As I write this (in 2023), there are hordes of migrants on the southern border of the United States. And the country is struggling to find humanitarian ways of dealing with them, while often wishing that they would return to their places of origin. How do we begin to treat so many people as faces to be welcomed into our lives and into our country? Welcome begins in our families, but it quickly extends its claims into our neighbourhoods, schools, states, countries and far beyond.

The criminals in our jails make claims on us for fair and humane treatment. Our courts seek justice for both the victims and the perpetrators of crimes. Homeless people who cannot work, and even those who refuse to work for any reason, deserve to live within the margins of decency. Taking care of the dispossessed and disenfranchised is a burden to those who must support them, either through their taxes or by donations to various charities. But where are the limits of responsibility? How much is demanded of those who support themselves, when confronted by so many who cannot, or sometimes will not, do so?

It is reason that sets up policies and programmes in society that serve and support the indigent and the incarcerated. Love and care are the energies that drive us to responsibility in these areas, but reason

organizes the efforts that respond to the demands upon us that we acknowledge. The face of the other makes its appeal to the brain of society and places a claim on our action. For me, the immediate question would be: is this claim justified, is it reasonable or unreasonable? Is it solely a question of my respecting the rights of another, or can it also be a matter of my protecting my own rights?

At the same time, are the claims and demands that I place on others reasonable, or am I overly demanding and going beyond the bounds of what is acceptable in what I require of others? Indeed, we have courts of law to help us decide the fairness and appropriateness of what we require as justice in our relations with others. We sometimes ask our friends what we should do or not do in matters of courtesy toward other friends. We have to balance avoiding hurting others against protecting our own privacy and independence.

Duty is both a great blessing and an imposing demand for Levinas. For him the first consideration of each day should be: what do I owe the world and the people in my life? Especially, what is required of me by the poor and indigent, the ones who are in need but have no legal claim upon me and against the privileges I enjoy? Keeping the law is required of me, but the needs of others, even when not addressed by laws, also place demands on me, my time, my money and possessions.

Comparison with Immanuel Kant

The ethics of Levinas has been compared to the ethics of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Levinas's ethics is duty-based or *deontological*. The experience of the demanding face of the other may not at first seem to have much in common with Kant's *categorical imperative*, which says that no action of mine is ethical unless it would be allowable to any and every other human being under the same circumstances. For Kant, my ethical maxim must be universalisable. The ethical stance of Levinas is the opposite of universalisable. For him, ethics is based on the concrete demand of the other placed on me in concrete present circumstances. It is the sheer personal otherness of the Other that brings the ethical dimension into my experience, not some universal principle that is grounded in pure reason.

Totality is an abstraction, says Levinas! The sense of the individual is lost in the universal. Totality is an important idea for him, as seen in the title of his seminal book, *Totality and Infinity*. Likewise Levinas's term *infinity* refers to the unbridgeable separation between the face of

the other and my concept of the face. For Descartes, the reality of God or of God's perfection is infinite, that is, it exceeds by far any definition it might be given. In Levinas, it is the real presence of the other that transcends any idea or definition I might conceive of. Infinity is accessible to me in the face or gaze of the other. My *experience* of the other is not reducible to my *idea* of the other. I cannot be reduced to being part of a totality, and the face cannot be reduced to the abstract idea of what a face is. In conceptual thought, there is 'always a violence done to the singular'.[6] I am an individual in a radical sense, and not primarily a part of a totality, a part of universal humanity. In this way, Levinas is not like Kant.

However, Levinas is like Kant in that ethics for him is inescapable. It is possible for both men to be correct. A primordial pre-awareness of the categorical imperative is triggered into existential engagement by my first confrontation with a human being. Initially, it may be as simple as sharing a toy with another child. Something triggers in me a response that makes the claim of another equal or superior to my own claim over what I possess. Once that happens, I become open to the idea that this may happen again, or be the ever-present condition of my social existence.

The categorical imperative prevents me from doing evil, that is, from permitting myself to do things in my own self-interest that I would not allow another to do in the same circumstances. It does not command me to do good things that I may not want to do on my own. The categorical imperative does not command me to give food to a beggar who comes to my door. But the face of the other in need commands me to respond. For Levinas, the Good Samaritan in the New Testament *must* do something to help the victim lying by the side of the road; the other's need places a claim upon the one passing by. He is not allowed to pass by without offering assistance.

The face of the other in need commands me to respond

There is a strong sense of duty toward the other in Levinas, and there is also a sense, especially in the notion of the face, of emotion, sympathy and personal connection. The face is of ultimate importance, not an impersonal principle that applies equally to all. This is so, even though every person has a face and would trigger the same ethical

[6] William Large, *Levinas' Totality and Infinity: A Reader's Guide* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 24.

response in us. The face comes first, but the response evoked by the face could be seen as a universal one. Kant and Levinas are reconcilable; the full ethical response is both emotive and rational.

Law and Freedom

Kant assumes that there is a human will and that the human will is free. Freedom means that one's will is not determined by external causes or by internal instincts. But Levinas has little regard for the experience or the exercise of freedom. Whereas freedom is part of goodness itself as a value at the heart of all Western ethical thinking, for Levinas, the alien claim of the other replaces freedom. This can be seen as an odd and extreme interpretation of the Jewish teaching called the Torah.

Torah means law. Remember that St Paul turns ethics away from the law, and replaces law with the freedom of the children of God. As sons, daughters and heirs of God and of God's kingdom, Christians are free of the claims of the law against our freedom. It is possible now, because of God's grace, for all of us to be free and autonomous, and still to dwell in the effective love of one another. Levinas's view, it would seem, is the opposite of Paul's.

For Levinas, freedom is not the point of ethics, and not something to be explicitly brought into play. Perhaps it was Levinas's concern to distance himself from Heidegger and from existentialism that drove him to eschew freedom and its implications. Whereas Paul closely associates grace and freedom, Levinas sees an alliance between freedom and the selfishness of the sinful state. It is a word that is closely associated with selfishness and with finding excuses not to respond to the demanding face of the other, especially as the faces of others distract us from our enjoyments and from our more self-authenticating tasks and concerns.

Totality and Enjoyment

For Levinas, life is not primarily the life of the mind or spirit; it is not rational or philosophical. Body transcends mind, knowledge, abstraction, reason and intellect. Enjoyment precedes and transcends intelligence. Thus, my enjoyment of bodily satisfactions in a primordial way is the basis of my happiness. Eating is a primary example of human enjoyment. I do not eat, for Levinas, for any purpose other than the enjoyment of food, company and the immediate experience of eating. Nourishment

in the ordinary sense and other ideas of purpose are secondary. For him, 'Enjoyment is essentially nourishment and it is an activity that enjoys itself as itself without looking beyond itself'.[7] Levinas calls this enjoyment of the self as such *psychism*: 'Psychism is life lived as an activity and this activity is enjoyment'. Life is in its immediacy the love of life: 'Life is first of all the sheer exuberance of being alive'.[8]

The ethical moment begins on the level of enjoyment. Work also follows this prompt, and is primarily a matter of enjoyment. For Levinas, pure egoism is the sheer love of life. Life enjoys even its needs. The enjoyment of life breaks with any immersion into a totality: my independence is unimpeachable. Here Levinas opens the possibility of a primal and valid self-identity that is capable of resisting any invalid or excessive claims on the part of the face of the other. There is, it would seem, even for him, an equality of freedoms on both sides of the ethical relation. There is for every claim a counterclaim, at least potentially.

Even so, the demands of others place limits upon my enjoyment. Seeing the face of the other, I experience the demand to transcend my own experience and to feed the need of the other. My enjoyment is of prime value and importance to me, but it is exceeded ethically by the importance of others' enjoyment to them. The face of the other always calls my own face into question and places a judgment on me.

Levinas does not seem to see well the connection between intersubjectivity and authenticity. Just as I cannot ignore the value of self-enjoyment, I may also enjoy pleasing the other, groups of others and even unseen faces as I imagine them in far-away places. Truly, enjoying my deepest selfhood, along with ethical self-contentment, while also experiencing my interwovenness with neighbours and colleagues, are equally parts of my experience. Life is not to be lived privately or anonymously.

Indeed, communication of thought and feeling, perspective and opinion, is part of the primordial experience of living. For me, the expression of life is important, and is part of living itself. Typing my thoughts at a keyboard is an intrinsic enjoyment that is fraught with the joy of communication. Writing is not merely a means of thinking and communicating, but is immediately infused with its own enjoyment.

[7] Large, *Levinas'* Totality and Infinity, 49.
[8] Large, *Levinas'* Totality and Infinity, 49, 51; and see Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 111–112.

Levinas acknowledges a primal joy of thinking, but there is for him no primal joy in writing. Is there not, though, a joy in writing, as in all expressiveness, that transcends the task of fulfilling an assignment? For him, speaking is more primal than writing, but this ignores the joy of creating greater clarity and precision of thought; there is also enjoyment of the wider range of expression and vision that writing affords.

I may enjoy the experience of sharing something. As a child, maybe it's at first with the family pet that I enjoy sharing some of my lunch. Eventually, I grow into sharing a favourite toy with a sibling or cousin. As an adult, I may enjoy showing off what I have, even allowing a friend to take a turn driving my new car. When a neighbour comes over and asks to borrow a cup of sugar, I may welcome the contact. These casual exchanges may not seem to be claims of any kind. But, suppose a slightly annoying neighbour, who is constantly asking for favours, comes over to beg for one more cup of sugar, or even to borrow my car for the weekend. Suppose I give in and accede to their demand. I may not enjoy helping my neighbour in some cases, but, in the long run, I might not be happy if I did not comply.

Driving home from the airport, I am grateful to have had a safe trip and to have found my car waiting for me in good condition. I see a beggar standing by my exit. I pull over and find in my wallet only a twenty dollar bill. I give the poor man the twenty, saying a prayer of gratitude for the blessings in my own condition, and compassion for the misery in his. No explicit claim had been put upon me in this incident, but indeed there was a claim, and I feel some ethical enjoyment for having done a decent thing.

The Problem of Commitment

For me, our human identity is comprised of a series of decisions which string together successively into a personal trajectory, which I call a commitment.[9] Each moment of my personal emergence makes a claim

[9] In this I am indebted to the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. See my previous articles, 'Ignatian Spirituality and Whitehead', *The Way*, 48/3 (July 2009), 47–60, and 'The Mystery of Commitment and Our Commitment to Mystery', *The Way*, 57/2 (April 2018), 65–74. See also Robert E. Doud, 'Identity and Commitment in a Process Perspective', in *Religious Experience and Process Theology: The Pastoral Implications of a Major Modern Movement,* edited by Harry James Cargas and Bernard Lee (Paramus: Paulist, 1976), 387–395. 'A commitment is a concern on the part of a person to preserve a certain direction in the trajectory that he is' (390); 'The commitment is changed somewhat in every atomic decision' (391).

on the next moment to renew previous acts of choice and decisiveness, and to maintain a direction it has set for itself in the past. Before I make commitments to other persons, I *am* a commitment to myself that maintains fidelity to the serious decisions of my previous life. Then too, as parts of my commitment to myself, I make promises and sustain commitments to other people. So doing, I face the faces of others, with intentions to promote the good in their lives and to respond to the claims or demands they place before me.

I do not face others only in momentary situations, but also in ways that are sustained or emergent. Relationships grow over time and evolve as they do. Thus, commitments with and to others continue to be adjusted and accommodated to over days, months and years. Claims change, and faces come into and drift out of our lives as time goes on. When he focuses on the immediate claim of the face, I find that Levinas does not give enough attention to the variations and vicissitudes of relationships and commitments in the most important interactions of our lives. He deals with the drama of instantaneous interactions, but not with the evolution of trajectories that shift and change with respect to one another.

Often I only begin to think about my duty towards others when things start to go wrong or when there is a change in my relationship with another person. Suppose that, at work, my close colleague has now become my supervisor or that I have been promoted to be the supervisor of my former colleagues. I can no longer socialise with certain people in ways that I did formerly or I cannot speak to them in the same ways or about certain sensitive topics. Even so, there is a bottom line or least common denominator of respect that I must give to everyone I meet. As I avoid others who are rude, I try not to be rude towards others. I may not reflect on the fact or condition that many of these relationships have an ethical dimension. It seems rather to be just a matter of how things are between myself and others.

The individuality of other people and the special relationship we might have with them are factors in determining what we do or what we say to them. Even in a family, I may not speak to all my brothers and sisters in the same way, or have the same expectations of them or allow them to have the same expectations of me. We live in a constant dialogue of establishing and restructuring our relationships with one another. I may notice that one family member or another makes sacrificial accommodations in their relationship with me. I may be more

accommodating to one close cousin than I am to my other cousins. Analogous to the particularity there is in dealing with family members, there will be unique and special tones of relationship with friends, colleagues and acquaintances. This pattern of consideration extends to other members of society; indeed, it extends to all members of society.

The *face* of any particular other requires a response of respect, but this will have varying degrees of uniqueness and intensity that change and develop over time. Morality is cumulative and involves face-to-face encounters as well as sustained contact with many people in the course of a lifetime. For me, dwelling exclusively on the immediacy of the face of the other neglects the importance of sustained emergence of human identity and commitment.

Robert E. Doud is emeritus professor of philosophy and religious studies at Pasadena City College in California. He has a particular interest in bringing together philosophy and poetry, using poetry to offer insight into philosophy and philosophy as a tool in interpreting poetry. His articles have appeared in *Process Studies*, *Review for Religious*, *The Journal of Religion*, *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *Philosophy Today*, *The Thomist*, *Religion and Literature*, *Horizons*, *Soundings* and *Existentia*.

IGNATIUS THE COURTIER

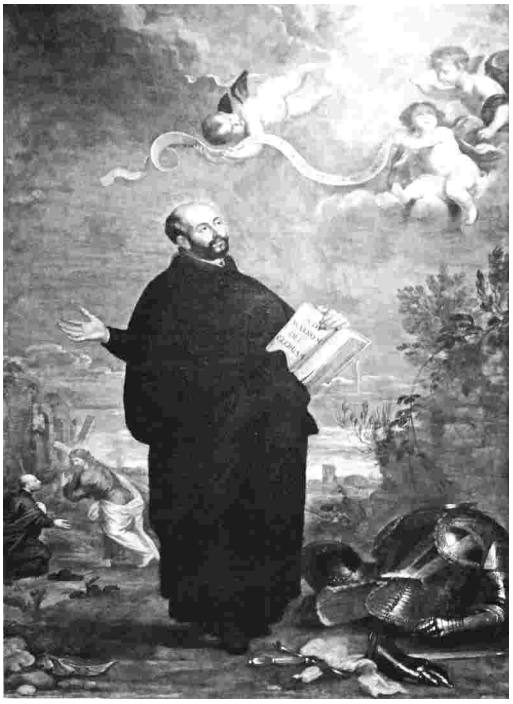
Tim McEvoy

IN THE SUMMER OF 1940, as the fate of his nation was hanging precariously in the balance with the battle of Britain raging overhead, C. S. Lewis tried to convince his readers that the salvation of civilisation itself depended on the resurrection of a medieval ideal. Look up at the skies and consider the young pilots of the RAF, he wrote: 'to whom we owe our life from hour to hour'. Their heroism combined with their urbanity made them contemporary embodiments of chivalry: the value system that 'offers the only possible escape from a world divided between wolves who do not understand, and sheep who cannot defend, the things that make life desirable'.[1]

As a former soldier himself and a medievalist by trade, Lewis believed that the war-torn world needed modern-day Lancelots who could be both 'meek in hall' and 'stern in battle', combining the virtues of valour and forbearance with humility.[2] He would go on to claim, during one of his wartime broadcast talks, later reworked as *Mere Christianity*, that 'the idea of the knight—the Christian in arms for the defence of a good cause—is one of the great Christian ideas'.[3]

For Lewis it was possible to reconcile such an apparently outdated, highly masculine and militaristic ideal with his Christianity.[4] He admired the chivalric tradition's synthesis of the best of pagan and Christian values and found in it no contradiction, but rather inspiration for the Christian of the twentieth century and for a generation of post-war children in his Narnia chronicles. I wonder what Ignatius would have made of this argument, some four hundred years earlier as he reflected on his life and the story of his conversion?

[1] C. S. Lewis, 'The Necessity of Chivalry' (1940), in *Present Concerns*, edited by Walter Hooper (San Diego: Harcourt, 1986), 13–16, here 16.
[2] Lewis, 'Necessity of Chivalry', 15.
[3] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1995), 104.
[4] He believed 'it is perfectly right for … a Christian soldier to kill an enemy' and points out that Jesus never suggested that the Centurion leave the Roman army (*Mere Christianity*, 104).



St Ignatius, *by Anthony Van Dyck, 1630*

The impression given in his *Autobiography* is that he saw a great divide between his early life—when 'his chief delight used to be in the exercise of arms, with a great and vain desire to gain honour' (n. 1)—and his life post-conversion. In his own account, intended for the edification of his Jesuit companions in the young and fast-growing Society, he seems to want to draw a firm line under that part of his story when he was still 'set on following the world' (n. 4). The values of his former life as a courtier, along with knightly pursuits, are firmly and unequivocally rejected, even down to his favourite reading material which he dismisses as 'worldly and false books, which they normally call "tales of chivalry"' (n. 5). Ignatius here seems quite at odds with Lewis, for whom such tales could be a source of inspiration for Christian apologetics.

Ignatius also seems to have had very ambivalent feelings about the idea of the Christian knight—for Lewis one of the great Christian ideas. As we read in the first, official biography by Pedro de Ribadeneira, Ignatius was repulsed by reading Erasmus' popular contemporary treatise 'On the Christian Soldier' and found it a source of desolation during his studies. He was to forbid other Jesuits to read it.[5] At face value, for Ignatius the Jesuit there was little redeemable in the old way of life of Ignatius the knight-courtier, and little reconcilable with the new choices that he began to make from his sickbed in Loyola. Indeed, one gains the impression from his reminiscences that these were two starkly divergent paths: one leading to God, the other to the world and the devil.

[5] Pedro de Ribadeneira, *The Life of Ignatius of Loyola*, translated by Claude Pavur (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2014), n. 75.

Might it be possible, however, that Ignatius, in his eagerness to reject the spirit of the world, was throwing the baby out with the bathwater? While his 'chief delight' before his conversion may have lain in the pursuit of military prowess, was there really no profit to be drawn post-Pamplona from his education in the ways of courtesy? It seems a bit extreme entirely to dismiss the experience of some ten years of formation, from the age of fifteen, when he was being brought up in the household of Juan Velásquez de Cuéllar, at times on the move with the royal court, in the immediate cultural afterglow of the Renaissance.[6]

Or were there in fact some positive aspects to this early formation—tales of chivalry included—that imbued the young Ignatius, perhaps largely unconsciously, with knowledge, skills and attitudes—even virtues—that would bear fruit in later life? I would like to suggest that there was more continuity in his manner of life before and after his conversion than Ignatius credits, and that his courtly life of service as a young man, steeped in chivalry, shaped his conduct as a servant of God in some crucial and characteristic ways.

Courtly Love of God

Ignatius' relationship with chivalry is more ambiguous than at first it might appear, even in the text of his *Autobiography*. On the one hand, the story of Ignatius, the Moor and the mule shows a less virtuous side of the hot-blooded and honour-bound knight prepared to leap violently to the defence of his offended Lady. But on the other, we are told that his intensely spiritual all-night vigil of arms at Montserrat was inspired by precisely the kind of worldly literature he had scorned just a few paragraphs earlier:

> And he went on his way to Montserrat, thinking, as was always his habit, of the exploits he was to do for love of God. And because he had his whole mind full of those things from *Amadis of Gaul* and books of that sort, he was getting some thoughts in his head of a similar kind. Thus he decided to keep a vigil of arms for a whole night, without sitting or lying down, but sometimes standing up, sometimes on his knees, before the altar of Our Lady of Montserrat, where he had resolved to abandon his clothes and clothe himself in the armour of Christ. (*Autobiography*, nn. 17–18)

[6] It is possible that Ignatius' education may have even included music lessons from a Basque relative on his mother's side, the famous Renaissance composer Juan de Anchieta. For a good account see Philip Caraman, *Ignatius Loyola* (London: Fount, 1994), 10–15.

Here it seems clear that his prayerful vigil was inspired both by his new thoughts about the acts of love he would do for God and by the kinds of things he had read about, and was still thinking of, long miles from Loyola, in books such as *Amadis of Gaul*. The two strands of thought appear to combine in his decision to perform an all-night vigil, staff in hand, before the image of Our Lady. Even by Ignatius' own admission then, some doubt is already starting to be cast on the fact that such books were by their nature completely 'worldly and false'.

Ignatius could hardly fail to have been influenced by such a book as *Amadis*. First printed in Spanish in 1508, the same year that he arrived as an impressionable page to the royal treasurer at the court of King Ferdinand, it was hugely popular and its ideals of noble sacrifice in the pursuit of conquest and glory influenced the minds and behaviour of a generation of *hidalgos*.[7] What is significant is that he draws from it inspiration to perform a profoundly religious act: a ceremony of consecration of life. The likely source of this is the vigil of the character Esplandián in book 4, where the latter makes a similar vigil at a Marian site when, having removed his armour, he prays to Our Lady that she might be his advocate to her Son as he offers his life in service. The symbolism in the book is overtly religious.

Interestingly, if we compare the *Autobiography* with Ribadeneira's *Life of Ignatius*—for many years the only biography available—this ambiguity is lost and Ignatius is given full credit for the idea:

> In secular books, he had read about an old rite of initiation for soldiers. Now he wanted to create for himself a spiritual version of that rite. So, girded with his new weapons against the devil, he spent that whole night, sometimes standing and sometimes kneeling, without any sleep, in front of the image of the Most Holy Mother of God, entrusting himself to her, weeping over his misdeeds, and imagining the good deeds that he would do.[8]

Here no mention is made of *Amadis of Gaul* and Ignatius is pictured as adapting a secular rite of initiation to a spiritual one. But in his own telling of events, the pre-existing spiritual character of this rite is not in doubt and is consistent in his mind with the Pauline imagery of putting on the armour of Christ (Ephesians 6: 11–17).

[7] *Amadis* remains a classic of Spanish literature and was only replaced in popularity two generations after Ignatius by *Don Quixote*. Strictly speaking Ignatius was not a knight—a *caballero*—but a *hidalgo*: belonging to a slightly higher social rank as the landless son of an ancient noble family: see Caraman, 14.

[8] Ribadeneira, *Life of Ignatius of Loyola*, n. 29.

For Ignatius himself it appears that a soldier's vigil of arms was inherently and explicitly a spiritual and Christian activity. In this he would not have been alone in the late medieval understanding of chivalry and the ideals of the Christian knight—well known to C. S. Lewis—whose supreme example in scripture was often held to be the Good Samaritan. Being a knight did not just mean defending Christendom from the Turks, but implied living a life of service, humility, reverence and obedience.

From this example, it does not appear that Ignatius was being entirely led astray by vain and worldly books. Whether credited by Ignatius or not, there were attitudes in common between the saintly and the knightly ideals between which he was oscillating at this time. Perhaps, at a stretch, we can even trace the beginnings of his fourth addition on prayer in the *Spiritual Exercises* to this significant experience of bodily self-offering during his vigil, at times standing, at times kneeling (Exx 76). At a significant juncture for him there is apparent integration between Ignatius' habitual forms of thinking along chivalrous lines and the new stirrings of love of God and service of Our Lady that were emerging in his heart from his conversion. Such love easily and naturally found a courtly mode of expression in his vigil of arms.[9]

Courteous Conversation

Another area of his life where we can perceive points of continuity before and after his conversion is in Ignatius' way of dealing with others and in his approach to conversation. This is an area where it is common to ascribe to Ignatius a great deal of originality, in particular his application of discernment of spirits and the insights he gained from reflecting on his experience to talking with others of the 'things of God'. However, it is important to recognise that Ignatius' innovations rested upon a firm foundation of good manners and polite behaviour which he inherited from his courtly upbringing. The impact of the chivalric tradition upon him in this context is significant even if he—along with the first generations of Jesuits, many of whom shared a similar background—perhaps took this largely for granted.

[9] I am indebted here to the insights of Rogelio García Mateo, 'Amadís de Gaula', in *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Ignaciana*, edited by José García de Castro and others (Bilbao and Santander: Mensajero and Sal Terrae, 2007), 133–135.

A good place to look if we want to understand some of the attitudes and values that the young Ignatius would have absorbed is *The Courtier* by Baldassarre Castiglione, first published in Venice in 1528. Rather than an original work of thought, this was a distillation of contemporary noble ideals drawn from a blend of the classics, medieval chivalry texts and Renaissance humanism, which makes it a useful source for understanding the cultural milieu into which Ignatius was born and raised.[10] It is obviously an aspirational text, following a long line of exhortative 'courtesy books' in the Middle Ages, and in some instances Machiavelli's *The Prince* may have been nearer the mark in practice, but nevertheless it gives us some idea of the virtues of courtly life that were upheld in Ignatius' day, whether or not he ever read it.

Castiglione's idea of the perfect courtier was a soldier-scholar who could both be bold in battle and appreciate the value of a decent library, like his idealized patron the Duke of Urbino. Such men were, like Ignatius, well-born and 'experienced in courtly behaviour, arms and letters'.[11] He needed to be able to blend the martial accomplishments with the social and be as adept at dancing or 'polite conversation' as jousting. Above all, the courtier must know 'how to write and how to speak well', he argued.[12] It went without saying that he should also be an expert in the art of romantic love and, as the maxim went: 'when the courtier wishes to declare his love he should do so by his actions rather than by speech'.[13] Such were the ideals that permeated the education of the young Iñigo, of which we can detect traces throughout his writings and observed behaviour in later life, even perhaps in the *Contemplatio*.

All of Ignatius' conversations rested upon a foundation of courtesy and polite norms of behaviour that he had absorbed as a young nobleman. He expected his future Jesuits to uphold the same high standards and by all accounts could not abide bad manners or discourtesy from pompous dinner guests. We can glimpse this through the eyes of Luís Gonçalves da Câmara, who spent some time in Ignatius' company in the Roman community in the 1540s and to whom Ignatius would later dictate his *Autobiography*. Da Câmara remembered how,

[10] Its author, like Ignatius, was more proficient as a courtier than as a soldier: Baldassarre Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, translated by George Bull (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 9–17.
[11] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 75.
[12] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 73–74.
[13] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 268.

> … he never changes a subject of conversation without preamble, nor do those who are in conversation with him without asking his permission. His conversation is so orderly, that he says nothing by chance, without first having thoroughly reflected on it.[14]

These were not just personal habits or characteristics of Ignatius, but were commonplace rules of courteous conversation—so much so that the author of another contemporary book of manners, Giovanni Della Casa, almost apologises to his readers for stating the obvious: 'I will not shrink from telling you something which might seem superfluous to recall because it is so obvious, that is, never to speak before you have set out in your mind what you are going to say'.[15]

His courtly training in speaking and writing certainly served the mature Ignatius, and the future of the Society, very well indeed. He was able to move with ease and assurance in elite circles, putting his fine handwriting to good use in letters addressed to the royal houses of Europe and entertaining the great and the good of Rome at his humble table.[16]

Portrait of Baldassarre Castiglione, *by Titian, 1536–1538*

The significance of Ignatius' letter-writing—the product of his education in the household of the royal treasurer where it is likely he was being groomed as a future court secretary—should not be underestimated.[17] Not only were letters a means of spiritual conversation and counsel over distances, but they were the glue that held the fast-expanding group of companions together

[14] *Remembering Iñigo: Glimpses of the Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. The Memoriale of Luís Gonçalves da Câmara*, translated by Alexander Eaglestone and Joseph A. Munitiz (Leominster: Gracewing, 2005), n. 202.
[15] Giovanni Della Casa, *Galateo or The Book of Manners*, translated by R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1958), 79.
[16] This point has been well made by Caraman, *Ignatius Loyola*, 16.
[17] Caraman, *Ignatius Loyola*, 10–15.

in their first decades: 'the warp and woof of the Society of Jesus as a global missionary order', as one historian has noted.[18] In this Ignatius was unconsciously participating in a contemporary 'epistolary revolution' in which he stands out as one of the great correspondents of his age.

If we compare the text of *The Courtier* with some of Ignatius' later advice on how to converse with others, some striking parallels emerge which give an indication of the legacy of his early formation. It was a truism at court that in dealing with a variety of people, one must possess good judgment and a flexible approach. The courtier must,

> … accommodate his behaviour … recognising the differences between one man and another, must change his style and method from day to day, according to the nature of those with whom he wants to converse.[19]

He ought to speak in such a way 'so as to adapt himself to the qualities of those with whom he had dealings' which meant sometimes attending to 'grave matters and sometimes to festivities and games'.[20]

We see this mirrored in Ignatius' famous instructions to Alfonso Salmerón and Paschase Broët ahead of their mission to Ireland in 1541:

> In order to deal with and win the love of highly placed persons and superiors for the greater glory of God our Lord, first study their temperament and adapt yourself to it. With someone of choleric temperament, quick and merry in speech, adopt somewhat his own style of conversation in good and holy matters; avoid seeming grave, phlegmatic, or melancholic. With those who are by nature reserved, slow in speech, serious and weighty in their conversation, adopt the same manner, for this is what pleases them.[21]

Such was the advice, we might reasonably imagine, that a young Ignatius would have received in his own training at the royal court a few decades earlier. Ignatius was unashamed of going into such conversations with an agenda, as he put it, 'to win a person over and ensnare him for

[18] Paula Findlen, 'With a Letter in Hand: Writing, Communication and Representation in Renaissance Italy', in *The Renaissance of Letters: Knowledge and Community in Italy, 1300–1650*, edited by Paula Findlen and Suzanne Sutherland (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 21–22.
[19] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 124.
[20] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 140.
[21] Ignatius to Alfonso Salmerón and Paschase Broët, early September 1541, in *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*, edited by Martin E. Palmer, John W. Padberg and John L. McCarthy (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 66.

the greater service of God our Lord'. To that end, even the Enemy's means was acceptable—praising and pleasing a person and so entering by their door: 'Once we have won their love, we will better get what we want'.[22]

In this approach, Ignatius was embodying and perfecting the wiles of the ideal courtier in Castiglione's eyes, who 'should seek to gain the goodwill of his prince' and 'so win over the mind of his prince that he may go to him freely whenever he wishes'. The ultimate end being 'to encourage and help his prince to be virtuous and to deter him from evil'.[23] In his preparation of his fellow Jesuits for dealing with persons of rank and authority, Ignatius was taking the courtier's playbook and making it work, even more efficiently, for God.

The Discerning Courtier

Perhaps it is no coincidence that one of the key virtues expected of the courtier—and practised by Ignatius—was discretion or discernment. Discretion permeates Castiglione's text which he equates with the virtue of prudence and 'the knowledge of how to choose what is good'.[24] The ideal courtier needed to know how to behave well and act correctly in any given situation and this required 'right judgment', or,

> … a certain prudence and wise discrimination, and to understand the exact emphasis to give to various actions so that they may always be done seasonably. The courtier may be so judicious that he can discern these distinctions.[25]

He should not act or speak precipitously but 'let him prepare himself discreetly for all he wishes to do or say'.[26] This overriding virtue was to be united with others, which we can imagine chimed with the natural large-heartedness of the young Ignatius: one Monseigneur d'Angoulême was singled out in the book for his virtues of 'noble courtesy, his magnanimity, his valour and his generous spirit'.[27]

The knight-courtier of Ignatius' day needed to have the drive and focus of an elite athlete, and it is no accident that Ignatius—who had

[22] Ignatius to Alfonso Salmerón and Paschase Broët, 66.
[23] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 285, 289.
[24] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 292.
[25] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 113.
[26] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 115.
[27] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 88.

already developed these in himself to a high degree in his courtly life of service—would come to employ them in his service of the Lord. He would prize and encourage such qualities in his future exercitants and companions in mission as well. As much as his physical exercise in the practice of arms, the courtier was to pursue the necessary virtues wholeheartedly and hone them to perfection to achieve his end: that of winning over the love of his prince and thereby steering him towards good. Integrity mattered here as much as gaining universal approval from those in authority:

> He should not only strive to perfect his various attributes and qualities but also make sure that the tenor of his life is such that it corresponds with those qualities, is always and everywhere consistent in itself.

In order to pursue his goal, 'the courtier should know how to order his whole life'.[28]

In this, as for Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises, discernment was key. The courtier needed 'discretion to discern what pleases his prince' and to ensure that all his actions were ordered 'in regard to the end to which he is directed'.[29] This was ultimately a spiritual objective: to steer his prince in the direction of virtue for the good of the kingdom. As the character Ottaviano argues in the book, the courtier strives to influence the prince to be good, just, liberal, magnanimous, gentle and discerning: 'to be virtuous and to deter him from evil', inspiring him to love God 'above all else and direct all their actions to Him as being their true end'.[30]

While Ignatius might have consciously turned his back on his earlier knightly ambitions, he could not shake off his courtly past and, ironically, in following his deeper desires with the same energy, he may have ended up fulfilling them in a new and quite unexpected way. In some sense, it would be harder to find a better example of Castiglione's perfect courtier—or Lewis's heroic yet humble Christian in arms—than the mature Ignatius, armed with the weapon of discernment, striving against the Enemy of our human nature using every trick in the courtier's book. Some of his fellow companions, inspired by his

[28] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 114.
[29] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 126, 284.
[30] Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 285, 307.

model of living, went on quite literally to become courtiers, occupying positions of great influence in the royal households and governments of Europe and beyond in the centuries that followed.

It is also clear from the text of the *Spiritual Exercises* that Ignatius found chivalric imagery enduringly helpful in framing his spiritual experiences. His imaginative engagement with knights, kings and ladies—rooted not just in reading books but in concrete experiences of life in the service of Ferdinand of Aragon—clearly continued to influence his sense of God and of the spiritual life far beyond his conversion.[31]

Grace builds upon nature and it seems that with Ignatius, despite his keenness to hang up his sword and mark a 180-degree change of direction after his conversion, God was not content to let such a good education go to waste. Rather, in some important ways, his very focused training as a Castilian courtier imbued in chivalry was repurposed and refined for a new mission. Though he may not have appreciated it, Ignatius' experience of love expressed in service in the court of the king turned out to be a natural preparation, after some purification, for a life of service of His Divine Majesty.

Tim McEvoy has a doctorate in early modern history from the University of Warwick and is on the team at St Beuno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre in north Wales.

[31] For an in-depth exploration of how his lived experience at court may have shaped certain passages in the *Spiritual Exercises* see Francisco de Borja Medina, 'Vivencias de Iñigo López de Loyola en la corte del Rey Católico y su reflejo en los Ejercicios', in *Las Fuentes de los Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio. Actas del Simposio Internacional (Loyola, 15–19 Sept. 1997)*, edited by Juan Plazaola (Bilbao: Mensajero, 1998), 399–420.

St Beuno's

Jesuit Spirituality Centre

A place of peace, prayer and beauty in North Wales

Away in the loveable west,
On a pastoral forehead of Wales,
I was under a roof here, I was at rest

Gerard Manley Hopkins, Jesuit poet

St Beunos is a Jesuit retreat house offering the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, silent individually guided retreats and various themed retreats. We also provide courses and training in spiritual accompaniment.

For the full programme of retreats and courses, see *www.beunos.com*

Contact: The Secretary, St Beuno's, St Asaph,
Denbighshire, N. Wales, LL17 0AS

Tel: +44 (0)1745 583444

secretary@beunos.com

THE SYNODAL CHURCH

A Synthesis from an African Perspective

Mathew Bomki

THE SECOND SESSION of the sixteenth assembly of the Ordinary Synod of Bishops on Synodality was concluded in Rome in October 2024. This particular synod attracted much global attention, both within and outside the Church. Pope Francis's initiative to convoke the synod was met with doubts in certain quarters. Some thought that it had been contrived by progressives to change some aspects of the Church's teaching, especially with respect to sexual ethics. Others went so far as to qualify the synod as 'a toxic nightmare', 'garbage', a 'Pandora's box', a 'revolution … at work to change radically the Church's self-understanding, in accord with a contemporary ideology which denies much of what the Church has always taught and practiced'.[1] Despite these alarmist attitudes towards the Synod on Synodality, the final outcome has been largely welcomed by the universal Church.

It would not, therefore, be inappropriate to revisit the meaning of the 'synodal Church'. According to Pope Francis, synodality is to be the defining characteristic of the future Church: 'it is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium'.[2] Thus the concept has come to stay in Roman Catholic ecclesiology. Even though synods are a common practice in the Eastern rite Churches as well as in the Anglican Church, the Synod of Bishops was not established as a permanent institution in the Roman Catholic Church until Pope Paul VI created it in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, on

[1] George, Cardinal Pell, 'The Catholic Church Must Free Itself from this "Toxic Nightmare"', *The Spectator* (11 January 2023); Christopher White, 'Texas Bishop Says Francis' Support of Civil Unions Is "Dangerous", Papacy Lacks Clarity', *National Catholic Reporter* (22 October 2020), and see Joseph Strickland, 'Catholic Answers Webinar: Forming the Catholic Conscience in a World of Confusion', at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbtLJoPvTU0%; José Antonio Ureta and Julio Loredo De Izcue, *The Synodal Process Is a Pandora's Box* (Spring Grove: American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property, 2023); Raymond Leo Burke, 'Foreword', in *Synodal Process Is a Pandora's Box*.

[2] Pope Francis, address on the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015.

15 September 1965, honouring the wish of the Council Fathers 'to keep alive the positive spirit engendered by the conciliar experience'.[3]

In the modern Church the term *synod* has always been used in association with the periodic meetings of bishops, which are often followed by a post-synodal apostolic exhortation from the Pope. Pope Francis, however, renounced the writing of a traditional apostolic exhortation after the Synod on Synodality.[4] In his concluding remarks, Francis declared that he did not intend to publish the post-synodal document because, in his own reckoning, what was approved at the synod was sufficient. He thus ratified *Illico presto,* the final synodal document, as part of the 'ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter'.[5]

This surprising decision was certainly taken by the Pope in a synodal spirit. According to Pope Francis:

> In our time marked by wars, we must be witnesses of peace, even by learning how to live out our differences in conviviality.
>
> For this reason, I do not intend to publish an Apostolic Exhortation. There are already highly concrete indications in the Document that can be a guide for the mission of the Churches, in their specific continents and contexts. That is why I am making it immediately available to everyone. In this way, I wish to recognize the value of the synodal journey accomplished, which by means of this Document I hand over to the holy people of God.[6]

Again, in the final note accompanying the synodal document, Pope Francis said:

> Acknowledging the value of the synodal journey completed, I now hand over to the whole Church the indications contained in the *Final Document*, as a restitution of what has matured during these years, through listening and discernment, and as an authoritative guide for her life and mission.[7]

[3] General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 'Introduction to the Synod of Bishops', at https://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/documentazione/documents/sinodo/sinodo_documentazione-generale_en.html.

[4] See John, Cardinal Onaiyekan, 'Synodality in the African Church Avant la Lettre', *Church Life Journal* (20 October 2023). at https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/synodality-in-the-african-church/.

[5] Note of the Holy Father Francis, in 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission. Final Document', 25 November 2024, 3, available at https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024–10–26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf.

[6] Pope Francis, 'Final Greeting of His Holiness', 26 October 2024, 2, available at https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly2024/document/2610/2024_10–26_CG17_SALUTO-SANTO-PADRE_ENG.pdf. And see Pope Francis, 'The Spirit Whispers Words of Love into the Heart of Each Person'. *Osservatore Romano* (31 October 2024).

[7] Note of the Holy Father Francis, 3.

Ecumenical prayer vigil with Pope Francis ahead of the General Assembly of the Synod, 30 September 2023

This was an extraordinary move by the Pope, underscoring his contention that the synodal path is the way of being Church in the third millennium. What, then, is the synodal path that was initiated by Pope Francis in October 2021 and concluded in October 2024?

Definition

In his address of October 2015 commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis asserted that, as the bishop of Rome, he had sought 'to enhance the Synod, one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council'.[8] Etymologically, the term *synod* is 'composed of a preposition συν (with) and the noun ὁδός (path), it indicates the path along which the People of God walk together'.[9] Francis affirmed that, since Vatican II and the successive assemblies, the Church has 'experienced ever more intensely the necessity and beauty of "journeying together"'.[10]

Francis was convinced that increased collaboration and cooperation in all the areas of the mission of the Church is indispensable in the world today with its many challenges and contradictions. Such a vision

[8] Pope Francis, address on the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops.
[9] International Theological Commission, 'Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church', n. 3.
[10] Pope Francis, address on the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops.

of the Church aligns with the 'ecclesiology of the People of God' of Vatican II, with its emphasis on '"the common dignity and mission of all the baptised" in exercising the variety and richness of their charisms, vocations and ministries'.[11] Synodality is therefore a constitutive aspect of the Church.[12]

Synodality as a concept has been brought into the spotlight, revitalised and promoted by Pope Francis, but as an ecclesial praxis it finds its origins in the scriptures and the early Christian community, long before Vatican II. The example of the First Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 illustrates the concept eloquently. We can find there a listening Church, a consultative and deliberative Church, a Church in prayer and an inclusive Church, whose members can sit around the same table to discuss ecclesial and pastoral challenges they face in their community. Such a community of believers is enlightened and invigorated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

A Synodal Church as a Listening Church

If synodality is a constitutive element of being Church, listening is an essential aspect of the synodal process. This implies that synodality begins in mutual listening, an inclusive activity in which the whole Church is involved. It is a dialogue among the People of God which includes both the hierarchy and the lay faithful. According to Pope Francis,

> A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening 'is more than simply hearing'. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of truth' (John 14:17), in order to know what he 'says to the Churches' (Revelation 2:7).[13]

This listening process is undertaken in a context of prayer and discernment, in which everyone shares freely about the issue at stake.

[11] Declan Marmion, '"A Church That Listens": Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church', *New Blackfriars* (2000), 443–444, quoting International Theological Commission, 'Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church', n. 6.
[12] Pope Francis, address on the fiftieth anniversary of the Synod of Bishops.
[13] Pope Francis, address on the fiftieth anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, quoting *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 171.

This is what is called 'conversation in the Spirit'.[14] Everyone listens without prejudice. The Holy Spirit is the protagonist of the process. The rational for this collective listening is also inspired by the principle in Roman law, transmitted and recontextualised by the Benedictine monk Gratian, among others, that 'what touches all must be treated and approved by all' (*quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari et approbari debet*). Such collective listening is certainly not an easy process and Pope Francis recognised this.[15] It might be one reason why there has been resistance to the synodal process in some circles.

Synodality and the Evangelizing Mission of the Church

Pope Paul VI wrote in *Evangelii nuntiandi* that the Church 'exists in order to evangelize'. He quoted from the Third Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: 'the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church'.[16] This implies that all the baptized are agents of evangelization; they all share in the common priesthood of Christ, therefore it is appropriate that all God's faithful, and not only the ordained, share in the mission of Christ.

This is only possible in a spirit of synodality, in which the different charisms of the Holy Spirit are acknowledged and celebrated in their own right, as complementary to each other in the propagation of the Kingdom of God on earth. In very clear terms, Pope Francis stated: '*sensus fidei* prevents a rigid separation between an *Ecclesia docens* and an *Ecclesia discens*, since the flock likewise has an instinctive ability to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the Church'.[17]

Synodality offers the space in which the Church's mission can be undertaken, a space where everyone feels at home and happy to contribute to the growth of the Church. This is underlined by the International Theological Commission when they affirm:

> In this ecclesiological context, synodality is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and

[14] See Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission. *Instrumentum laboris* for the First Session, nn. 31–42, at https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/06/20/0456/01015.html#en.
[15] Pope Francis, address on the fiftieth anniversary of the Synod of Bishops.
[16] Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 14, quoting 'Declaration of the Synod Fathers', n. 4, *L'Osservatore Romano* (27 October 1974), 6.
[17] Pope Francis, address on the fiftieth anniversary of the Synod of Bishops.

> gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelising mission.[18]

Such a vision of being the Church is likely to raise eyebrows in a context where clericalism is profoundly embedded. In the context of the grumblings voiced in some Catholic circles, a process of 'synodal conversion' is thus fundamental for it to be a success.[19]

Synodality and Synodal Conversion as a Learning Process

Synodality involves a change of mindset. This is certainly its most difficult aspect, because of the hierarchical or, rather, clericalist attitude of some of our church leaders. As Tom McGill explains:

> Synodality is not first and foremost about changing Church structures or establishing strategies of renewal; rather it is about a change of culture, of moving from how we live and relate and do things at present to a new mode of being Church.[20]

Austen Ivereigh similarly affirms, synodality 'is a conversion of culture, of mindset, of a way of thinking, of a way of being, a way of operating'.[21]

Synodal conversion is learning to walk with others. This is, in fact, the meaning of being in *communion*, *koinonia* (Acts 2:42–47). Our world today is overwhelmed with noise of all sorts: the noise of guns and of political intoxication, angry debates about child abuse and gender, the denigration of immigrants. There is a superficiality in relationships, both personal and political, and a loss of interest in the Church among young people. With such a grim situation in the world and even within the Church, there is a huge risk of developing an attitude of indifference to the plight of others. How can the Church be authentic today with its challenging realities without compromising its perennial truth, the heart of the gospel message?

Synodal conversion is learning to walk with others

[18] International Theological Commission, 'Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church', n.6.
[19] International Theological Commission, 'Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church', nn. 6, 118.
[20] Tom McGill, 'Synodality in Scotland', *Open House*, 318 (21 June 2024), at https://openhousescotland.co.uk/ news/conference-paper-2-20-06-2024, accessed 29 October 2025.
[21] 'Transcript of a Talk Given by Dr Austen Ivereigh at St Anne and St Bernard, Overbury St, Liverpool 8. January 28th 2024', *Independent Catholic News* (18 February 2024), at https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/49155, accessed 29 October 2025.

The Church is proposing an antidote to the culture of indifference: the path of synodality. Learning to walk together entails learning to face the reality of today as a listening Church, in which every voice counts. This demands self-abnegation. Synodality is therefore not only a process but also a grace to be sought, especially by those who find the inclusive aspect of that process difficult because of their hierarchical position in the Church or clericalist leanings. Synodal conversion is therefore an important step in the synodal process.

Synodality, Clericalism and the African Church

Co-responsibility in mission of the Church was one of the main themes discussed at the Synod on Synodality. In the final synthesis of the first phase (October 2023), it is boldly stated: 'The exercise of co-responsibility is essential for synodality and is necessary at all levels of the Church. Each Christian is a mission on this earth.'[22] Reading in the African context, one does not need a magnifying lens to see that it will take effort, time and tact for this exhortation from the synod hall to become a reality.

In Africa, the Church is still more perceived as the Church of the clergy than the 'People of God'. The clergy are placed on a pedestal and wield a considerable amount of power in the community because they are regarded as specially invested with divine power, conferred on them by holy orders. The sacral model of priesthood is very much at home in this context, a model that 'tends to separate the priest from the community, a separation reinforced by obligatory celibacy, special privileges, and clerical dress'. Once merely 'sacral and ritualistic' aspects of priesthood, emphasized in the pre-Vatican II rite, are promoted and celebrated, the spirit of synodality will find difficulty taking root.[23] Many priests see themselves as 'holier than thou': the priest is always right, even in matters where he has no expertise. The pyramidal model of the hierarchical Church is still very much a reality here.

Pope Francis writes:

> *Synodality*, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretive framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself. If we understand, as Saint John Chrysostom says,

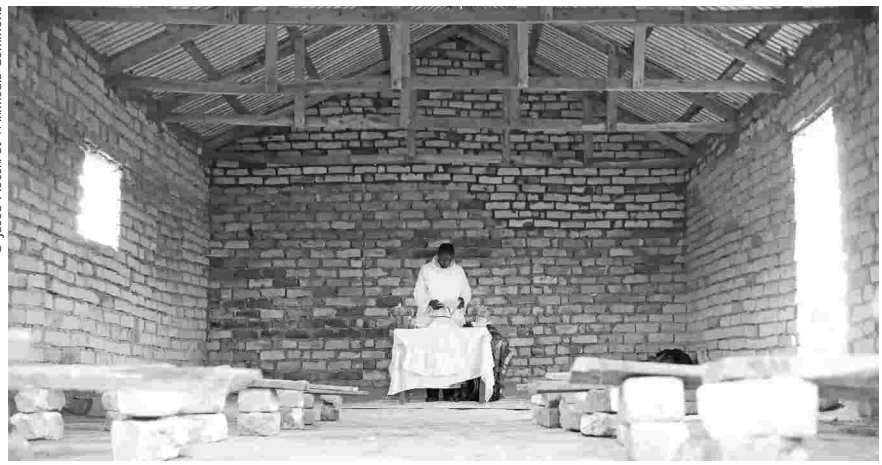
[22] Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 'Synthesis Report: A Synodal Church in Mission', 8.b.
[23] Thomas P. Rausch, *The Priesthood Today: An Appraisal* (New York: Paulist, 1992), 22, 4.

> that 'Church and Synod are synonymous', inasmuch as the Church is nothing other than the 'journeying together' of God's flock along the paths of history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord, then we understand too that, within the Church, no one can be 'raised up' higher than others. On the contrary, in the Church, it is necessary that each person 'lower' himself or herself, so as to serve our brothers and sisters along the way.[24]

The 'People of God', not only the ordained, share in the mission of Christ, in different capacities or charisms. As the synod expressed it:

> The sacraments of Christian initiation confer on all the disciples of Jesus the responsibility for the mission of the Church. Laymen and laywomen, those in consecrated life, and ordained ministers have equal dignity. They have received different charisms and vocations and exercise different roles and functions, but all are called and nourished by the Holy Spirit to form one body in Christ. They are all disciples, all missionaries, in the reciprocal vitality of local communities who experience the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing.[25]

It is undeniable that without the tremendous contribution of consecrated persons in the evangelizing and social ministry of the Church, the mission of the Church in Africa would be seriously compromised. But excessive clericalisation tends to obliterate the role of religious



A Benedictine monk prepares for Mass in a rural Tanzanian church

[24] Pope Francis, address on the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops.
[25] Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 'Synthesis Report', 8.b.

men and women in the African Church. Sometimes religious women are regarded by priests as mere servants in the ministry. In some areas catechists have played a considerable role in evangelizing and keeping the faith alive, especially where there are no priests. But that role is not always acknowledged in its own right, because they are not ordained.

Clericalism could be a huge impediment to the implementation of the synodal exhortation to co-responsibility in the mission of the Church in Africa. Pope Francis strongly decried the clericalist spirit:

> Clericalism is a scourge, it is a blow. It is a form of worldliness that defiles and damages the face of the Lord's bride; it enslaves the holy, faithful people of God.
>
> And the people of God, the holy, faithful people of God, go forward patiently and humbly, enduring the scorn, mistreatment and marginalization of institutionalized clericalism. How naturally we speak of the princes of the Church, or of episcopal promotions as getting ahead career-wise! The horrors of the world, the worldliness that mistreats God's holy and faithful people.[26]

Clericalism is thus not just an issue which pertains to the clergy but also to the faithful, who have a crucial responsibility in declericalising the African Church. Unfortunately, the lay faithful also tend to promote clericalism; it would be dishonest not to recognise that it is deeply embedded in the African Church in general.

Another aspect of synodality which is a challenge to the African Church is its inclusivity and diversity, which can be repulsive to anyone with a clericalist mentality. The reaction of the African Church to *Fiducia supplicans* is a specific proof that it is easy to talk about synodality but putting it into practice can be more difficult.[27] This is why synodal conversion is more than necessary in the African context. In particular, synodality as a concept and an ecclesial praxis should be at the heart of the theological formation for those preparing for ministry in the Church today.

The importance of synodality as an appropriate framework for reflecting on the mission of the Church cannot be overemphasized.

[26] Pope Francis, intervention at the eighteenth General Congregation of the sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 25 October 2023.

[27] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Fiducia supplicans*. This declaration clarified the circumstances under which 'couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples' may be blessed.

And consequently, synodality becomes the *novus locus theologicus* for our epoch. This is eloquently put by Tom McGill, who proposes synodality as 'a mark of the Church alongside One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic'. If the other marks are 'given', because they 'define how the Church lives and operates, what the culture of Catholicism is', a 'cultural shift' is now required for them to be 'understood in a synodal key' so that the Church may renew itself for today's world with all its challenges.[28]

Mathew Bomki SJ is a Cameroonian Jesuit, teaching at Hekima University College, Nairobi, Kenya.

[28] Tom McGill, 'Synodality in Scotland'.

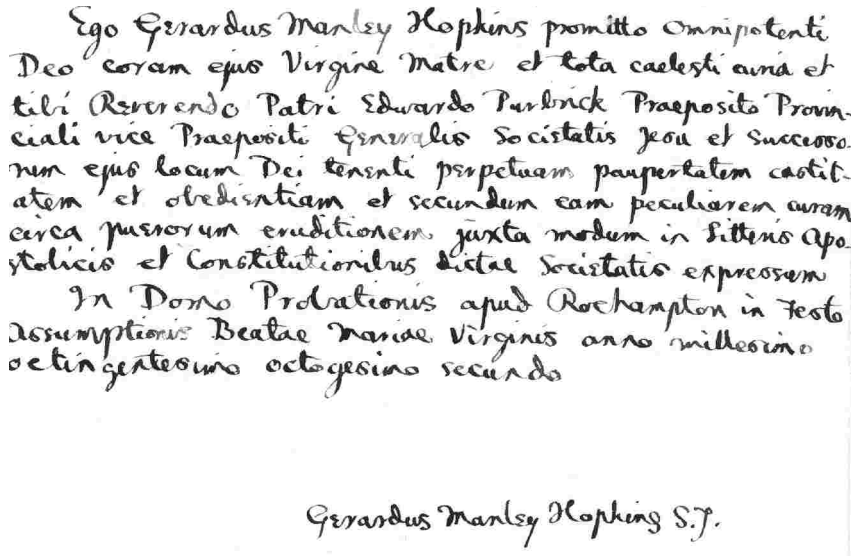
THE TWO VOCATIONS OF GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

Philip Endean

BY NINETEENTH-CENTURY Jesuit standards, Gerard Manley Hopkins's life must have appeared fairly ordinary. Like many Jesuits before and since, he had eccentricities that his contemporaries recorded, more or less affectionately. But his career was normal and unexceptional. Entering the Society as a convert from Anglicanism a year after coming down from Oxford, he followed a normal course of training up till his ordination in 1877. Thereafter he served, without particular distinction, in parishes (notably Oxford and Liverpool) and at Stonyhurst. In 1884 he was seconded to the Irish province, as professor of Greek at the nascent university college for Catholics. There he died in 1889, aged 44, of typhoid.

He was, of course, also a poet. Probably few, if any, of his Jesuit contemporaries were aware of this spare-time activity. But friends outside the Society preserved his texts carefully, even when they seemed bewildered by what seemed to them their 'Oddity and Obscurity'.[1] In 1918, Robert Bridges, a contemporary in Oxford, a medical doctor and by then Poet Laureate, published a volume containing most of Hopkins's major poetry. Shortly afterwards, Hopkins began to become famous. When writing of the newly canonized St Alphonsus Rodríguez in 1888, he had evoked the passing of 'years and years by of world without event', and in doing so was surely saying something about himself.[2] Yet now he has a claim, at least among those outside the Roman Catholic Church, to be the most influential and successful Jesuit ever.

[1] Robert Bridges, 'Preface to the Notes', in *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Robert Bridges and W. H. Gardner (New York: Oxford U, 1965 [1948]), 205.
[2] Gerard Manley Hopkins 'In Honour of St Alphonsus Rodriguez', in *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Norman H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 200–201.


Ego Gerardus Manley Hopkins promitto Omnipotenti
Deo coram ejus Virgine Matre et tota caelesti aula et
tibi Reverendo Patri Edwardo Purbrick Praeposito Provin-
ciali vice Praepositi Generalis Societatis Jesu et Successo-
rum ejus locum Dei tenenti perpetuam paupertatem castit-
atem et obedientiam et secundum eam peculiarem curam
circa pueorum eruditionem juxta modum in Litteris Apo-
stolicis et Constitutionibus dictae Societatis expressam
In Domo Probationis apud Rochampton in festo
Assumptionis Beatae Mariae Virginis anno millesimo
octingentesimo octogesimo secundo

Gerardus Manley Hopkins S.J.

Gerard Manley Hopkins's final vows, 15 August 1882

Obviously, the Jesuit family is proud of Hopkins. Wherever he ranks among nineteenth-century English poets, he is surely the most distinctive and original of them. And he was also a faithful and loyal member of the then English province, perhaps heroically so.

What are we to make of this double identity? Some critics have argued that the poet and priest were in serious inner conflict. Others, either Jesuits themselves or sympathetic to Catholicism, have attempted to refute this claim. Hopkins's initial reputation after the publication of his poetry surely drew on both identities. He cut an exotic figure: his poetic innovations were rendered all the more fascinating by the *outré*, faintly sinister associations of his Catholicism and his Jesuitry. But in so far as we can judge how he himself lived, he seems to have pursued the two most important commitments of his life out of different aspects of his personality. Hopkins seems less a Jesuit poet than a poet who just happened also to be a Jesuit.

A generation ago, the late Fr Alfred Thomas published *Hopkins the Jesuit*. Elegantly, comprehensively and lovingly, Alfred pieced together the details of Jesuit formation as Hopkins lived it between 1868 and 1882. What is striking is how little these careful archival researches tell us about what makes Hopkins interesting. The most one can say is that Hopkins, whose personality seems to have lived off contrasts and extremes, found Victorian Jesuit discipline, and the taxing drudgery of

his routines in active ministry, foils that stimulated by contrast the dramatic sensuousness of his verse.

For the secular public, Hopkins was exotic. In Jesuit circles, he appeared more as one of our own. When his poetry was becoming famous, the renewals in theology and spirituality that would culminate in Vatican II were also beginning to stir. These developments surely influence the ways in which Catholics read him. Jesuits were beginning to think of Ignatius not so much as a militarist disciplinarian but rather as a liberal humanist, a contemplative in action, one who could find God in all things. The discovery of Hopkins in many ways both fed and fed off this wider change in religious sensibility. It became common to see in Hopkins's sacramental vision of nature an application of Ignatius' Contemplation to Attain Love.

The connection was probably inevitable, even providential. But it had the effect of hiding from Hopkins's religious readers how very odd his theology and spirituality would have been within the Victorian English province. Once you pick up from Fr Thomas and others how rudimentary and conventional Hopkins's Jesuit religious training actually was—to a Jesuit today it seems almost unimaginably barren and unenlightened—then his ecstatic visions of God in nature, and indeed the raw emotion of his 'terrible sonnets' in the Dublin period, appear only the more startling. If there is any kind of intellectual source for this creativity, it is more likely to lie in what Hopkins picked up in Oxford, from the renewal in patristic studies promoted by High Church Anglicanism.

When Jesuits and their friends celebrate Hopkins today, they can easily read him for how he embodies what has become an important aspiration for Jesuits: dialogue with modern culture, and perhaps even a hope that we might influence how that culture develops. All well and good. But Hopkins himself seems to have had no such interest. Once 'The Wreck of the *Deutschland*' was turned down by *The Month*, he seems to have given up any idea of going public with his verse.

When his friend Canon R. W. Dixon remonstrated with him on this score, Hopkins replied in a way that made his position plain:

> When a man has given himself to God's service, when he has denied himself and followed Christ, he has fitted himself to receive and does receive from God a special guidance, a more particular providence. This guidance is conveyed partly by the action of other men, as his appointed superiors, and partly by direct lights and inspirations. If I wait for such guidance, through whatever channel

> conveyed, about anything, about my poetry for instance, I do more wisely in every way than if I try to serve my own seeming interests in the matter. Now if you value what I write, if I do myself, much more does our Lord. And if he chooses to avail himself of what I leave at his disposal he can do so with a felicity and with a success which I could never command.[3]

Hopkins wrote this passage probably on the third centenary of Campion's martyrdom, 1 December 1881, which happened to be the second rest day during his tertianship long retreat. After this opening passage, he tries to justify his intuition with arguments that are highly questionable, and something of a historical curiosity, in support of a claim that 'show and brilliancy do not suit us'.[4] But there is no need to let that dubious material colour our reading of the vocational testimony with which Hopkins begins. His poetry is God's. Decisions about its publication are not in the end about his own ambition but about how God might use it. Unless and until a sign comes from God that publication would be appropriate, Hopkins will keep his poetry to himself, trusting that God's 'lovely-felicitous providence' will look after it.[5] 'As things have turned out'—so Fr Christopher Devlin commented in his edition of Hopkins's religious prose in the 1950s—'who dare say that he was not right?'[6]

On the evidence we have, those so inclined will always be able to convict Hopkins of using pious language to rationalise less noble motivations: a fear of ridicule and rejection, or an internalised rigorism that has little to do with true Christianity. But another story is also possible, one that is challengingly inspirational. Hopkins did, despite what is sometimes said, value his poetry. Something in him, within due limits, was prepared to nurture a creativity that nothing in his Victorian Jesuit socialisation reinforced. We have a retreat note of Hopkins's from September 1883:

> I earnestly asked our Lord to watch over my compositions, not to preserve them from being lost or coming to nothing, for that I am very willing they should, but they might not do me harm through

[3] Gerard Manley Hopkins to R. W. Dixon, 1 December 1881, in *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, edited by Claude Colleer Abbott (London: Oxford U, 1970), 93.
[4] Hopkins to Dixon, 1 December 1881, 96.
[5] Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'The Wreck of the *Deutschland*', in *Poetical Works*, 127.
[6] Christopher Devlin, 'Introduction', *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford U, 1959), 121.

> the enmity or imprudence of any man or of my own; that he wd. have them as his own and employ or not employ them as he shd. see fit. And this I believe is heard.[7]

It thus becomes possible to see Hopkins as exemplifying an important teaching from a text he probably never read: the opening of part X of Ignatius's *Constitutions*. Yes, it is important that we learn to use our natural talents well; yes, we normally have some idea of the fruit that our engagement brings forth. But these things are not essential. What matters is that we entrust things to God. Even in the apostolate, 'the means which join the instrument with God, and arrange it so that it is well governed by his divine hand, are more effective than those which arrange it with regard to people' (X.2 [813]). In what appears to us as trivial, or even failure, God's power may indeed be accomplishing 'abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine' (Ephesians 3:20).

Hopkins made his last retreat in January 1889, and the notes, fortunately, survive. Nothing at that point suggested that his death would come six months later. His first meditations lead to an outpouring of raw pain at the 'five wasted years' he has spent in Ireland: 'I am ashamed of the little I have done, of my waste of time …. All my undertakings miscarry: I am like a straining eunuch …. O my God, look down on me'.[8] As the retreat moves on, it is as though he is protecting himself from a recurrence of such self-loathing. With a cerebral ingenuity verging on the manic, he writes about three gospel stories of Christ's initial public appearance: his Epiphany when the wise men come, his baptism by John and the miracle at the Cana wedding.

In the final surviving paragraph, Hopkins notes something important about the Cana story that most readers miss. The guests never get to drink the new and better wine. Despite the worries of Jesus' mother, the original supply lasts perfectly satisfactorily; the guests continue revelling while the huge water-pots are being filled. The story ends in a way typical of John. The miracle remains a secret among those in the know: the waiting staff, the bridegroom and the disciples. Jesus' hour has indeed not yet come: only later will his glory be revealed.

[7] Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'Retreat Notes 1883 and 1885', in *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, volume 5, *Sermons and Spiritual Writings*, edited by Jude V. Nixon and Noel Barber (Oxford: Oxford U, 2018), 561.

[8] Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'Retreat at Tullabeg, January 1889', in *Sermons and Spiritual Writings*, 565.

Christopher Devlin noted that Hopkins's final sentence about the wine supply at the wedding—'there has been no stint, but there has been an unwise order in the serving'—anticipates some later judgments of his life and work.[9] But for me there is a deeper, more spiritual message to be taken. The paragraph as a whole stands as a comment on Hopkins's vocation. In his lifetime, Hopkins's 'heart in hiding' was largely unseen, marked by 'sheer plod' and more than a fair share of 'the blight man was born for'. Yet even so he made, almost despite himself, a beginning. It was for God, and for others, to carry that beginning forward—a God whose work we can only let 'size / At God knows when to God knows what'.[10]

Philip Endean SJ (1954–2023) had a long association with *The Way* and was its editor between 1994 and 1996, and again between 2001 and 2007. Before his death in September 2023 he worked at the Centre Sèvres (now Facultés Loyola), the home of the Jesuit faculties in Paris.

[9] Hopkins, 'Retreat at Tullabeg, January 1889', 575; Devlin, 'Introduction', 121.
[10] Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'The Windhover', in *Poetical Works*, 144; 'Spring and Fall', in *Poetical Works*, 167; My own heart let me more have pity on', in *Poetical Works*, 186.

A LION RETURNS TO ROME

The Legacy of Leo XIII

Ambrose Mong

WHEN CARDINAL ROBERT PREVOST was elected Pope on 8 May 2025, he chose Leo as his papal name in honour of Leo XIII. In his address to the College of Cardinals, Leo XIV explained his choice:

> There are different reasons for this, but mainly because Pope Leo XIII in his historic encyclical *Rerum novarum* addressed the social question in the context of the first great industrial revolution. In our own day, the Church offers to everyone the treasury of her social teaching in response to another industrial revolution and to developments in the field of artificial intelligence that pose new challenges for the defence of human dignity, justice, and labour.[1]

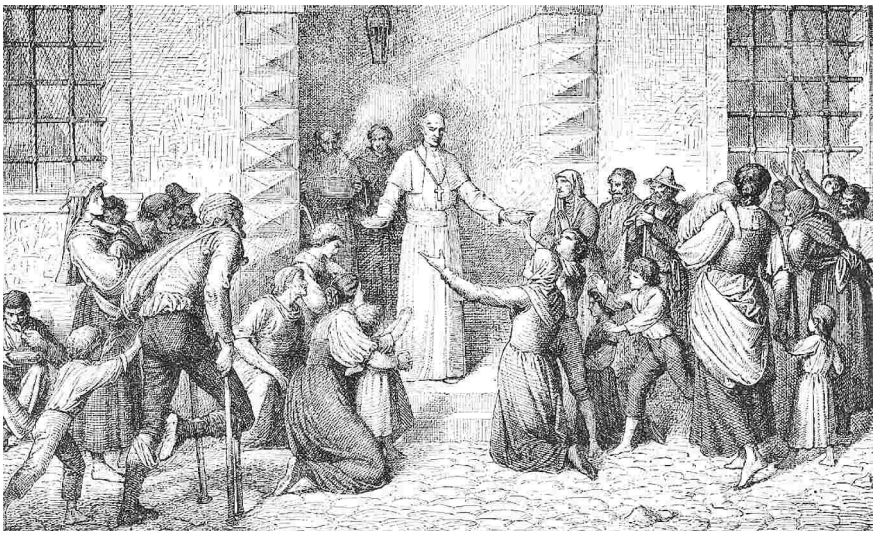
Leo XIII guided the Roman Catholic Church into the modern world, most notably through *Rerum novarum*, which emphasized workers' rights and earned him the reputation as the 'Pope of the Workers'. *Rerum novarum* draws on the Church's collective wisdom to form the cornerstone of modern Catholic Social Teaching.

The two pontiffs share intellectual and spiritual interests—Leo XIII revived Thomism, while Leo XIV, grounded in Augustinian spirituality, seeks to revitalise the Church, balancing modernity with tradition. Leo XIII was perhaps the most prolific pope in history when it came to authoring documents, and his teachings reached the faithful worldwide with advancements in communication and the press. Likewise Leo XIV intends to address contemporary social and digital challenges, serving as a bridge between tradition and modernity. By consciously connecting himself with Leo XIII, the new Pope aims to further his predecessor's work on social justice and moral guidance for the Church and broader society.

[1] Leo XIV, address to the College of Cardinals, 10 May 2025.

In many ways Leo XIII was a modern pope, open to engagement with civil authorities and contemporary social issues. But he also looked back to the past to rediscover the wisdom of tradition. Unafraid to speak to the world with depth and boldness, his vision of the Church 'embraced both the ancient and the new, the mystical and the rational'.[2] In choosing the name Leo, Robert Prevost is inviting the Church to think deeply, pray unceasingly, teach clearly and love wholeheartedly. The lion returns to Rome—a sign of what kind of shepherd we can expect.

Leo XIII (Vincenzo Gioacchino Pecci) was born on 2 March 1810 in Carpineto Romano. He was head of the Roman Catholic Church from 1878 to 1903. Pecci came from a lower nobility family and was educated at the Pontificia Accademia dei Nobili Ecclesiastici in Rome. He was ordained in 1837 and joined the diplomatic service of the Papal States, serving as a papal nuncio in Brussels. Pecci was appointed bishop of Perugia in 1846 and remained in this small diocese for the next 32 years, even after becoming a cardinal in 1853. During this time he developed an open and positive stance toward the relationship between the Church and modern society, reflecting the aspirations of



Archbishop Pecci Aids the Poor, *by Karl Benzinger, 1854*

[2] Shaun Mcafee, 'Leo XIV and the Legacy of Leo XIII: A Name That Bears a Vision', *Catholic Exchange* (9 May 2025), at https://catholicexchange.com/leo-xiv-and-the-legacy-of-leo-xiii-a-name-that-bears-a-vision/, accessed 13 November 2025.

the times. This optimistic outlook was evident in his influential pastoral letters of 1877 and 1878 on 'The Church and Civilisation'.

When Pius IX died on 7 February 1878, Pecci was elected as his successor and took the name Leo in memory of Leo XII, whose pontificate emphasized education, a more accommodating approach toward civil governments and openness to other Christian Churches.[3] The new spirit of Leo XIII's papacy was characterized by constructive political relationships achieved through diplomacy. Leo succeeded in gaining recognition for the Holy See, as an increasing number of countries—including non-Christian nations—established diplomatic ties with the Vatican. But despite his political acumen, Leo's governance of the Church was pastoral rather than political. In supporting the organization of Catholic laity, the pontiff also sought to improve relations with the Anglican Church and the Eastern Churches, whose traditions he deeply respected. While upholding the authority of the Pope, he remained open to the signs of the times.

The doctrine of papal infallibility proclaimed by Pope Pius IX during the First Vatican Council in 1870 was viewed by European nation-states as a threat to nationalist agendas. Like his predecessor, Leo was firm in his stance on the temporal sovereignty of the apostolic see and upheld the doctrine of the ideal of the Christian state. He sought to centralise the papacy's authority and expand the powers of the nuncios. But whereas Pius IX was critical of the modern world, Leo XIII was more focused on bringing reforms in the economic and social spheres.

Navigating Church and State

Becoming pontiff during a time of sweeping political and social changes, Leo XIII faced complex challenges arising from the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. Unlike in the past when there was 'marriage between altar and throne', the government during the French Revolution became hostile to the Church. The birth of the nation-state of Italy in 1861 presented another challenge: this new state refused to recognise the Vatican's authority over temporal affairs. In Prussia the May Laws (Falk Laws), enacted between 1873 and 1875, aimed to bring

[3] See Roger-François-Marie Aubert, 'Leo XIII', *Encyclopedia Britannica*, available at https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-Catholicism.

the Catholic Church under state control, particularly in education and ecclesiastical appointments.[4] According to John Courtney Murray:

> The new separation of Church and state and the old Union of Throne and Altar, whatever their differences, had one thing in common—a tendency toward the politicization of the whole of society, religious matters not excluded.[5]

Leo XIII asserted that the Catholic Church should be free from state interference, because the health and liberty of the Church affect the well-being of society as a whole. Alluding to the May Laws in his first encyclical, *Inscrutabili Dei consilio*, Leo condemned,

> … laws that shake the structure of the Catholic Church, the enacting whereof we have to deplore in so many lands; hence … contempt of episcopal authority; the obstacles thrown in the way of the discharge of ecclesiastical duties; the dissolution of religious bodies; and the confiscation of property that was once the support of the Church's ministers and of the poor.[6]

He contended that the Church should be allowed to play a pivotal role in society to promote the common good: 'in those times which most abounded in excellent institutions, peaceful life, wealth, and prosperity the people showed themselves most obedient to the Church's rule and laws' (n.5).

Leo reminded his readers that the Church continues to provide relief for the poor and sick worldwide through dedicated charitable organizations. Far from opposing genuine progress, the Church has made the world more peaceful and prosperous. In earlier times, the apostolic see had 'held together the crumbling remains of the old order of things' (n.7) by infusing Christian values. Thanks to the first Pope Leo, Leo the Great (391–461), and his successors:

> Italy has escaped unscathed from the utter destruction threatened by barbarians; has kept unimpaired her old faith, and, amid the darkness and defilement of the ruder age, has cultivated and preserved in vigor the luster of science and the splendor of art. (n.10)

[4] Lilian Parker Wallace, *Leo XIII and the Rise of Socialism* (Durham, NC: Duke U, 1966), 106.
[5] John Courtney Murray, 'Leo XIII: Separation of Church and State', *Theological Studies* (Baltimore), 14/2 (1953), 158.
[6] Leo XIII, *Inscrutabili Dei consilio*, n.3.

During the political upheavals of his own time, Leo XIII believed that genuine Christian freedom could stabilise and strengthen the nations.

St Paul taught: 'Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God' (Romans 13:1). Jesus told his disciples, 'Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's' (Mark 12:17). History has shown the Church fully accepts that it is never part of its mission to oppose the rightful aims of civil governments. The teaching that Christians should obey legitimate government stems from the conviction that God is the true source of authority:

> No society can hold together unless someone be over all, directing all to strive earnestly for the common good, every body politic must have a ruling authority, and this authority, no less than society itself, has its source in nature, and has, consequently, God for its Author.[7]

Leo XIII lamented that the gospel, which had civilised European nations in the past, was now undermined by the conflict between the two powers, the Church and the State. He spoke of 'atheism' and 'the idolatry of the state',[8] describing societies completely separated from God, where the Church becomes merely an agency of the state, 'dependent on the civil law for her legal existence and freedom, and subordinated to the political sovereignty'.[9]

> When kingdom and priesthood are at one, in complete accord, the world is well ruled, and the Church flourishes, and brings forth abundant fruit. But when they are at variance, not only smaller interests prosper not, but even things of greatest moment fall into deplorable decay.[10]

While Leo valued cooperation with civil governments, his ultimate aim was the 're-Christianization' of society. All his endeavours, including solutions to juridical problems, were directed to this purpose, and 'whatever value Leo XIII set on legal and diplomatic relations with governments lay in their contribution to this supreme spiritual end'.[11]

[7] Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, n. 3.
[8] Leo XIII, *Au milieu des sollicitudes*, n.25.
[9] Murray, 'Leo XIII: Separation of Church and State', 164–165.
[10] Ivo of Chartres, *Epistola* 238, quoted in Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, n. 22.
[11] Murray, 'Leo XIII: Separation of Church and State', 156.

The Ideal of the Christian State

Leo XIII maintained that the Church's mission encompasses both the spiritual and secular spheres. The well-being of the State depends on the foundations of faith and morality. Critical of those who organize society based on principles contrary to Church doctrines ,he declared that only the teaching of the gospel provides a firm foundation for building the state. Its advantages were highlighted by St Augustine, who addressed the Church in these words: 'Thou joinest together, not in society only, but in a sort of brotherhood, citizen with citizen, nation with nation, and the whole race of men, by reminding them of their common parentage'.[12]

By preaching the gospel, the Church has brought civilisation to many people, as St Augustine noted. Established by Jesus Christ for eternal 'happiness in heaven', the Church also fosters earthly civilisation and promotes the prosperity of nations: 'in regard to things temporal, she is the source of benefits as manifold and great as if the chief end of her existence were to ensure the prospering of our earthly life'. Countries that follow the Church's teachings are provided with a moral compass for virtuous living: 'All nations which have yielded to her sway have become eminent by their gentleness, their sense of justice, and the glory of their high deeds'.[13]

In *Inscrutabili Dei consilio*, Leo emphasized the Church's civilising role in fighting against 'foul superstition' and 'the curse of slavery'. In addition to promoting human rights and dignity, the Church advances the arts and sciences, and serves as the 'mistress' and 'mother' of progress (n.5). It embraces the establishment of the modern state and supports scientific research that benefits society: 'as all truth must necessarily proceed from God, the Church recognizes in all truth that is reached by research a trace of the divine intelligence'. Encouraging every kind of art and craft, through its influence on these creative works, the Church 'labours to prevent man's intellect and industry from turning him away from God and from heavenly things'.[14]

Catholics can influence society through their practice of Christian virtue, and Leo encouraged them to be actively involved in social and political life. He noted that the intervention of committed and

[12] Augustine, *De moribus ecclesiae*, 1.30.3, quoted in Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, n.20.
[13] Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, n.1.
[14] Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, n.39.

practising Catholics would also help to prevent 'men whose principles offer but small guarantee for the welfare of the State' from running the government and implementing policies harmful to the Christian faith. It is the responsibility of Catholics to participate in public affairs and infuse into 'all the veins of the State the healthy sap and blood of Christian wisdom and virtue'. In their private lives, their first duty is to conform their lives to the gospel values, which may require personal sacrifices. Bound to the Church as their mother, they were obliged to 'obey her laws, promote her honour, defend her rights, and to endeavour to make her respected and loved by those over whom they have authority'.[15]

In ancient times, Christians rapidly transformed pagan societies: 'the Christian faith, when once it became lawful to make public profession of the Gospel, appeared in most of the cities of Europe, not like an infant crying in its cradle, but already grown up and full of vigour'.[16] Leo XIII taught that it is the duty of modern Catholics to revive the faith of our forefathers, advance truth and righteousness, and renew civil society with Christian values. This echoed Pope Leo I's efforts to safeguard orthodoxy by promoting a civic Christianity in the fifth century. However, Leo XIII had to confront another challenge: the plight of the workers during the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century.

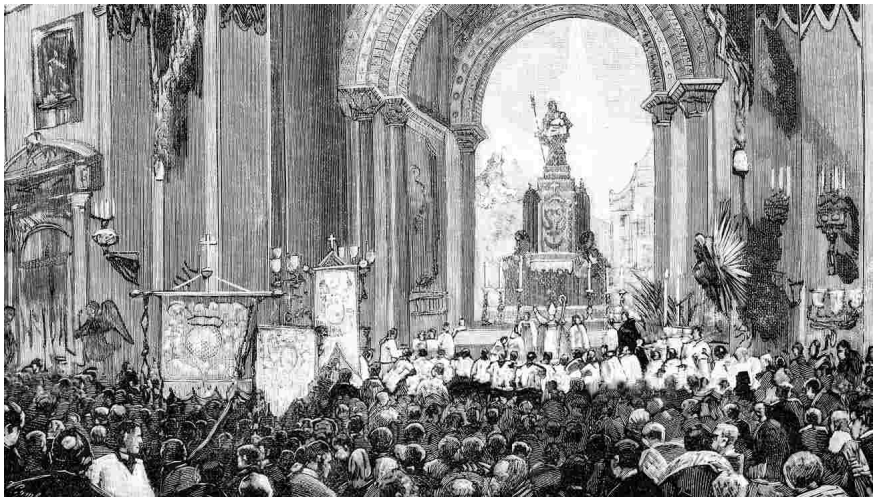
It is the duty of modern Catholics to revive the faith of our forefathers

The Pope of the Workers: Rerum novarum

Issued by Leo XIII in 1891, *Rerum novarum* ('of new things') clarified the Catholic position on social justice, particularly regarding the problems created by the Industrial Revolution. Responding to these societal changes, concern for the working class inspired thinkers to develop new ideologies such as socialism and communism, in opposition to capitalism and the concept of private property. *The Communist Manifesto*, published by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848, laid out the fundamental principles of European socialist and communist movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In 1849, Pope Pius IX issued his encyclical *Nostis et nobiscum*, condemning socialism and communism. His critical view of these

[15] Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, nn. 45, 43.
[16] Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, n. 45.



Pilgrimage of Spanish workers in support of* Rerum novarum*, 1894

ideologies and his reassertion of papal authority lay behind Leo XIII's decision to promulgate *Rerum novarum* 42 years later. This was the first church document to offer a comprehensive perspective on contemporary social issues and to articulate principles aimed at alleviating the sufferings of workers. Taking a new approach, the encyclical opened dialogue with the modern industrial world and appealed to civil authorities to recognise their responsibilities towards the workforce.

In defence of the poor, the encyclical represents the Pope's moral stance and commits the Church officially to reject the main tenets of a western secular liberal capitalism that had increasingly become divorced from any Christian and ethical roots.[17] Leo's purpose was to speak out both against capitalist exploitation of workers and against Marxist revolution. Challenging the dominant capitalist paradigm, the pontiff was also critical of the socialism of the day and sought to maintain 'a middle way between individualism and collectivism'.[18] *Rerum novarum* is a balanced document that rejects both extreme socialism and uncontrolled capitalism.

Leo spoke out against abuses and the sufferings of working people: 'the enormous fortunes of some few individuals, and the utter poverty of the masses' (n. 1). He denounced social injustices and the intolerable

[17] Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth : Catholic Social Teaching*, anniversary edn (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2012), 18.
[18] Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth*, 38.

situation of the working class—victims of employer greed and deprived of associations to defend their welfare:

> The hiring of labor and the conduct of trade are concentrated in the hands of comparatively few; so that a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the labouring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself.[19]

Leo proposed a solution that requires cooperation between the state and the Church. He argued that the Church, with its moral authority, must promote justice, while the state has the duty to protect the workers including defending their right of free assembly.

Condemning class struggle between the rich and poor, Leo aimed to bridge the gap between the classes: 'in a State is it ordained by nature that these two classes should dwell in harmony and agreement, so as to maintain the balance of the body politic' (n. 19). To narrow the gulf between the haves and have-nots, Leo proposed that the poor should own property: 'The first and most fundamental principle, therefore, if one would undertake to alleviate the condition of the masses, must be the inviolability of private property' (n. 15). In this way Leo hopes that 'the gulf between vast wealth and sheer poverty will be bridged over, and the respective classes will be brought nearer to one another' (n. 47). As long as wealth is concentrated in a small sector of society, the few rich seek to protect their interests to the detriment of the poor.[20]

Justifying the Church's intervention in the social sphere, Leo asserted his right and duty to speak out, insisting that without religion, there can be no solution to the sufferings of the workers. The Church calls for a conversion of minds and hearts, following its guidance and turning towards God: 'It is the Church that insists, on the authority of the Gospel, upon those teachings whereby the conflict can be brought to an end, or rendered, at least, far less bitter' (n. 16). The encyclical also emphasizes that Christian morality 'leads of itself to temporal prosperity, for it merits the blessing of that God who is the source of all blessings' (n. 28).

Liberalism and Socialism

Denouncing the abuses of 'liberalism', particularly as expressed in unrestrained capitalism, Leo also warned of the threats to freedom posed

[19] Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum*, n. 3; and see Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth*, 18–19.
[20] See Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth*, 22, 24.

by 'socialism' (at least as understood by him in its historical form and context). Ernest Fortin puts it this way: 'Liberalism is rebuked for its excessive individualism; socialism, for its dangerous collectivism. The former exalts the individual at the expense of the community; the latter sacrifices him to the collectivity.'[21] Leo considered both as detrimental to human dignity and rights.

Accusing liberalism of exploiting workers and treating them like commodities, Leo condemns,

> … the cruelty of men of greed, who use human beings as mere instruments for money-making. It is neither just nor human so to grind men down with excessive labor as to stupefy their minds and wear out their bodies. (n.42)

Workers are forced to bargain for their salaries under inhumane conditions, at the mercy of their employers. Laissez-faire capitalism encourages the accumulation of wealth at the expense of others and condones greed and inequality. The poor are deprived of the necessities of life while the rich live in abundance. Labour, in this system, has no intrinsic value but is determined solely by the market's demand and supply mechanism. Neglecting the spiritual needs of workers, liberalism also undermines the family by allowing child labour and forcing both parents to work to make ends meet.

But Leo believes that socialism, when it seeks to abolish private property, is even worse than liberalism:

> To remedy these wrongs the socialists, working on the poor man's envy of the rich, are striving to do away with private property, and contend that individual possessions should become the common property of all, to be administered by the State or by municipal bodies. (n.4)

While attacking unbridled capitalism for reducing workers to the condition of slavery, Leo also condemned the form of socialism, at the opposite extreme, that attempts 'under the futile and shallow pretext of equality, to lay violent hands on other people's possessions' (n.38), producing a 'condition of misery and degradation' (n.15) and violating

[21] Ernest L. Fortin, '"Sacred and Inviolable": *Rerum novarum* and Natural Rights', *Theological Studies* (Baltimore), 53/2 (1992), 207.

the fundamental rights of everyone. This, Leo contended, runs counter to both the individual and society because 'there naturally exist among mankind manifold differences of the most important kind; people differ in capacity, skill, health, strength; and unequal fortune is a necessary result of unequal condition' (n.17).

It is clear from the historical context and language used that what Leo was condemning were forms of 'liberalism' and 'socialism' which, despite their differences, were rooted in a common outlook:

> Liberalism and socialism thus understood have much in common, grounded as they are a materialistic and mechanistic understanding of human existence …. Socialism comes into being by way of a radicalization rather than a repudiation of the basic premises of modern liberalism.[22]

Private Property: 'An Inviolable Right'

Thomas Aquinas taught that private property is necessary for social order and human flourishing. It can promote the common good, encourage responsibility and efficiency, and therefore: 'It is lawful … for a man to hold private property; and it is also necessary for the carrying on of human existence'.[23] He asserts that people will take greater care of things belonging to them than when things are held in common, and that peace and harmony are more attainable when property rights are clearly defined. Endorsing Aquinas' teaching, *Rerum novarum* upholds the right to private property, but seeks to give it 'a much firmer grounding in nature'.[24] Aquinas says it is licit and necessary for human beings to possess certain things as their own; the encyclical presents private property as 'sacred and inviolable' (n.46).

In *Rerum novarum* private property is both 'lawful' and desirable: 'it must be within his right to possess things not merely for temporary and momentary use, as other living things do, but to have and to hold them in stable and permanent possession' (n.6). Private property is also sanctioned by natural and civil law: 'there is the duty of safeguarding private property by legal enactment and protection' (n.38). Historically, natural law was understood to mean that everything on earth originally

[22] Fortin, '"Sacred and Inviolable"', 208.
[23] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2.2, q.66, a.2, ad., cited in Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum*, n.22.
[24] Fortin, '"Sacred and Inviolable"', 209.

Portrait of Leo XIII by Franz von Lenbach,

belonged to everyone. However, subsequent division occurred because of 'right of nations' or positive law.[25] 'Private property itself was therefore secondary, and consequently not a sacrosanct absolute right.'[26] The notion of private property as a natural and inviolable right was incorporated into Roman Catholic theology in the nineteenth century.

Some critics argue that Leo turned private property into an *absolute* right.[27] It is more accurate to say that while he recognised the right to private property as fundamental, he did not neglect to note that its use must serve the common good and accord with social justice and what in modern Catholic Social Teaching is often referred to as 'the universal destination of goods', even though he did not actually use that expression. This principle means that private ownership comes with a moral obligation to use possessions in ways that benefit others, especially the poor and the needy. The state is also responsible for regulating the use of property for public interest, but the fundamental right to private ownership remains a keystone in Catholic Social Teaching.

Empowering Workers

Rerum novarum places at its heart the dignity of workers and of labour. Insisting that the state should be concerned for the welfare of the poor, Leo asserted:

> When there is question of defending the rights of individuals, the poor and badly off have a claim to especial consideration. The

[25] Fortin, '"Sacred and Inviolable"', 210.
[26] Michael Walsh, 'The Myth of *Rerum novarum*', *New Blackfriars*, 93/1044 (2012), 160.
[27] Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth*, 36. And see Fortin, '"Sacred and Inviolable"'; Walsh, Myth of *Rerum novarum*', 160–161; and Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching, 1891–Present : A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis* (Washington, DC: Georgetown U, 2002), 177–178.

> richer class have many ways of shielding themselves, and stand less in need of help from the State; whereas the mass of the poor have no resources of their own to fall back upon, and must chiefly depend upon the assistance of the State. (n.37)

Leo accordingly appealed to the state to support the formation of workers' unions and protect workers' rights, including a safe and healthy working environment and a just wage (*iusta merces* in Latin), so that workers can afford a decent standard of living for themselves and their families—what is now called a 'living wage'. He observed that the times required a new role for the association of workers, protected by the government: 'Such unions should be suited to the requirements of this our age—an age of wider education, of different habits, and of far more numerous requirements in daily life' (n.49).[28]

The state cannot violate the rights of workers to form unions; this is required by natural law for the common good, as taught by St Thomas Aquinas: 'Men establish relations in common with one another in the setting up of a commonwealth'.[29] Workers' associations are means for social and economic betterment pursued in the light of Christian teaching of the Church:

> Working men's associations should be so organized and governed as to furnish the best and most suitable means for … helping each individual member to better his condition to the utmost in body, soul, and property. It is clear that they must pay special and chief attention to the duties of religion and morality …. (n.57)

Rerum novarum proposes collaboration between workers and employers, as well as between Church and state, to solve the problems caused by the Industrial Revolution. The encyclical emphasizes that the social teaching of the Church is a call to action, an invitation to Catholics to commit themselves to promoting justice in defence of the workers. Leo stresses that the Church's role is crucial:

> There is no intermediary more powerful than religion (whereof the Church is the interpreter and guardian) in drawing the rich and the working class together, by reminding each of its duties to the other, and especially of the obligations of justice. (n.19)

[28] See Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth*, 29–34.
[29] St Thomas Aquinas, *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem*, 2.8, quoted in Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum*, n.51.

The document ends with an appeal:

> Every minister of holy religion must bring to the struggle the full energy of his mind and all his power of endurance …. they should never cease to urge upon men of every class, upon the high-placed as well as the lowly, the Gospel doctrines of Christian life; by every means in their power they must strive to secure the good of the people. (n.63)

'Solidarity' and 'Subsidiarity'

Although the term 'solidarity' (*solidaritas* in Latin) was not used explicitly in *Rerum novarum*, Leo invoked it when he spoke in terms of unity and social harmony between rich and poor, and of the need for government and people to work together. He referred early in the encyclical to 'the rights of capital and labour', rejecting as false the notion that classes are naturally in conflict. 'Each needs the other: capital cannot do without labor nor labor without capital.' (n.19) All classes, he declared, are children of the same Father, and justice, charity and fraternal love constitute the foundation of a truly harmonious society (n.25).

As for 'subsidiarity', the basic idea is that, in general, central or larger authorities should not take over matters which the individuals or smaller groups can accomplish themselves. Leo did not use this term either (*subsidiarietas* or *subsidium* in Latin), but it is quite clear that he supported the principle. He stressed, for example, that the state 'must not absorb the individual or the family, both should be allowed free and untrammelled action so far as is consistent with the common good and the interest of others' (n.35). This also meant that social groups such as the family and professional and non-government organizations should be supported if 'civil society' is to be promoted.

Natural Law and Natural Rights and Duties; Truth and Liberty

If no higher law existed or was recognised to exist, earthly power would easily go unchecked. In his 1888 encyclical *Libertas,* Leo robustly reaffirmed the universal and binding character of natural law that is 'written and engraved in the mind of every man; and this is nothing but our reason, commanding us to do right and forbidding sin'.[30] This echoes what St Paul says about the Gentiles:

[30] Leo XIII, *Libertas*, n. 8.

> When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them. (Romans 2: 14–15)

Libertas says that liberty is to be treasured as 'the highest of natural endowments' but warns that 'on the use that is made of liberty the highest good and the greatest evil alike depend' (n. 1). Hence true freedom consists in acting according to right reason and the truths of the human condition. In this, Leo would not have overlooked the words of Jesus: 'And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free' (John 8:32). Citing Aquinas, Leo declared that natural law is a participation in the Eternal Law, and following Augustine, he affirms that an unjust law does not conform with the Eternal Law and thus lacks legitimacy.[31]

When in *Rerum novarum* Leo applied these principles to underpin private property, human dignity and the rights of workers and others, he did not find it necessary to repeat all that he had written in *Libertas*. However, he made it explicit throughout *Rerum novarum* that there are sacred rights as well as solemn duties—whether as part of natural law or in human law—that reinforce and sanction natural rights and duties, protecting both individuals and the public interest.

The Augustinian Connection

Unlike the present Pope, Leo XIII was not a member of the Order of St Augustine; he was a diocesan priest before he became Pope. Nevertheless, St Augustine's influence on him was deep and palpable, Although no explicit reference to Augustine is made in *Rerum novarum* the encyclical is suffused with both Augustinian and Thomstic spirit and insights, whether in relation to natural law, the relationship between religious and secular spheres or the dignity of the human person—made in the image of God, redeemed by Christ and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Numerous explicit references to Augustine are found throughout Leo's other writings.

[31] Leo XIII, *Liberras*, n. 10, quoting St Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, 1.6.15. And see Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2.1, q. 96, a. 2, ad. 3.

It is not without reason that the Augustinian community and historians regard Pope Leo XIII as 'second founder' of the Order of St Augustine.[32] Leo saved the Augustinians from almost inevitable decline by offering steadfast support to the order throughout his pontificate. He revived their ministries, appointed Augustinian cardinals and bishops, canonized at least two Augustinians, and restored and rebuilt many Augustinian properties, including the ancient church and convent in his hometown in Italy. He also approved the construction of a major building in Rome to serve as a new Augustinian headquarters and restored the beautiful church of St Peter in Ciel d'Oro at Pavia, Italy where the tomb of St Augustine is now housed.[33]

Revolutionary, Yet Calm, Measured and Balanced

Rerum novarum spoke of 'new things' without abandoning or diluting old truths. In more than one sense, it was truly revolutionary social teaching, but presented in a calm, measured and balanced way. It was written in response to the cry of the poor and oppressed, and at the urging of church leaders in Europe and the United States who sought an authoritative voice to support those protesting against the exploitation of workers. Leo's intervention meant that the Church could not remain indifferent to the injustices of the time.

According to Donal Dorr:

> There is no doubt that [Leo] wanted major changes. But what he had in mind was change 'from the top down' rather than 'from the bottom up'. He issued a ringing call to conversion to the people who held economic power. But what if this call goes largely unheeded? Then it appears that, for Leo, those who are part of the poor working class have little option but to put up with their sad situation.[34]

Thus Leo called upon the rich to convert and the poor to be patient. Patience, however, is not the same thing as complacency, and it can run thin if the thirst for justice remains unquenched. To create a more

[32] Balbino Rano, *The Order of Saint Augustine*, translated by A. J. Ennis (Rome: Order of Saint Augustine, 1975), 3–4. The first founder of the Order of St Augustine was Pope Alexander IV in the year 1256 who, when approving its formation, also adopted as its Rule the Rule of St Augustine just as the Dominicans had done.

[33] See '4336 Pope Leo XIII', at http://augnet.org/en/history/people/4336-pope-leo-xiii/, accessed 16 November 2025.

[34] Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth*, 26.

equitable society, the powerful must change their hearts, and change the structures of society. Active steps need to be taken at all levels to change unjust structures and protect and empower workers through peaceful means. Despite the high value Leo placed on order and social stability, he knew that peace and harmony are not sustainable without justice.[35] *Rerum novarum* was a significant intervention by the Pope in defence of the working class; it places the Church firmly on the side of the poor and the vulnerable. Not just charity, but social justice was needed to prevent the exploitation of workers.

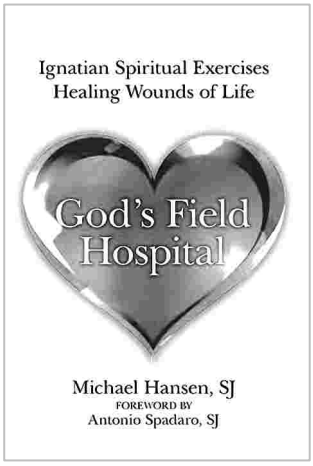
The prevalent secular or liberal view was and is that religion is 'essentially a private affair', but this exposes public discourse to the risk of being dominated by professedly non-religious people. A neutral public square is a myth. Leo, however, insisted on 'the right of the Church to play an important role in shaping society', while respecting distinct spheres of competence.[36] Taken as a whole, the encyclical is a landmark in the social teaching of the Church. Rooted in tradition, it nevertheless offered a new strategy to deal with the negative effects of industrialisation and social unrest. Unsurprisingly, later pontiffs constantly referred to this document in their social teachings, including the present Pope, Leo XIV.

Ambrose Mong OP is assistant parish priest at St Joseph's Church and research associate at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

[35] Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth*, 25.
[36] Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth*, 25.

RECENT BOOKS

Michael Hansen, *God's Field Hospital: Ignatian Spiritual Exercises Healing Wounds of Life* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2024). 978 0 8091 5688 7, pp.160, $22.95.



How did the late Pope Francis understand the Church he was called to lead? He returned to one image repeatedly: 'I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is hopeless to ask a seriously wounded person if he has high cholesterol and high sugar! One must treat his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds ….'[1] He first spoke these words in 2013, only a few months after his election to the papacy, in an interview with fellow-Jesuit Antonio Spadaro for *America* magazine. Over a decade later, less than a year before his death, he thanked an audience of those working with the poor and marginalised in Spain, telling them: 'You, helped by the grace of the Holy Spirit, strive to make the churches like a field hospital'.[2] It was a way of thinking and feeling that clearly meant a lot to him.

Michael Hansen is an Australian Jesuit who has worked extensively in Ignatian spirituality. In this book he expands upon Francis's metaphor, offering sixty prayer exercises for those conscious of their need of healing. Like the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius, in which his approach finds its roots, these are offered less to be studied or analysed than to be prayed through. They draw upon the life experience of those who will be using them, inviting such people to be drawn into a contemplative encounter with God, the Divine Healer. However, whereas Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* offer an ordered sequence of prayer, each section building on what precedes it, the materials presented by Hansen are intended to be used in any order,

---

[1] Pope Francis, 'The Church as a Field Hospital', reprinted in *A Big Heart Open to God*, interviews with Antonio Spadaro (New York: America, 2013), 30–31.

[2] Deborah Castellano Lubov, 'Pope: The Church Is a Field Hospital', *Vatican News* (4 November 2024), at https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2024-11/pope-francis-the-church-is-a-field-hospital.html.

the author inviting readers to choose as a starting point whatever they see as their primary need at any given point.

To be clear, he is not inviting anyone to flick through the pages of the book and light upon an exercise at random. The work is, in its own way, highly structured. It proposes 'five broad levels of care: Emergency, Medical, Intensive, Specialist and Recovery' (xvi). These are divided among fifteen 'departments', including coronary care, pain management, and rehabilitation, and each department offers four complementary spiritual exercises. Each exercise in turn has four stages: touch, desire (occasionally augmented by 'choose'), breathe/rest and reach out, and the 60 exercises are split between 44 promoting direct healing, and the 16 others aiming at healing discernment. Finally, the book offers an 'index of symptoms' which is intended to help readers in choosing which exercise will be of best use to them either initially or subsequently.

All of this structure is explained in seven pages of introduction, before the exercises proper begin. Similes of the black and white keys contributing together to the tune played on a piano, of a trellis supporting a climbing plant and of the ingredients assembled by a cook in preparing a feast are also added here to clarify what is being undertaken. It is perhaps no surprise that by the end of this section Hansen feels the need to add: 'Relax and try the [exercise] that appears best. If it does not meet your need, choose another. The Spirit will help you.'! (xviii) He remarks at one point here: 'The author is invisible' (xvii). While perhaps true, this is the invisibility of the architect who has designed a highly distinctive building.

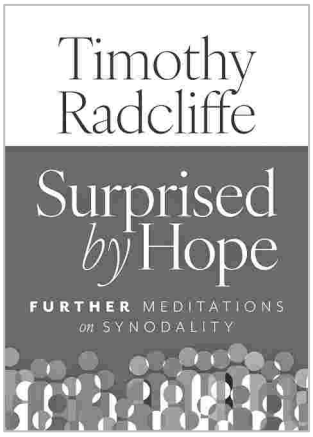
Once beyond this elaborate superstructure, however, the book opens out into a greater serenity. As the author notes, each prayer exercise can be embarked upon without a lot of preparation, and any supplementary material, from scripture or elsewhere, is contained within its pages. Although the index of symptoms may not make it entirely clear how to choose between 'I need to hope again' (exercise 23) and 'I am paralyzed, hopeless' (exercise 41), it will certainly give some idea of the kinds of healing of which one might feel the need, to which God might be drawing someone. The common framework of each exercise, like that employed in the book of the Spiritual Exercises itself, may take a little time to get used to. But it then carries the one praying through the experience of becoming increasingly open to God, and noticing more clearly what it is that God is offering.

I have worked for some years with someone who believes that the Church could benefit from separating the sacrament of reconciliation into two, one focused on the forgiveness of sins and the other on the healing of

wounds. Although I suspect that the idea that there are 'seven sacraments' is too ingrained within Catholicism to make such a division likely, I can appreciate that there are two different, although related, processes at work here. The material presented in *God's Field Hospital* will undoubtedly be of service to those primarily conscious of their need to meet with God's healing in their own lives, as well as those called within the Church to act as ministers of such healing.

Paul Nicholson SJ

Timothy Radcliffe, *Surprised by Hope: Further Meditations on Synodality* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2025). 979 8 4008 0236 2, pp.136, £11.99.



The old tensions between 'progressives' and 'traditionalists' in the Church have shifted. The new challenge is to make sense of the diverse range of cultures that it contains. Amid the many different roles in the Church, there is a need for reciprocity rather than merely complementarity. In this context, synodality offers a means to re-establish our relationships with one another before the Lord. The unique experience of each member of the Church is a vital contribution to this process, and listening to those experiences is what will enable us to write the next chapter in the history of the Church. In this book Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe situates the synodal process within the fragility of the global order since the Second World War: a symptom of its crumbling superstructure has been the breakdown of human solidarity.

While the first phase of the Synod on Synodality (October 2023) centred on what it meant to listen to each other, the subsequent one (October 2024) concerned the mission of proclaiming the risen Christ. Radcliffe begins with four meditations that he gave at the retreat preceding this second phase of the synod.

In the first, as night gives way to the dawn, the disciples go to seek the Lord at the empty tomb. The synod participants are also 'seekers', each in their unique way. Just as Jesus calls out the name 'Mary' at the tomb, the participants begin to learn each others' names to start a process of uncovering one another's deepest yearnings. Radcliffe beautifully explains this with the example of the Jesuit Gregory Boyle, who works with gang members in Los

Angeles. The secret of his success is that he knows the names of each gang member, even what their mothers used to call them. When he calls out the name 'Lula' to one of them he says: 'You would have thought that I had electrocuted him. His whole body spasms with delight to be known, to be called to hear his name uttered out loud.' (9)[3]

The second mediation continues the resurrection theme by touching upon the upper room, where the disciples are still in the dark about what has just happened. The synod participants are ready to acknowledge their need to breathe the fresh air of the Holy Spirit. They are united in their love for the Church but, as Radcliffe points out, that very love can sometimes 'lock us inside a narrow world, gazing at our ecclesiastical navels, watching others, ready to spot their deviations and denounce them' (24). And he is not just talking about one group in the Church, but all of us! Radcliffe carefully distinguishes among the Church's many cultures, from young people in Paris who are crying out to be taught the doctrine of the Church, to the academic theologians who help us to be obedient to the faith. In this way he opens up a more spacious conversation, sensitive to the creative work of the Holy Spirit.

We now arrive on the beach at dawn, where Jesus tells the disciples to put out their nets for a catch. There are moments of achievement in the synodal process, but also moments of failure. Simon Peter demonstrates another fundamental attitude for the participants. Radcliffe comments that 'whatever he has done, he returns to the Lord time and time again. His love is stronger than his shame.' (38) The image of the net helps to articulate the need for space between the cultures of the Church, to give them definition while also enabling them to intersect, and the invitation to learn how to hold all of those diverse relationships together with 'mutual delight, friendship, shared joy and even laughter' (43).

The story continues as the risen Jesus shares breakfast with the disciples on the beach. Here, Radcliffe meditates on the conversation between Peter and Jesus, perhaps proposing it as a model for synodal conversation itself: 'Jesus trusted Peter and entrusted the flock to him, although so far, he had been untrustworthy. The Church is founded on the rock of God's unmerited trust of Simon Peter.' (52) This leads him to the theme of authority, and he uses the image of the shepherd to bear all the resonances of forgiveness, friendship, transparency and accountability in which modern leadership in the Church consists. He invites us all to defer to one another's authority, recognising in it the voice of the Lord speaking to the Church.

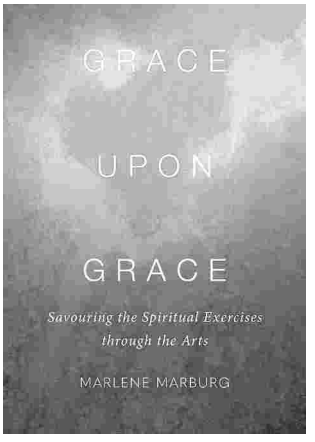
[3] Quoting Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 47.

Moving away from the resurrection, the narrative of the Canaanite woman helps Radcliffe to show the synod participants how to navigate processes of change the Church. He takes the opportunity to honour the role of silence in the synodal process: not the silence of denial that has sometimes descended on the Church, but a silent seeking of a new way forward. The Canaanite woman's response to Jesus and his surprise are used as an example of imagining a new kind of household—one in which, incidentally, dogs have their place in the home (just like in many modern households)—but also a new kind of Church (69). The final meditation leads us out of the synod back into the world, encouraging the participants to speak with boldness and without fear as they begin implement the synod's insights in their own area of the Church.

The other two meditations in this book are taken from Radcliffe's post-synodal discourses to the Dominican Sisters of Peace in Columbus, Ohio. They revisit what happened during the synod, seeking to express exactly what went on. Perhaps it is never going to be easy to pin down the Holy Spirit, but Radcliffe leaves us the impression that something great is happening, and that in the wake of the synod a new way of being Church is opening up everywhere. It is richer and deeper than anything we have known before, and its coming is sure as the light of the dawn.

Philip Harrison SJ

Marlene Marburg, *Grace upon Grace: Savouring the Spiritual Exercises through the Arts* (Sydney: Acorn, 2024). 978 0 6475 3350 5, pp.222, $19.95.



Marlene Marburg's *Grace upon Grace* is a luminous and contemplative reimagining of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, offering retreatants and spiritual directors a deeply embodied, artistic and inclusive pathway into prayer and discernment. Drawing on her experience as a spiritual director, poet, theologian and educator, Marburg invites readers into a journey that engages heart, mind and imagination.

Structured as a thirty-week retreat in daily life, with an additional optional eight-day format, the book remains faithful to the core movements

of Ignatius: self-awareness, discernment and inner freedom. Yet it opens new pathways through poetry, visual art, movement and music—not as embellishments, but as sacred languages through which God speaks and is known. Marburg's approach honours the whole person, encouraging retreatants to engage not only intellectually but also somatically and creatively.

What distinguishes *Grace upon Grace* is its theological depth paired with pastoral sensitivity. Marburg is especially attentive to those for whom traditional masculine imagery of God may feel limiting or painful. She offers inclusive metaphors for God as Wisdom, Midwife, Friend, Divine Love, creating space for relational depth and healing. This is not a rejection of tradition, but a gentle expansion of its contours to meet the diverse spiritual needs of contemporary seekers.

Each section of the book is infused with original poetry, often serving as a contemplative doorway into the themes of the Exercises. These poetic reflections are invitations to pause, feel and respond from the heart. The book also encourages creative practices such as journaling, drawing, and embodied prayer, making it an ideal resource for spiritual directors who wish to support holistic engagement.

Following the structure of the four Weeks of the Exercises, Marburg reframes them as four 'seasons', each with its own rhythm and spiritual focus.

- **Season One** affirms essential goodness and the pursuit of inner freedom. It invites retreatants to reflect on their belovedness and the foundational grace that underpins all spiritual growth.

- **Season Two** explores the life of Christ through imaginative contemplation. Marburg encourages readers to enter gospel scenes with their senses and emotions, deepening their connection to Jesus' humanity and mission.

- **Season Three** engages suffering and desolation with artistic lament and truth-telling. Here, art becomes a means of expressing grief, wrestling with injustice and finding God in the shadows.

- **Season Four** celebrates resurrection and mission, guiding readers towards renewed joy, purpose and a sense of being sent into the world with love.

Throughout these seasons, Marburg's voice is tender yet bold. She reclaims the Exercises as a space of imaginative freedom and spiritual depth, where grace is not earned but received, savoured and shared. Her writing is accessible and theologically rich without being academic, making the book suitable for a wide audience, including those undertaking the Exercises, spiritual directors, artists and anyone seeking a more integrative spirituality.

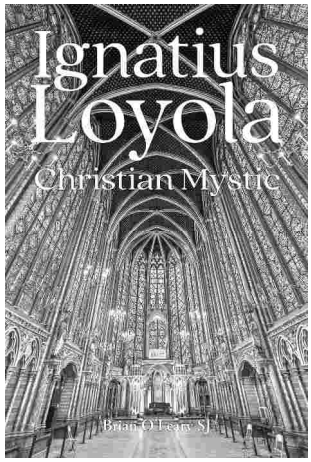
What makes *Grace upon Grace* especially compelling is its accessibility. The language is welcoming and inclusive, honouring emotional and cultural nuance while gently moving beyond doctrinal rigidity. Marburg speaks to the heart of spiritual direction: the sacredness of each person's journey, the importance of relational fit and the transformative power of contemplative presence.

The text also reflects a subtle ecological and social awareness. Marburg's reflections point to the interconnectedness of creation and the divine presence within all things, echoing Ignatian themes of finding God in everything. This ecological sensitivity is woven through the imagery and metaphors she employs, inviting readers to see their spiritual lives as part of a larger, sacred whole.

Ultimately, *Grace upon Grace* is a generous and beautiful resource for deepening prayer, creativity and grace. It expands the contours of Ignatian spirituality, offering a fresh approach that sings, paints and prays its way towards God. Marburg's creative voice is a gift to the tradition, reminding us that the Exercises are not a rigid formula but a living invitation, one that can be shaped by poetry, colour, movement and silence. This book is highly recommended for spiritual directors, retreat facilitators, formation teams, and anyone seeking a contemplative and creative approach to Ignatian spirituality. It is to be savoured slowly, with openness and wonder.

Bernadette Miles

Brian O'Leary, *Ignatius Loyola: Christian Mystic* (Dublin: Messenger, 2023). 978 1 7881 2648 9, pp.120, £12.95.



The image of a mystic can be misleading and unhelpful for many. Such spiritual heights are reserved for the few, we might think, only to be achieved by those who live a solitary and ascetical life far removed from the world and its ordinary concerns. While we might be fascinated by their strange visions or drawn to their wisdom, the fruit of long hours in prayer, we may also be convinced that we have little in common with their experience of life, let alone of God.

Needless to say, this is not the view of Jesuit scholar Brian O'Leary who, in this engaging

and accessible book, poses the question, 'What if there could be a mysticism in the midst of the world or, as some call it, an everyday mysticism?' (19) This is precisely the kind of mysticism embodied by Ignatius of Loyola, he argues, whose life and experience proclaimed the possibility, even expectation, of 'finding God in all things'.

At a time of renewed popular interest in mysticism, this is a timely enquiry into the nature of the mystical experiences of one of the most influential saints in the Roman Catholic Church. While not a biography of Ignatius, it serves as an excellent introduction to the man and his spirituality and offers more depth of analysis of his experiences of God than most biographies have done to date.

Ignatius was a mystic who remained firmly inserted in the world and who combined in his life and personality both action and contemplation. His was a 'mysticism of service' that, while undoubtedly extraordinary, is not placed on some lofty shelf but is brought down to earth as a living and consoling example for everyday Christians.

O'Leary manages to demystify mysticism—a 'pure gift' available to all by virtue of our baptism—whilst also inviting the reader to reverently stand in wonder on the holy ground of Ignatius', and their own, encounters with the divine. He guides us through some of Ignatius' key experiences, from his initial conversion to Manresa, Cardoner and La Storta, making use of familiar sources, such as the *Autobiography*, but also of less well-known ones—including the 'first biographies' of Juan Polanco and Diego Laínez, two of the early Jesuit companions—and listening to what we can learn from the views of Ignatius' critics, such as Melchor Cano and the Inquisition.

The most fresh and revealing insights into Ignatius' inner world are drawn from O'Leary's research into the Spiritual Diary, the 'uncensored daily record "for his eyes only" of what was happening for him in prayer' (95). It is here that we catch glimpses of a mature Ignatius being reminded of the Trinity on an ordinary walk through the busy city of Rome or receiving confirmation from God—not during prayer but during his midday meal. Graces, long asked for, arrive in the midst of life: 'God breaks in on him in the most ordinary of circumstances' (109). For Ignatius, God was not only 'His Divine Majesty' but also the intimately familiar 'Giver of Graces' whose love he was constantly encountering, in a deeply affective and even sensual way, in daily life.

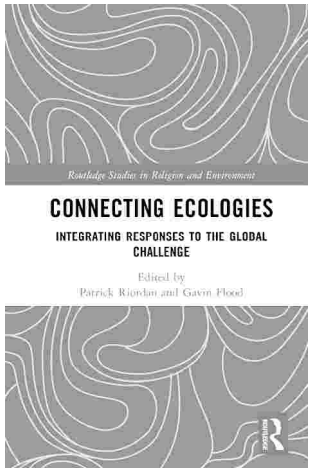
The reader is presented with a fuller, more nuanced and more human portrait of Ignatius, who was not exempt from the messiness and confusion of daily discernment and decision-making, and who evolved in his prayer and spirituality over the course of his life. O'Leary emphasizes the significance

for Ignatius of his priesthood from the time of his preparation for ordination onwards and of his developing Trinitarian consciousness, largely implicit in the *Exercises*, but explicit in the *Diary*.

The result is an encouraging and enlightening journey into the mystery of the Creator dealing directly with one creature: an exceptional mystic to be sure but who ultimately holds out hope to all that 'every human experience, from the most pedestrian to the most exalted, can be a stepping stone on the journey into holiness' (116).

Tim McEvoy

***Connecting Ecologies: Integrating Responses to the Global Challenge*, edited by Patrick Riordan and Gavin Flood (London: Routledge, 2024). 978 0 3672 5190 1, pp.252, £42.99.**



This rich and wonderful book takes a broad interfaith and interspiritual approach to explaining and communicating integral ecology in a variety of ways, as understood by its different authors. Starting with the basis of the concept of integral ecology in Catholic Social Teaching and expanded in Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'*, we go on a journey through time and space, finding out how integral ecology is understood by Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian scholars and teachers in turn. Integral ecology is considered from the various perspectives of pedagogy, practical agro-ecology, the contemplative common life, global inequities, gender inequities, people's movements for social justice and human rights, and water law and water rights. Experiencing this enormous scope feels like walking down a path in an ancient forest, with tall trees and a fair amount of undergrowth, with occasional shafts of brilliant sunshine breaking through the canopy.

Integral ecology, as set out in *Laudato si'*, is a critique of the technocratic paradigm that is exploiting and exhausting the resources of the Earth and God's Creation. This is causing untold human suffering and the widespread destruction of ecosystems, accompanied by rapid climate change and global warming through the release of greenhouse gases into the Earth's atmosphere. The fourfold relational framework of integral ecology encompasses our

relationships with God, with ourselves, with our neighbours and with Creation. Pope Francis urges us to open ourselves to an ecological conversion, deepening all of these relationships and their interrelatedness, thereby enabling us to care for our common home, the Earth. This book offers us regular glimpses of this central teaching. The hope is that through connecting all its different 'ecologies', its various approaches and perspectives, we can better integrate our responses to the 'cry of the earth and the cry of the poor' (*Laudato si'*, n.49). But how are we to undergo such an ecological conversion?

One shaft of sunlight breaks through in the chapter entitled 'Dependent Arising and Buddhist Integral Ecology', by Dhivan Thomas Jones. The author describes the twelve stages of 'dependent arising':

> … meditative transformation, involving the establishment of mindfulness in and of the body and the emergence of liberating insight into the interconnected nature of reality . … A conscious, embodied awareness comes into an empathetic, intimate relationship with the outer world of life. (115–116)

This chapter is followed by one entitled 'Vespers', written by Douglas E. Christie, which brings a deep understanding of the role of silence and stillness united in prayer with a Christian religious community. This author writes evocatively of ecological conversion as, 'a way of seeing that helps us recognise how deeply involved we are with the life and welfare of all sentient beings' (133) and of rediscovering each day 'the depth and beauty of our shared life in God …. You find yourself entering and inhabiting once again the common life.' (138)

The second half of the book changes gear with Michael Stoeber on 'Sacred Groves or Profitable Commodities', which compares a heart-rending account of how colonialism completely destroyed Canada's white pine forest ecosystem—because of the need for tall old trees (some with a lifespan of over 600 years) to provide masts for the British navy—with our current destruction of the Amazonian rainforest. The following chapter, on 'Women, Justice and Integral Ecology' (the only chapter written by a woman, Suzanne Mulligan) notes poignantly that discovering ways forward to implement the call of *Laudato si'* must 'include the expertise of women, yet this remains a largely untapped source of wisdom both within the Church and society'. She points out that 'repairing human relationships and dismantling violent structures of oppression must be part of our ecological response' (167).

I would like to end with a gem of wisdom from the chapter 'A Holistic Framework to Connect People's Movements with Our "Common Home"', by Xavier Jeyaraj. He sums up by saying:

> If a movement focuses merely on justice, the movement remains narrow. When it becomes rights-based, it becomes broader and gains more strength and support. But when a movement has a larger holistic vision of globalism, going beyond the present to look towards future generations and the survival of the entire planet, it becomes more vibrant, more encompassing, and gains greater positive energy and support. (180)

Here the ecological approaches of various indigenous people's movements around the world can provide vital lessons and a focus for our positive action.

In this time of widespread environmental peril, with the technocratic paradigm becoming ever more deeply entrenched in its structures of power and destruction, the broad vision of integral ecology can give us hope and help to reunite us with deep currents of love and wisdom, the work of the Spirit among us. *Connecting Ecologies* provides us with many different viewpoints and perspectives, all helping towards building and understanding our essential common vision for the care of our common home.

Ania Grobicki

***The Book of Margery Kempe*, translated by Luke Penkett (Mahwah: Paulist, 2025). 978 0 8091 0676 9, pp. 288, £38.99.**

The history of manuscripts and their transmission can often be as fascinating as the texts themselves. This is certainly so with Margery Kempe (*c.* 1373–*c.* 1438) and her eponymous *Book*. Known for her both talkative and tearful nature, Kempe was an East Anglian wife, mother, mystic, businesswoman and pilgrim, and the subject of the earliest female autobiography in the vernacular (though this claim has recently been disputed on grounds of genre). As with her near-contemporary Julian of Norwich (1342–*c.* 1416), and unlike the work of many other medieval mystics, *The Book of Margery Kempe* did not have a wide circulation and readership in its own time. It was only in the twentieth century that both writers, in effect, found their voice.

In fact, the only complete manuscript of the *Book* had a somewhat serendipitous discovery. In 1934, whilst searching for a ping-pong ball at the back of a cupboard in the Derbyshire country house belonging to Colonel William Butler-Bowdon, a plucky table-tennis player, found the leather-bound manuscript instead. This was soon identified as Margery's

Book by the US scholar Hope Emily Allen (1883–1960), who played an important role in the first scholarly edition of the text. The manuscript is believed to have been in the ownership of the Roman Catholic Butler-Bowdon family from at least the eighteenth century, if not long before. Prior to the Dissolution, the manuscript was housed, and possibly copied, by the Carthusian monks of Mount Grace in Yorkshire. Dated to *c.*1440, the volume is now in the British Library.

Before the discovery of the complete manuscript in 1934, all that had existed of Kempe's *Book* was a highly edited version published as a pamphlet by Wynkyn de Worde in 1501. This was popular enough to be reprinted in 1521 as one of a miscellany of texts by seven devotional writers, and was again published by Edmund Gardner in 1910 as *The Cell of Knowledge*.[4] But in all these versions, Kempe is rendered meek and mute and assumed to be, like Julian, an anchoress. Even Allen, who first brought Kempe to critical attention, considered her an interesting but 'minor mystic'.[5] However, modern translations, such as the well-regarded version by Barry Windeatt, have, at last, presented her words in her entirety, even though Kempe's character and her *Book* have traditionally been sidelined in favour of the gentler and less abrasive figure of Julian.

But one scholar who wants to shine a serious light on Margery Kempe is Luke Penkett, in his new translation of the *Book*, published by the Paulist Press in their well-respected Classics of Western Spirituality series. This volume provides a good companion to Barry Windeatt's earlier translation (first published in 1985). Penkett is a trustworthy scholar in the field of medieval mysticism, having published several books and articles on Margery and Julian, as well as others. He has a long relationship with Kempe and is currently the honorary secretary of the Margery Kempe Society and curator of the Margery Kempe Collection at King's Lynn Minster (St Margaret's Church in the time of Kempe).

Reading Penkett's translation of the *Book*, one gets the sense that this modern version is, without distracting from Windeatt's scholarship, a little overdue. Penkett is both scholarly and accessible—often a rare feat—and it is clear that he likes and respects Kempe. Importantly, he lets the text speak for itself, in much the same way as scholarship is now allowing Margery's voice to be heard on her own terms, instead of being dismissed as that of a 'hysterical woman', as had all too often formerly been the case. He says in his short introduction:

[4] For the history of the manuscript see the introduction 'Discovering Margery Kempe' in Santha Bhattachariji, *God Is an Earthquake: The Spirituality of Margery Kempe* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997), xiv–xx.

[5] Mary H. Farley, 'Her Own Creature: Religion, Feminist Criticism, and the Functional Eccentricity of Margery Kempe', *Exemplaria*, 11/1 (1999), 1–21, here 1.

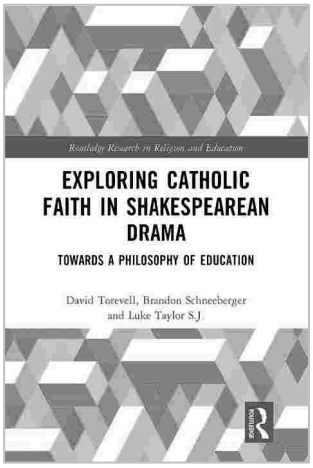
> A plethora of arguments over Mary's literacy, tears, and chastity can be found elsewhere and that facts that are so often ignored are there in the text for us all to read. In *A Scandal in Bohemia* Holmes says those lines that we commentators ignore to our peril: 'You see', Holmes says to Watson, 'but you do not *observe*'. (xii)

Penkett focuses on Kempe herself: her spirituality and liturgy and the medieval context of her work, rather than drawing together too much of the modern theological scholarship on the text. He says: 'Not for nothing do the Classics of Western Spirituality bear the subheading A Library of the Great Spiritual Masters, and it is this aspect that has been uppermost in my mind as I have been reading Margery's *Book*' (xi).

This is refreshing, although it might sometimes been good to read a little more of the theological debates surrounding Margery and her *Book*. However, the interested reader can find these debates elsewhere (and Penkett provides a helpful bibliography). His lively translation certainly helps us to 'observe' Kempe directly, rather than filtered through the lens of scholarship. In this way, Penkett provides a 'grown-up' translation, which allows us to make up our own minds about Kempe's life and spirituality. And for this reason alone, it is well worth the read.

Kirsty Clarke

David Torevell, Brandon Schneeberger and Luke Taylor, *Exploring Catholic Faith in Shakespearean Drama: Towards a Philosophy of Education* (London: Routledge, 2025). 978 1 0327 4186 4, pp. 236, £145.00.



The importance of this collection of essays was highlighted for me by a recent proposal that the works of Shakespeare should be removed from the curriculum in Irish secondary schools. The ensuing protest was robust enough for the suggestion to be withdrawn; but this was the latest reminder that the educational value of Shakespeare now needs to be defended, not least when postcolonial sensitivities are to be taken into account, as well as other critical perspectives.

The core argument of this collection is advanced in David Torevell's reading of *King*

Lear, critiquing (post)modern educational mantras, which erroneously foster unlimited self-esteem and self-determination in the name of personal authenticity and autonomy (55–56). In Roman Catholic educational settings, as Luke Taylor asserts (1), the central importance and value of Shakespeare can help further the educational vision of John Henry Newman (*The Idea of a University*) and St John Paul II (*Ex corde ecclesiae*). The volume is in the line of attempts by the Victorians to draw lessons and moral precepts from Shakespeare for living well, but arises out of lived experience of the contemporary classroom and moves in its final stages toward specific theological pedagogical visions (Benedictine, Ignatian).

The three authors share the ten essays, plus introduction and conclusion, between them. This gives a cohesion to the volume which would have been difficult with more contributors. The section headings—anthropology, ethics, vocation and pedagogy—are considered through a broad range of plays, including tragedies, festive comedies, problem plays and romances.

The editors, wisely, do not directly concern themselves with the religious beliefs of Shakespeare himself, though they are fully aware of the renewed interest in Shakespeare and Catholicism generated by recent historicist scholarship. To some extent this research prompts the question, not *whether* Shakespeare was Catholic, but what *kind* of Catholicism requires our attention. The historicist scholar Richard Wilson, for example, has proposed that the playwright is caught between the recusant, Jesuit-enflamed resistance, and the allegedly more tolerant and inclusive vision associated with Montaigne. Which of these is 'nobler in the mind?'

'Shakespearean' Catholicism, in short, is not straightforward or monolithic. There is a leap from there being 'something in the air' (as Andrea Campana, an investigator into 'Jesuit Shakespeare', modestly puts it), to arguing for specific correspondences.[6] In one essay, by Brandon Schneeberger, episodes in *Twelfth Night* are likened to encounters recorded in the gospel infancy narratives. In another, by Torevell, the theme of 'recognition' is deployed to identify parallels between the Ignatian pedagogy of the *Spiritual Exercises*, and key scenes in *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale*. Whether any given example is credible or clunky will generally be a matter of the reader's personal taste.

Given the vastness of the theme, there will be annoyance on the part of readers who interpret the plays differently, or who will bristle at omissions. For myself, I would draw attention to the unfortunate absence of any

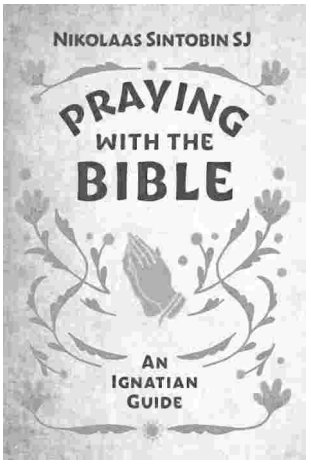
[6] See Andrea Campana, 'If a Jesuit Pope, Why Not a Jesuit Shakespeare? There's Something in the Air …', *Heythrop Journal*, 56 (2015), 203–234.

reference to the work of René Girard, both a prominent Catholic thinker and a (self-confessed) amateur commentator on Shakespeare. His book *A Theatre of Envy* deserves at least mention in this volume, especially as one of its essays is dedicated to 'the passion which causes evil' in *Othello*. I would also note the absence of any sustained treatment of Shakespeare's dramatization in the history plays of the theo-political, as a way of making sense of legitimacy and authority, spectacle and extremism in current Western politics.

But the unevenness of some of the analyses is nevertheless offset by the spirited intention of the authors, rooted in their own teaching experience, to argue the case for William Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's perspectives on faith. There is, indeed, 'something in the air'. The playwright's exploration of the human condition, including its religious dimension, remains essential to serious pedagogy, especially in our strange cultural and political climate. Taylor and Schneeberger offer the volume as a 'timely resource' for initiating non-threatening conversations about Catholic faith in the classroom, especially in the USA and the UK. It does not claim to be a comprehensive treatment of its themes, and is certainly not that; but is an honest and useful contribution to their ongoing discussion.

Michael Kirwan SJ

Nikolaas Sintobin, *Praying with the Bible: An Ignatian Guide* (Dublin: Messenger, 2024). 978 1 7881 2692 2, pp.128, £12.95.



There is in our day a discernible thirst for praying the Spiritual Exercises. This thirst is by no means restricted to those of the Roman Catholic, or even the Christian, persuasion. It is particularly well-suited to combining the experience of the Exercises with praying the scriptures—in the approved Ignatian manner. This book is a most interesting attempt at 'praying the Bible, with a special focus on Jesus' (8). There are some fifty splendid brief tips on how to do this, which will be helpful for anyone who needs to pray, or wants to deepen their life of prayer. For example, it would not always occur to us just how important the 'last five minutes' of a prayer session is (42). Or you might reflect on the importance of what Sintobin

calls the 'compass of joy' (35). I particularly liked an excellent example of a 'Guided Prayer' appetiser using Matthew 14: 22–33. It is a most illuminating journey through this text.

There is more, however, and there is an added richness in the frequent cross-references to other tips; one way of going through this part of the book is to follow up the references to other such tips, when they seem promising. So I suggest that all readers of *The Way* should read this book twice; first they need to go through it from beginning to end, and get the shape and feel of it. Then go through once more, but this time feel free to follow up these cross-references, especially those that immediately seem to ring a bell with you. You are likely to find in this a striking deepening of your grasp of scriptural prayer. This book is warmly recommended.

Nicholas King SJ