IGNATIAN DIRECTED RETREATS

The Dark Ages?

Tom Shufflebotham

NO DOUBT FROM TIME TO TIME the younger members of a Jesuit Province hear their seniors reminiscing about the old style of making annual retreats, and even the Long Retreat, the memories being spiced with anecdotes about the prodigious loquaciousness of many a retreat-giver. Not infrequently I have heard it taken as read that the individually directed retreat was rediscovered in the 1960s by Paul Kennedy, the tertian instructor at St Beuno's from 1958 to 1974, and a few of his foreign and British contemporaries and disciples, including those who passed through his tertianship.[1] By comparison, it seems, what went before was the Dark Ages. I would like to make a brief examination of this view and attempt to draw a moral, so to speak.

First, I shall say a word about terminology. In a field where there is little uniformity I am going to treat the terms 'directed retreat', 'individually directed retreat', 'individually guided retreat' and 'individually accompanied retreat' as interchangeable.

My own Long Retreat in tertianship was directed—individually—by Paul Kennedy in 1968. If I say there was something haphazard about the direction, that can fairly be taken as reflecting more on the retreatant than on the director. Within the year I was myself sent to give preached retreats, and shortly afterwards accepted invitations to give individually directed ones. Then in 1973, at Kennedy's invitation, I came to St Beuno's along with another Jesuit, Jock Earle, to give the

[1] Jesuits take one year devoted to spiritual matters at the end of their training: it is called the 'third' period (tertianship) because the training begins with two periods, the first of only a few days and the second of two years, also focused on spirituality.

The Way, 49/3 (July 2010), 109–120

full Spiritual Exercises in what Paul called a 'guided retreat' (without the additional word 'individually').

What this meant was that Jock and I each had at least a dozen retreatants: we met each person in our respective bunch individually every alternate day; and every day we each addressed our own dozen as a group—at least once, perhaps twice at our discretion. I cannot speak for Jock, but it would be a relief if I could now contact each one of my group and give them their money back. I swore that never again would I be involved with such a beast that was neither fish nor fowl; and, incidentally, I had no wish ever again to be giving a series of major inputs while directing six or seven individuals daily. There were other things, too, that were wrong with this retreat, but that will do for a start. I would not wish to dismiss the very idea of mingling talks with individual direction of the Exercises, but it requires some dexterity to give talks relevant to the Exercises but which avoid implying that all the retreatants have reached the same point.[2]

Musing on this experience recently, I recalled that Jock Earle and Tom Corbishley had once given talks, reproduced as articles, on 'The Annual Retreat: Past and Present' and 'Present and Future'.[3] These were two stimulating papers, although, given their titles, it is clear that they were not addressing the Long Retreat of thirty days. Even so, I find it interesting and slightly curious that neither of them mentions—certainly not directly—the individually directed retreat. They are generally concerned with how to give a preached retreat in a more fruitful way, taking account of the needs of their audience—and 'audience' seems the appropriate word.

Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council thrust religious orders back to look afresh at their foundational roots, and I have the impression that many people have assumed that the gradual spread of the individually directed retreat, imitating St Ignatius, was a consequence of this:

[2] Those who might wish to reflect further on various formulas for adapting or 'applying' the Exercises can find help and stimulus in Philip Endean's article, 'How Far Can You Go ?' *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* (*C.I.S*), 87 (1998).

[3] See *The Way Supplement*, 16 (Summer 1972).

hence the tendency to locate it in the period from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, after which it had become a familiar feature in the landscape.

It seems to me that such an assumption is quite an exaggeration.

The Indian Jesuit and spiritual writer Tony de Mello was born in 1931, and in the early 1950s he was studying philosophy at Barcelona. The spiritual director of the theology students was Fr José Calveras. Calveras was one of the great scholars of Ignatian spirituality and of the *Spiritual Exercises* in particular, and his younger contemporary Ignacio Iparraguirre was an energetic collaborator in his work. Miguel La Font describes the influence of Calveras on de Mello:

Anthony de Mello

> Tony related with feeling the following episode about him. On a certain occasion in the course of their meeting Calveras said to Tony, 'Tell me how you pray'. Tony was perplexed. However after pondering deeply he gave him the desired answer, whereupon Calveras after listening carefully responded, 'You have still not had an experience of prayer'. Thereafter he taught Tony the third of St Ignatius' three methods of prayer, and suggested he do as follows, 'take a deep breath and recite the Lord's Prayer (*per anhelitos*)'. Tony did so, and later recalled that it was only then that he had his first experience of prayer.
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> In the book *Tony De Mello: Compañero de camino* by Jose Vincent [sic] Bonet, it is stated as follows, 'Tony was influenced in diverse ways by the spiritual direction and insight of Fr Calveras, whose

> *modus operandi* resembled the present approach of staying beside the other'.[4]

For myself, I recall de Mello saying how, as a philosopher, he had managed to wangle his way on to the theologians' retreat being given by Calveras. The talks were short, and then Calveras was available in his room—de Mello stressed both features of Calveras' style. De Mello went to see him and naïvely chose as his opening gambit: 'Father, I can't pray'. Calveras feigned shock: 'You can't what?' 'I can't pray.' 'This is very serious. And you hope to be ordained. You can't pray …. Have you a rosary?' 'Yes, Father.' 'Can you say it ?' 'Yes.' 'Then you can pray.'

That was at the beginning of the 1950s. A year or two later I was a novice under George Walkerley. There were eighteen of us in the Long Retreat and the poor man must have given about 140 half-hour talks. A few times during this retreat (corresponding, I suppose, to the 'Weeks') he would see each individual. This belonged firmly in the tradition of the preached retreat, except that, in my experience, those giving a preached retreat have usually invited, but not required, visits from the retreatant. But I remember that a Benedictine, before taking up his appointment as novice master, stayed at our Harlaxton novitiate to make the Spiritual Exercises under the individual direction of Fr Walkerley. To echo Miguel La Font, George was 'staying beside the other' and, knowing George, I would guess that he was really listening to his directee and to some extent adapting accordingly.

My aim so far has been to suggest that the desirability of an application of the retreat to the needs of the individual was not something appreciated for the first time only in recent times by Paul Kennedy and some of his contemporaries, inspired by Vatican II. Indeed, it would be surprising if it were so since in the preceding centuries one only had to begin reading the book of the Exercises to realise that Ignatius was advocating individual direction.

In his essay 'Dominant Orthodoxies', Joe Veale remarks:

> By the time of the [Second Vatican] Council, Jesuits had begun to take seriously St Ignatius' directives about giving the Exercises.

[4] Miguel La Font, *Sadhana*, n.2, available at http://web.me.com/cyrilveliath/Site/SADHANA_by_Miguel_La_Font_SJ.html. And see also José-Vicente Bonet, *Tony De Mello: Compañero de camino* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2002).

> There had always been an awareness that it was an adaptation of the Exercises to give them to groups with a number of lectures each day. There was a kind of floating assumption that to give them to one person at a time was not practicable.[5]

One could get an initial impression of Veale's meaning thus: around 1960 some Jesuits were in a position to perceive the gap between Ignatius' intention and the contemporary practice of retreat-giving in regard to this question: should they be given individually so far as practicable, or rather to groups? Despite this impression, Veale does not in fact claim that the revival of individually directed retreats dates only from about 1960: his implication is compatible with what I have described about de Mello and Calveras in or just after 1950.

James Walsh, however, is more precise. He states:

> It was indeed at Paray-le-Monial, where this rediscovery of the Exercises, now known as the directed retreat, found its first beginnings at the end of the second world war, through the reflections of the French Jesuit Père Goussault.[6]

From what I have already said it will be clear that this assertion seems to me surprising, if only because it is surely to be expected that in earlier times individual Jesuits, armed with the *Spiritual Exercises*, though lacking so much supplementary material, would have on occasion directed the retreat of an individual person, perhaps more than one; and of these Jesuits some surely would have grasped that Ignatius intended some accommodation to the individual reporting on their prayer and their life. But perhaps we can go further than that.

Alban Goodier

St Ignatius Loyola and Prayer—As Seen in the Book of the Spiritual Exercises is an unfinished work by the Jesuit Archbishop Alban Goodier,

[5] Joseph Veale, *Manifold Gifts* (Oxford: Way Books, 2006), 139. 'The renewed grasp of the Spiritual Exercises and of the other Ignatian sources would have been impossible without the scholarship of the men who have been editing and publishing the more than 100 volumes of the *Monumenta Historica* since 1894. This means that we have access to the early documents and to the witness of those who were close to St Ignatius and knew his mind. It is a resource that the second and third generations of Jesuits did not have, apart from a dwindling oral tradition and a handful of manuscripts ….' (142)

[6] James Walsh, 'Introduction', *The Way Supplement*, 38 (Summer 1980). (Walsh goes on to quote Annotations 2 and 15.)

posthumously published in 1940 (the author died in 1939). The editor explains that, stimulated by the controversies of the time, Goodier,

> … here seeks to show that the teaching of St Ignatius Loyola on prayer—even that part of it contained in the brief notes which make up the *Spiritual Exercises*—has been much misunderstood and misrepresented by casual readers, and even by casual commentators; and that so far from its being a mere insistence on so-called 'discursive' prayer it is the teaching of an authentic contemplative for whom the whole meaning of prayer is the direct contact of the soul with God.

That is Goodier's concern but, incidentally, he reveals his attitude to 'the one who gives the Exercises', and it is difficult to imagine that he would be content simply to preach a series of sermons based on the themes of the *Spiritual Exercises* or that any concession to individuality would consist solely in being available for chance visits. In the following extracts one can see his view of the director's ideal unfolding:

Alban Goodier

> … it is clear that when St Ignatius put down his 'meditations' on sin and its concomitants, he had in mind 'contemplation', and the making of the contemplative, not merely the purification of the sinner. On this account he would give his Exercises to only one person at a time; Faber, Xavier, Borgia, and the rest, all were taken one by one, and the result in every case was an ecstatic contemplative …. (93)
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> … St Ignatius now turns to him who gives the Exercises. And first, as if to emphasize what has gone before, he shows him he must make the prayer of the exercitant the barometer by which he may estimate the atmosphere of the retreat [Goodier quotes Annotation 6] …. (96)
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> … [St Ignatius] even hints in one place that the director should not also be the confessor, so that he may attend more to 'the various movements and thoughts to which the spirits draw' the exercitant …. When the director has discovered that the penitent substitutes desire to do something for love and not only to sorrow, then he is ordered to alter, almost reverse, his tone. A new set of Rules for Discernment of Spirits is given to him, quite different from the first; indeed so different that St Ignatius considers their application before the proper time to be even dangerous …. (116)
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> … the director has been told quite clearly that his work is to bring the soul and its Creator together; when that is done his task is over and he must not interfere. (121)
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> [St Ignatius] … presumed that the Exercises would be given only to one person at a time, in which case perhaps anyone, if he would go through them, would reach the goal he proposed …. (146)
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> … the director is also warned that the giving of points is not the same thing as the giving of a lecture; that it is his chief business, not to interfere, but to bring the soul and its Creator more and more intimately in touch with one another; that he should study his exercitant, not to know his sins as a confessor, but to be able to guide him wholly and entirely in the way of prayer …. (150)

By way of summary Goodier remarks,

> In the advice given to [the director] we notice chiefly words of warning. He must not be anxious to hear the exercitant's confession; his chief business must be to watch the operations of his soul, the different spirits that affect him. He must not crowd the exercitant's mind with too many reasons, however good; more important is it that the exercitant should 'see' things for himself,

> should feel them, should have his whole being stirred by the discovery for himself of a new world. He must not try to influence the exercitant one way or another …. (133)

Little or nothing in the above extracts would be a surprise to directors now, who take the Annotations seriously; but they are worth noting by anyone who might imagine that before 1960 what was called an Ignatian retreat would be mass-produced with no individual adaptation, by 'directors' who saw their task simply as preaching. So far as I am aware, nothing is known about how far Goodier was able to put his convictions into practice. Clearly he did a great deal of the preaching of retreats, at any rate shorter retreats, but we cannot know what degree of individual tailoring he brought into them. It would be surprising if he did not give the Exercises to some individuals in much the same way that I described my own novice master accompanying the Benedictine monk. We can only speculate as to how he chose scripture passages to offer to such individuals. What we do know is that, while his grasp of scriptural scholarship was—by the standards of our own day—pitifully limited, his love of the scriptures was outstanding and his praying of the word of God incessant.

Goodier can easily be misunderstood as down-playing the apostolate to the advantage of seclusion; but this would be as much a misunderstanding as to take St Ignatius' 20th Annotation in the same way. Goodier remarks that St Ignatius',

> … idea of life, contemplative or active, is precisely the same as that of St Teresa, who, as a result of her contemplation, longed to 'go over the whole world' telling man of Jesus Christ. It is the same as that of St Thérèse of Lisieux, whose zeal for souls made her co-patron of the missions, by the side of that son of St Ignatius, Francis Xavier. (135)

Jan Roothaan

In considering the antecedents of contemporary directed retreats I have been focusing on José Calveras (born in 1890), and, a generation older, Alban Goodier (1869–1939). Perhaps, too, in the present context Jan Roothaan, Jesuit Father General in the early and middle years of the nineteenth century, should be mentioned. His name is much associated with the revival of the Jesuits after their suppression

Jan Roothaan

and with the spread of interest in the Spiritual Exercises, both the book and the practice. The usual image of Roothaan, not without some reason, portrays him as dour and inflexible. There is a satirical quip that locates him among the successors of St Ignatius: 'Ignatius set up the Society of Jesus as light cavalry; Borgia turned us into infantry; Acquaviva put us into barracks; Roothaan cancelled all leave ….'[7] Although his dedication to the Exercises and his work in furthering them has been well recognised, his name is much associated with a supposedly exclusive insistence on discursive prayer. In its time and later a booklet by Roothaan has been very influential—a baleful influence in the opinion of many—*De Ratione Meditandi* [How to Meditate]. In *The Return of the Jesuits* C. J. Ligthart writes:

> This booklet has been used by many with immense profit. It has, for all that, been severely and often criticized, especially in later years. One of the remarks was that it taught a method of prayer that was too dry, too arid, not Ignatian enough, because the intellect was

[7] See Michael Campbell-Johnston, 'Being and Doing', *The Tablet* (4 August 1992), 434.

> kept too busy at the expense of the heart. In other words it taught how to reason rather than how to pray. In reply to this criticism the following observation was made when a new Latin edition saw the light in 1936: 'These critics are requested to remember (1) that the writer (Roothaan) wanted with this writing to help beginners, to occupy themselves during one hour in spiritual meditation. It was not meant for mature and experienced religious. (2) one should read not only the part devoted to the application of the intellect, which is rather worked out in detail, but pay attention above all to the repeatedly given directive that this intellectual preparation must completely cease once the interior feelings, those of the heart, carry us to God and the spiritual heights.

In passing one may note how in the 1930s it was rather presumed that the seriously praying people would be 'religious'.[8]

Roothaan was a critic of the preached retreats that were common in his time, in so far as they might masquerade as the Spiritual Exercises. In Belgium in 1849 (around the time of his visit to St Beuno's) he inquired about a certain Jesuit. He was told, 'He's out preaching a retreat'. 'Preaching a retreat?' murmured the General. 'Isn't that something of a contradiction? We give the Exercises, we conduct the Exercises, but we do not preach them.'[9]

But this distinction is rather misleading. Roothaan was objecting to a tendency to subject the retreatants to virtuoso oratory rather than the solid structure and content of the Exercises, including 'Rules by which to perceive and understand the various movements in the soul'. But evidently he intended that these sober, and undoubtedly Ignatian, elements be delivered to the group (of tertians, especially) simultaneously, rather than enabling the individual to proceed at a pace suited to the movements of the spirit with matter for prayer chosen accordingly. He,

> … took upon himself the formidable task of giving the eight-day retreat to the hundred and fifty [!] scholastics gathered at Vals. Five times a day he instructed them in the inner spirit of the Exercises, emphasizing now the personal application as in his writings he had emphasized the psychological presentation.[10]

[8] C. J. Ligthart, *The Return of the Jesuits* (London: T. Shand, 1972), 181.
[9] See R. G. North, *The General Who Rebuilt the Jesuits* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1944), 186.
[10] North, *The General Who Rebuilt the Jesuits*, 253–254.

Even so, I wonder if Roothaan's retreat practice may have included some individually directed pacing. He wrote:

> I was acquainted with a Russian army officer, an aide of the Tsar, who … spent a full three days reflecting on the Foundation, and it made a tremendous impression on him. 'And yet it's so evident', he exclaimed, 'it's so evident! If only the Tsar would think over these things, how conditions would improve.'[11]

One wonders if that gentleman was making what could be recognised as a directed retreat.

Preached and Directed Retreats

My purpose has not been to give a brief history of the antecedents and development of the directed retreat but, resorting to a few illustrations, to take issue with the impression that Ignatius intended the individually directed retreat, but that, shortly after his time, the existing practice of sometimes giving the Exercises to a group spread and spread (true enough so far) until, before long, the individually directed retreat was acknowledged only as a historical fact that had very soon been superseded as growing numbers showed it to be first impractical and then outmoded in view of the evident fruits of the preached retreat; and so on until Vatican II. The reality seems to have been much more nuanced than that.

In Britain (I am less sure about the other English-speaking nations and the rest), the preached retreat has never fully disappeared, and indeed has gradually made quite a comeback in the form of a retreat with a theme or title. I am told that in some countries the individually directed retreat never returned with the same strength or was as widely accepted as in Britain. My hunch is that there is good reason to view both styles with approval; that some retreatants will find it helpful to vary their practice from year to year; that generally speaking it will always be desirable for the full Spiritual Exercises, and shorter retreats too, to be given with as much individual direction as numbers will allow (and if numbers do not allow, then the challenge is to seek ways of redressing that imbalance); and that it behoves us to further the

[11] North, *The General Who Rebuilt the Jesuits*, 187.

training of directors—and 'preachers' too, for that matter. By 'preachers' I am not referring to old-style oratorical sermonisers, but to directors who give 'talks', 'addresses'—whatever the word—that will ready the retreatant to pray from the heart in something of the way that Ignatius envisaged. These will surely not be talks of such length or frequency as we once groaned under.

We can all have selective memories. Jesuits and others of my generation who developed an allergy to inputs during preached retreats may need to reflect that most of us, even as novices, were entering on the Long Retreat with a fair amount of furniture in place in the background: the furniture of years of lived faith, of devotional practices, of basic Christian theology absorbed from school, or family, or books, or by osmosis. The worse inputs just tediously reiterated what we knew and then moralised on top of it, but the better ones opened the way for us to convert head-knowledge into our own heart-knowledge and relationship with the Lord. But in recent decades less can be presupposed: much of the furniture has vanished and there is now a need to bring things, new and old, both, from the treasure house. In other words, circumstances will suggest when a preached retreat is called for, and when a directed retreat, and when some sort of synthesis.

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