

‘HITHER I MUST COME TO DRAW’

Mary Ward and the Ignatian Constitutions

Brian O’Leary

MY STARTING POINT IS TWO distant, yet powerful, memories. The one is of celebrating the Eucharist at the tomb of Ignatius Loyola in the Church of the Gesù in Rome. I was standing underneath the gold statue of Ignatius, enthroned over an ornately decorated altar in the midst of a truly magnificent baroque church. While obviously aware that his mortal remains lay underneath that altar, I was even more deeply conscious of Ignatius now in glory, now triumphant, now honoured as part of all that was positive and life-giving in the Catholic Reform of the sixteenth century, and even in the Church of today. Indeed I felt as if I were present at the apotheosis of Ignatius.

The other memory is of visiting the burial place of Mary Ward at Osbaldwick, outside the city of York. It was in winter; it was dark; the weather was bitterly cold, and some snow lay on the ground. As I stood, well wrapped up, in the unpretentiousness and starkness of that Anglican churchyard, I pondered on the woman who had been buried there. And in that humble place it was the concrete, human life of Mary Ward that rose before me, in its simplicity, its struggles, its friendships, its frailties, its failures and its modest end—a life so admirably summed up on the slab inside that church:

To love the poor
persever in the same
live dy and Rise with
them was all the ayme
of
Mary Ward.

The contrast between these two memories is striking, mirroring that between the two locations. Being at the tombs of Ignatius and of Mary



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The churchyard, Osboldwick, where Mary Ward is buried

Ward were both profoundly moving experiences, although in significantly different ways. But now, whenever I try to weave these memories together, as it were, I see that the contrast is really only in the point of view. I recognise that the concrete life of Ignatius, which is practically ignored at his tomb, had all the simplicity, struggles, friendships, frailties, failures and modest end as had that of Mary Ward. And that from the viewpoint of eternity Mary Ward can also be celebrated as now in glory, now triumphant, now honoured as part of all that is positive and life-giving in the Christian tradition of her own time and of ours. We can indeed speak of her apotheosis.

There is an extraordinary connection between these two people, Ignatius and Mary Ward, who never met, who lived a hundred or so years apart, who were the products of different histories and cultures. Mary, of course, knew much about Ignatius, but he never knew anything of her. Yet they were kindred spirits, sharing the same vision with the same intensity and the same largeness of heart. For those who have inherited it, this vision is experienced not only as a privilege but also as a responsibility. It is a vision clearly rooted in the Spiritual Exercises—not in the text as such, but in the personal experience of their dynamic. Yet the Exercises

on their own leave the vision indeterminate, not fully focused, still plastic, capable of taking on many forms. For the complete picture we need the addition of the *Constitutions*. Mary Ward was clearly aware of this.

Questions and a Map

At this point I would like to propose some questions that may be helpful in integrating the reflections that I will be sharing with you here.

- What did Mary Ward find so attractive and persuasive in the person of Ignatius, in his apostolic project, and in the way of life which he articulated in the Jesuit *Constitutions*? We might ask if we experience a similar attraction.
- How do we understand, and how have we appropriated, the revelation received by Mary Ward when she heard the words: ‘Take the same of the Society’?
- How do we resonate with her commentary on this revelation which includes the statement: ‘and if ever I be worthy to doe any thing more about the Institute, heather [hither] I must come to draw’?¹

We will now explore what these *Constitutions* were, for which Mary Ward so longed and fought, and why she was so enthusiastic and determined to have them for her Institute. It may be useful to summarise beforehand the direction my next set of reflections will be taking.

- I want to use as a starting-point the phrase in the *Formula* referring to the Institute as *via quaedam ad Deum* (a pathway to God).²
- Then, adapting this phrase, I will present the *Constitutions* as a *via quaedam* of living out the consequences of the Spiritual Exercises. This will allow me to reflect on how the *Constitutions* are influenced by the Exercises, in part by presuming them, but also by ‘giving a body’ to their spirit.
- Lastly, I will briefly develop the interweaving themes of union with God and mission.

¹ Mary Ward to John Gerard, 1619, in *Mary Ward (1585–1645): A Briefe Relation ... with Autobiographical Fragments and a Selection of Letters*, edited by Chrstina Kenworthy-Browne (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 142.

² *Formula of the Institute*, n. 3.

Keeping before Their Eyes: God

God is at the centre of the Ignatian project. In the *Formula* we read that a Jesuit is to take care, as long as he lives, first of all 'to keep before his eyes God' (n.3). First of all—in Latin *primo*—is not to be understood chronologically, as though he were to look to God first (for a longer or shorter period of time) and then get on with his activities, his service to the Kingdom. *Primo* denotes a level of importance—indeed the highest level of importance. He is to keep God before his eyes at all times, whatever he may be doing or planning, no matter whether he

is alone or with other people. He does not ever move away from gazing at God, from being aware of God. He is not a contemplative only at times of formal prayer. He is a contemplative in the everyday experiences of his life, never losing sight of God no matter how busy or disturbed or hassled he may be.

In part VI of the *Constitutions*, Ignatius will insist that through their chastity Jesuits imitate the purity of the angels. Purity here does not mean chastity (disembodied spirits cannot be chaste) but rather single-mindedness, single-heartedness. This was the medieval understanding of the word 'purity' that Ignatius inherited. He is saying that through their human chastity Jesuits are to imitate the single-mindedness and single-heartedness of the angels. And what does the Christian tradition teach about the angels?³

Angels are part of the heavenly court, standing before the throne



Cherubim, Seraphim and Adoring Angels, attributed to Jacopo di Cione

³ See Joseph F. Conwell, 'Living and Dying in the Society of Jesus, or, Endeavouring to Imitate Angelic Purity', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 12/3 (May 1980), 6–13.

of God in uninterrupted contemplation and adoration. But angels are also God’s messengers, sent to comfort, enlighten, warn or accompany human beings. Yet in being sent (we would say, in being missioned) they never leave the throne of God. They remain in God’s presence, they continue to be contemplatives, even when carrying out whatever project God has entrusted to them on this earth. It is easy to see how they were, to adapt Jerónimo Nadal’s phrase, *contemplativi etiam in actione*, contemplatives even in the midst of action, and how they could appeal so much to the sensitivities of the early Jesuits.

Keeping before Their Eyes: The Institute

The Formula insists that, after keeping God before their eyes, Jesuits then (again not chronologically, but in order of importance) keep the nature of their Institute before their eyes. In other words, they are continually to contemplate their Institute. Let us first clarify what we mean by the term Institute. It is not only the founding documents, especially the *Spiritual Exercises*, the *Formula* itself and the *Constitutions*, but also the apostolic lifestyle to which they call all Jesuits, the apostolic lifestyle that they are in fact living. But why keep this Institute, both documents and lifestyle, before their eyes? Why devote energy to this kind of contemplation? The answer is simple: because the Institute is a pathway to God, *via quaedam ad Deum*. It is not the pathway for everyone but it is *their* pathway to God. If their loving gaze on God is to foster a dynamic that brings them into union with God, then they must live by their Institute—their way to God—in a similarly contemplative manner.

Let us reflect for a moment longer on the connotations or associations of the word *via*. It brings many other words, images and themes to mind, such as *movement*, *journey* and *pilgrimage*.

- ‘Movement’ is a term familiar from the *Spiritual Exercises*, and it is especially significant in the discernment of spirits and in decision-making. But it is also a key to entering into and understanding the *Constitutions*. The developmental nature of their ten parts expresses the developmental nature of the life outlined by them—a life characterized by constant inner and outer movement.
- ‘Journey’ is a similar word, which calls to mind Nadal’s famous statements about the road being a Jesuit’s favoured house.

It must be noted that in the Society there are different kinds of houses or dwellings. These are the house of probation, the college, the professed house, and the journey—and by this last the whole world becomes our house.⁴

For wherever they can be sent in ministry to bring aid to souls, that is the most glorious and longed-for 'house' for these theologians They realise that they cannot build or acquire enough houses to be able from nearby to run out to the combat. Since that is the case, they consider that they are in their most peaceful and pleasant house when they are constantly on the move, when they travel throughout the earth, when they have no place to call their own, when they are always in need, always in want—only let them strive in some small way to imitate Christ Jesus who had nowhere on which to lay his head and who spent all his years of preaching in journeying.⁵

- 'Pilgrimage' is a word we associate especially with Ignatius himself. In narrating his story in the so-called *Autobiography* he was responding to Nadal's request that he tell 'how the Lord had guided him from the beginning of his conversion'.⁶ Ignatius designates himself as 'the pilgrim'—not so much a pilgrim in search of God but a pilgrim guided by God.

In short, if the Institute is a pathway to God, then it entails dynamic movement, both inner and outer journeying, and the simplicity, poverty and trust of a pilgrim.

The Consequences of the Spiritual Exercises

Now I want to adapt the phrase *via quaedam ad Deum* so as to apply it to the living out of the consequences of the Spiritual Exercises. The Institute is one path, one way of doing this. Again we do not claim that it is the only or necessarily the best way. History shows that the Spiritual Exercises can lead into many varieties of gospel-inspired lifestyle and service within the Church. In the early years of the Society of Jesus, Carthusians were among the most enthusiastic devotees of the Exercises, as indeed were lay people holding high public office. Discernment simply asks, 'Is the Institute my way?' 'Is it our way?'

⁴ Cited in John W. O'Malley, 'To Travel to Any Part of the World: Jerónimo Nadal and the Jesuit Vocation', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 16/2 (March 1984), 6.

⁵ O'Malley, 'To Travel to Any Part of the World', 8.

⁶ See 'Preface of Fr Nadal', in Joseph N. Tylanda, *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1985), appendix, 123.

But what, more precisely, do we mean by ‘the consequences of the Exercises’? We mean that the dynamic of the Exercises continues to be operative in a person’s life when he or she follows this Institute. It means that the values absorbed through the Spiritual Exercises find expression through living according to the Institute. This will be marked especially by the experience of the key meditations on the Call of the King, the Two Standards and the Contemplation to Attain Love. These meditations will not simply be exercises made once, but exercises that continue to be made in the concrete circumstances of our lives—motivating us and driving us forward. All of this points to the conclusion that in some way the Exercises are enmeshed in the *Constitutions*.

Efforts have been made to find parallels between the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions*. But the two texts are far too different in purpose and form for this approach to yield any great success. The most that we can hope for is to recognise echoes or resonances that show both texts as emanating from one source—the mind of Ignatius. This is the mind that was illuminated by the mystical experiences at Manresa, especially the ‘great enlightenment’ on the banks of the river Cardoner. But this mind is always concrete in its thinking rather than speculative, developmental rather than classical, open-ended rather than seeking closure.

However, there is a simpler approach that, in fact, yields greater insight. Instead of looking for parallels or even echoes, we stay with a straightforward statement: the *Constitutions* presume the Spiritual Exercises. The person called to live the *Constitutions* has already received the graces of the Exercises. That person is, here and now, enjoying and being enlivened by these graces. No one can embrace the lifestyle of Mary Ward’s Institute who has not been so graced. Let us spell this out.

A follower of Mary Ward, just like a Jesuit, can only be someone who has experienced what it is to be loved unconditionally by God, who has at least to some degree attained indifference, who knows (again experientially) what it is to be a forgiven sinner, who has been profoundly attracted by the person of Jesus Christ and become committed to his project, who has learnt the art of discernment through being wisely accompanied, at least once, in making a life-changing decision, who has entered into the suffering and death of Jesus Christ and received intimations of his risen life and glory, who embraces herself, her life, other people and all creation as gift, hence becoming sensitised spiritually to recognise God in all things. Without these graces no one can understand, still less live, the *Constitutions*. They are not addressed to anyone else.

The Personal and the Corporate

Another approach begins with the recognition that the Exercises are at the service of the individual person. They depend on the one-to-one relationship between the exercitant and God, as well as on the one-to-one interaction between the one who gives and the one who makes the Exercises. The graces asked for and received throughout the four Weeks are intensely personal.

On the other hand, the *Constitutions* can be seen as giving a body to the spirit of the Exercises—giving a body to these graces received. Indeed, this process already begins within the Exercises themselves at the time of the election. It is at this point that their spirit ceases to float freely, as it were, waiting to be incarnated, enfleshed, in one of a multitude of possible forms. As we have already said, Christ and his Kingdom can be served in many ways. But in making an election the exercitant has discerned that God wants this enfleshment of the spirit of the Exercises to take place in one particular, concrete way. This may well be a commitment to enter the Institute.

However, the Institute is corporate. It is a body. Therefore the spirit of the Exercises has to be enfleshed, not only in the body—the concrete reality—of the individual person (which is the work of the Exercises themselves), but also in the body—the corporate reality—of the Institute (and this is the work of the *Constitutions*). This latter is done very specifically through the formation process that is one of the main dynamics of the *Constitutions*. More generally, it is brought about through the disposition of *discreta caritas*, or discerning love, that permeates them. Through these entwined realities of formation process and *discreta caritas* the *Constitutions* infuse the spirit of the Exercises into the corporate body of the Institute, a body fit for mission.

Union with God and Mission

If the Institute's way of life is *via quaedam ad Deum*, a pathway to God, the question of union with God arises. How do we envisage this union and, more particularly, how do we relate it to mission? The Christian mystical tradition, at least in general terms, recognises three ways of entering into union with God. The first is intellectual, focused on the search for the ultimate truth. This approach is influenced by, but not dependent on, the ancient Greek philosophical teaching on intellectual contemplation. Union with God is primarily a union of minds. In Christian history we associate this approach with the Dominican tradition, and

perhaps especially with Meister Eckhart. The second is affective, in which the human response to God is primarily one of feeling. Union is experienced as a mutual exchange of affective love between God and the individual. The mediating role of Christ’s humanity is frequently central. The Cistercian and Franciscan traditions come to mind here.

Without denying that there will always be an intellectual and an affective component in any Christian spirituality, the Ignatian tradition of union with God is best described as *conative*. This word is unfamiliar to most people and does not appear in many reputable dictionaries, even dictionaries of spirituality. However, the *Encarta English Dictionary* defines this word as ‘a mental process involving the will, e.g. impulse, desire, or resolve’. We are certainly familiar with the terms ‘desire’ and ‘resolve’ from the *Spiritual Exercises*, and impulse corresponds to certain kinds of movement (a word we have already considered). A conative mysticism will not be so much a union of minds or of affectivity as a union of wills. We will what God wills; we want what God wants.

If, as Paul writes, God is our Saviour ‘who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (1 Timothy 2:4), then that is what we desire also. That is the reason its members have entered the Institute, and the reason they desire to be missioned—to bring about what God desires for God’s people. Mission, therefore, is not problematic in relation to union with God, as some fear. Mission is union, because it is an insertion into the mission of Jesus Christ, who does only what the Father wants, whose will is one with the Father’s. In summary, wholehearted participation in mission is a way of entering into union with God.

This is the basis for my conviction that, in the debate about whether the Institute has one end or two,⁷ we must come down uncompromisingly on the side of the former. The Institute exists *aiudar a las almas*—to help souls, to engage in mission. This is its only end. I say this even though some phrases in the *Constitutions* are somewhat ambiguous and have at times been interpreted otherwise.

To my mind, Ignatius and Mary Ward have both moved beyond a theology of the mixed life, in which people seek their own holiness *and also* give themselves to the service of others. It is true that Mary Ward claims to propose the mixed life in her first plan for the Institute, *Schola*

⁷ This has been much discussed. See François Courel, ‘The Single Aim of the Apostolic Institute’, *The Way Supplement*, 14 (Autumn 1971), 46–61, and, taking the opposite view, Michael C. McGuckian, ‘The One End of the Society of Jesus’, *AHSI*, 60 (1991), 91–111.

Beatae Mariae.⁸ But, as Mary Wright has pointed out, 'In general, this plan can be seen as a bridge between the cloistered life Mary experienced in the Poor Clares and the active apostolic life she was to develop'.⁹ She effectively left the model of the mixed life behind her as she came to understand the *Constitutions* and the model of apostolic religious life portrayed there more deeply. She came to see that members of the Institute, in the same way as members of the Society of Jesus, are invited simply to give themselves to the service of others for God's greater glory. It is through that very giving, we might even say as a side-effect or by-product of that giving, that they grow in personal holiness. It is the way of *kenosis*, of self-emptying after the model of Jesus Christ.

'Hither I Must Come to Draw'

I have attempted to show what Mary Ward was seeking after the 'Take the same of the Society' revelation. Would she have expressed her understanding of the *Constitutions* in the way I have? Of course not! But then, neither would Ignatius. Implicit in my presentation are a number of contemporary questions that would not have troubled either Ignatius or Mary Ward. But that is not the point. We need to remember that the *Constitutions* are widely regarded, even outside Ignatian circles, as a spiritual classic.¹⁰ Like all texts that merit the designation of a classic, the *Constitutions* contain what is referred to as an 'excess of meaning'. That is, they are capable of communicating ideas, insights, and even wisdom of which the author was unaware. This is why classics of any kind are being reinterpreted, and must be reinterpreted, all the time. They are brought into dialogue with the history, the culture, and especially the existential questions, of later eras. It is the only fruitful way of approaching them. The challenge is to be both faithful to the text and creative in our interpretation of it. Classics continue to surprise us by how contemporary they are. Even Greek tragedy can work its catharsis on people of very different sensibilities today. And we need hardly mention the Bible, which is, for Christians, the spiritual classic *par excellence*.

I would like to suggest that part of the excess of meaning contained in the *Constitutions* is their potential to be lived by women. Such a

⁸ See *Till God Will: Mary Ward through Her Writings*, edited by M. Emmanuel Orchard (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 34.

⁹ Mary Wright, *Mary Ward's Institute: The Struggle for Identity* (Sydney: Crossing Press, 1997), 17.

¹⁰ See Gill K. Goulding, 'Take the Same'—But Differently: Mary Ward's Appropriation of the Ignatian Charism', below, 44.

potential was obviously not in Ignatius’ mind as he wrote them, but was discovered by Mary Ward when she brought them into dialogue with her female sensibility as well as with the apostolic needs of seventeenth-century England and Europe. This interpretation does not downgrade in any way her special revelation, but rather complements it. The revelation drew her attention to what was implicit in the *Constitutions*. In a similar way, referring to Ignatius’ sixteen years of prayer and reflection as he laboured over the *Constitutions* does not downgrade his experience at the river Cardoner, on which they were ultimately based.

This interpretation also allows us to see that the opposition experienced by Mary Ward in her desire to have these *Constitutions* for her Institute was based on arguments that were, for the most part, extrinsic to the *Constitutions* themselves. Her opponents, Jesuits and others, had not discovered this excess of meaning in the *Constitutions* that revealed their potential for women. It was as much a lack of imagination as theological dogmatism or canonical intransigence.

Marie Madeleine and the Faithful Companions of Jesus¹¹

The sad story of Mary Ward’s travails is a familiar one, so I need not retell it here. But it may be enlightening to jump forward two centuries to discover the parallel experience of Marie Madeleine d’Houët, the founder of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.

In 1827 a commission was formed in Rome to examine her request for the Jesuit *Constitutions* and for permission to use the name of Jesus in the title of her Society. This commission was to report to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. The document that emerged, named after its chief Jesuit author, is known as the Zechinelli critique, and contains fourteen points, to all of which Marie Madeleine later responded. These points cover a wide range of issues, many of them technical and canonical. But all argue against giving the Jesuit *Constitutions* to the new Society.

It must be said that there is no personal animosity towards Marie Madeleine in the Zechinelli document. The author does not question her integrity or her legitimate desire to found an apostolic religious congregation—even one that would draw on the Jesuit *Constitutions*. His objections are to her desire to have these *Constitutions* in their entirety and to use the name Companions of Jesus. He plainly understands that

¹¹ This section is mostly taken from Brian O’Leary, ‘Marie Madeleine d’Houët and the Jesuits: A Complex Relationship’ in *Reflections on the Life of Marie Madeleine d’Houët, Foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus* (privately published, 2009), 169–172.



Marie Madeleine d'Houët

Marie Madeleine wants a society of women Jesuits (a term Marie Madeleine herself uses) and refers back ominously to the saga of Mary Ward and her 'Jesuitesses'. He recalls their suppression by Urban VIII and the Pope's charge to the Jesuit General to ensure that Jesuits were not involved in giving them spiritual direction. In Zechinelli's view a canonical precedent has already been set which he sees no reason to ignore. He evidently regards Marie Madeleine's project as parallel to that envisaged two centuries earlier by Mary Ward.

Whatever we might say about the individual issues raised in the Zechinelli critique, it is clear that,

underlying them all, is a more fundamental question: what are women capable of? The answer to that question colours everything else. At one point Zechinelli writes:

The end of the Institute of St Ignatius which is apostolic ministry, the different grades into which the members composing it are placed, the Spiritual Exercises, catechetics in public, the missions constantly undertaken in distant regions, and finally the long and severe trials to which the novices, scholastics and even the professed with simple vows are submitted, all that seems quite incompatible with the nature of the weaker sex.¹²

This is where the real difference of opinion lies. Zechinelli believes that women cannot live the full *Constitutions*; Marie Madeleine believes that they can. They may disagree about enclosure, or grades, or interpretations of the vows, but these are subsidiary and ultimately derivative issues compared with that of the capabilities of women, and consequently their

¹² Quoted in Marie Madeleine d'Houët, *Memoirs*, translated by Patricia Grogan, *pro manuscripto*, second edition with amendments (1994), 116. The *Memoirs* give Marie Madeleine's account of her own journey leading to the foundation of the Faithful Companions of Jesus Society in 1820, and the history of the young Society over the following seventeen years.

place in the world. With this insight we can understand that Marie Madeleine is not dealing simply with the learning or the idiosyncrasies of Zechinelli and his commission, or even with the official stance of the Society of Jesus, but with broader cultural attitudes towards women in the Church and in society at large.

It is illuminating to place the above quotation from the Zechinelli critique alongside the following one from Urban VIII’s Bull of suppression of Mary Ward’s Institute from 1631.

Free from the laws of enclosure, they wander about at will, and under the guise of promoting the salvation of souls, have been accustomed to attempt and to employ themselves at many other works which are most unsuited to their weak sex and character, to female modesty and particularly to maidenly reserve—works which men of eminence in the science of sacred letters, of experience of affairs and of innocence of life undertake with much difficulty and only with great caution.¹³

Apart from the more restrained tone in Zechinelli’s language, the core of the argument remains the same. Two centuries on from Mary Ward not a great deal had changed.

We can say of Marie Madeleine, as we have of Mary Ward, that she intuited that excess of meaning in the *Constitutions* that revealed their potential for women. The objections with which the two Marys were faced seem in our day dated, *passé*, and perhaps most of all (as I suggested earlier) lacking in imagination. Indeed nowadays we do not need any imagination to see this particular excess of meaning. We have in the contemporary Church the evidence, or in Christian terms the witness, of women living the integral *Constitutions* in joy and fruitfulness. The question now is: what other excess of meaning may lie in these *Constitutions*? That is for all Ignatian women and men to explore together in fidelity and with imagination.

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¹³ ‘*Pastoralis Romani Pontificis*: Urban VIII’s Bull of 1631’ in M. Immolata Wetter, *Mary Ward under the Shadow of the Inquisition* (Oxford: Way Books, 2006), appendix, 213–214.