

# JESUIT APOSTOLIC PRAYER

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THESE REMARKS on jesuit apostolic prayer constitute, effectively, a scatter-shot reflection somewhat distantly based on statements of Karl and Hugo Rahner, and on the autobiography and journal of Saint Ignatius, among other things. But this reflection intends most especially to be a cursory reading of the Spiritual Exercises. And this seems particularly appropriate, since the prayer of jesuits is the prayer of the Exercises.

This last remark in no wise suggests anything at all – one way or another – about the method, or the duration, etc. of any jesuit's prayer (since this is entirely a matter of each individual's need and grace). Rather the remark looks to that primordial vision and inaugural experience *of God in the world* out of which the Spiritual Exercises arise – and which they in turn seek to incarnate and existentialize as personal experience for anyone who wishes to serve God our Lord in the Society of Jesus.

That vision and that experience were largely, and increasingly, identical for Ignatius. For each jesuit in turn, the *initial* purpose of the Spiritual Exercises is to identify and clarify that vision for himself and to begin its incarnation and its verification as his *own experience*. And the *repetition* of the Exercises, as well as the on-going, life-long prayer of the jesuit, ought to maintain this, his own unique and continually deepening identification with this, his own and the Society's primary graces, roots, vision, hope, etc. Finally, this prayer ought also continually and permanently to function as the primary event wherein and whereby the jesuit discovers that vision and experience within the particularity, the detail and the change of his own daily worldly history.

For it is in terms of this context alone – the contemporary Society's charismatic God-in-Christ experience: *jesuit prayer* as concretized and located within each individual jesuit's and every jesuit community's own history, love and work – that *jesuit* apostolic choices (discernments) are made. This applies, then, equally to those choices that a jesuit makes 'individually' (or, where appropriate, in concert

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with his superior or director) and to those made through the communal discernment of the community. It will be for this reason that jesuit prayer, while it is – like all prayer – an end in itself (because it is, in itself, a purely religious, that is, God-centred event), is, also and thereby, immediately and properly, *apostolic* prayer. For this prayer<sup>1</sup> (*familiaritas cum Deo, devotio*: ease in finding God) is the matrix of all *jesuit* choice (as perhaps inadequately distinct from the choices jesuits make). And this prayer is therefore also the matrix and condition of all *jesuit* action in the world as grounded in such choice. Thus, hitting both words hard, jesuit spirituality is suitably described as a *mysticism of service*. Where mysticism and service or, to use other words, where contemplation and action are conceived or experienced as alternatives or are simply collapsed the one into the other, it would seem you do not have the jesuit way of life.

#### *Some further remarks*

1. The structure of the grace of the Society, and therefore the basic contour of the prayer of jesuits, is conveniently exposed in the God-experience of Saint Ignatius at La Storta. The grace and the prayer, therefore, are wholly, permanently, trinitarian and christological. We find Ignatius asking the Father (through the intercession of Mary) to place him (Ignatius) with his Son. Ignatius is answered in the experience of himself being placed with the Son *in his humanity as Jesus carrying the cross*, who says to Ignatius: 'I will that you serve Us'. Thus Ignatius is a companion of the historical and the contemporary, the worldly Jesus, who has a Kingdom to conquer for his Father, under the sign of the cross. And the trinitarian dynamic is permanent and clear: Ignatius has received Jesus *from* the Father, and in this companionship with the suffering, striving Jesus in the world of action, he *finds* the Father too ('Us').<sup>1</sup>

Further, it could be shown, I think, that the third degree of humility (at least the desire of the desire which is required for entrance into the Society<sup>2</sup>) demands such a trinitarian spirituality, and not simply a commitment to the ethical values of Jesus. (And the resurrection is of course at once presumed, encountered and

<sup>1</sup> See Ganss, George E.: *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (St Louis, 1970), p 21, note 21; and p 347, note 8, for Jerome Nadal who, within Ignatius's own lifetime, understood the Jesus of the La Storta vision as also referring to the ecclesial and corporate Jesus in his contemporary, worldly existence and passion.

<sup>2</sup> Cf the *General Examen*, in Ganss, *op. cit.*, pp 107–8.

proclaimed in this joyful stance of the Society towards suffering, poverty and the cross.)

Thus the ignatian grace – and the jesuit prayer which incarnates this grace and makes of it an experience and gives it a contemporary history in the world – is a meeting with the God beyond *the whole world*. Yet the meeting occurs always and only (however implicitly, however darkly) *in Christ, through Christ*. For it is a meeting with *Christ's* God, the Father.

Furthermore, as a meeting with the Father, with *God*, the event, where fully done and allowed, is an *absolute* choice, an *unconditional* availability and commitment. As absolute choice of the Father, therefore, jesuit prayer is an on-going meeting and relationship which continuously *relativizes* for the jesuit – makes him 'indifferent' to – all else. And this in turn leaves him continuously *free* (without idols, 'mortified', dead to self and the world) – free enthusiastically to *choose* all else, anything else – anything, anyone, any time, any place – wherein the Father may, *just now*, today and in this place, choose to meet him, greet him, and be served.<sup>3</sup>

Now it is in formal prayer (as conscious and free inter-personal encounter and relationship) that the jesuit *meets* the Father; receives the world-as-Jesus *from* the Father; and receives those *choices of the world* from the Father which base all jesuit apostolic love and action. And then – perhaps, gradually, occasionally, increasingly – *the action itself*, and *the world itself* too, as had from God, as done in God, begin to be *themselves* fully jesuit prayer. The reality, and the radical conditions (ceaselessly to be renewed, fought for and accepted through mortification and through formal prayer), of this jesuit *prayer-in-action*, of this jesuit *action-as-prayer*, are here exposed. And herein too the meaning and the permanent conditions of the jesuit search which is also a cry of jubilation: God! Found in all things!

2. The Exercises (especially Annotation 15) enshrine the great faith, the great boast, which founds all jesuit existence and all jesuit prayer: 'God will deal directly with the one who is making the Exercises'. That is: 'God will deal directly with me'. This fact and expectation of faith may be indefinitely unpacked. For example,

<sup>3</sup> Where this perennial dynamic is deeply successful, there results, then, not only freedom from self, but also freedom from the idols of staticism and nostalgia as well as of sophistication and fad – be those idols cultural, ecclesiastical, political, theological, or whatever. This freedom is necessary if a man is just simply to *expect*, let alone imaginatively notice and passionately greet, the mystery of *God-as-Jesus* in our contemporary world's darkness, change and countless social and cultural possibilities.

God (my Father) will do so. He *will* do so (the great boast).<sup>3</sup> He will do so *directly* (which makes of jesuit prayer a true, though perhaps usually sober, mysticism). (And notice that in dealing *directly* with me, he will do so always, however darkly, as Jesus, because Jesus, the Word, is the only thing, because he is everything, the Father has to say. Just as he is, as cosmic Christ, the only Deed the Father has to do.) And finally here, God will deal directly with *me* in all my detailed particularity as spirit-in-a-body-in-the-world (a contemporary, american, human, reasonable, sociable, sexual, etc., jesuit man of the Church).

3. Since all prayer – taking prayer just here as the creative action of man – is primarily listening *response* to the divine initiative, the essential content and shape of jesuit prayer gets declared through God's continuing reality and action in the world. That reality is trinitarian, and that action is incarnational. And the Exercises, especially in the contemplations on the Incarnation and the Nativity, state this mystery of God as incarnating, incarnational, incarnated love. In other words, for Ignatius, *Jesus* (his person and action) *is* the Trinity, is the Father's love and labour become visible for history as on-going historical event.<sup>4</sup> What is important for us here: it is this *mystery* which decides both the shape and the pedagogy of the rest of the Exercises (including the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*) as well as the shape and the pedagogy of all jesuit *existence* and all jesuit *prayer* (where prayer is a human acting-out and taking account of this existence as a response to this mystery).

In the contemplation on the Incarnation, sheer mystery (the Trinity's loving decision to become man in the Son, who will suffer and die and rise to save men from their sins) – this sheer mystery is *mythologized* by Ignatius (the Trinity 'on the royal dais', 'looking down over the world': cf the first prelude and second point) in order to make emotionally available for prayer and life what is literal *fact* (the Trinity's love and its incarnational consequences). Further on, there is mention of the Annunciation: that event, that moment available to scientific *history* (whatever its mysterious elements or literary embellishments), when this *mystery* of God's love becomes *News*, becomes *historical event* as Jesus. Notice: sheer *mystery* assuming flesh and shape as *history*.

In the contemplation on the Nativity, the contemplative process

<sup>4</sup> I owe a suggestion for the development that follows, though not the development itself, to William A. M. Peters, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: Exposition and Interpretation*, (Jersey City, 1968), pp 80–86.

is reversed. Here we are faced with a whole series of *historical* details, here we are faced with an event available to scientific history: the birth of a jew, Jesus of Nazareth (with Ignatius freely embellishing in order that what is literal, historical *fact* may become emotionally *real, immediate, available* for prayer and life). The task here will be to press the *history* and find therein (spirit in flesh, spirit as flesh) the *mystery* – to press into all the details of *Jesus* and find a God, find the *mystery of the Father* working, labouring, loving.

Notice here a twofold affective, contemplative dialectic: from mystery to history, from history to mystery – pressing ever towards the full, rich experience of mystery *in* history, history *as* mystery (full Incarnation become now not merely a faith-fact, or doctrine, but faith-*experience*). In the remaining weeks of the Exercises, the jesuit fairly saturates himself with Jesus, proceeding from either end of this dialectic which faith, and then faith-*experience*,) declares to be the structure of reality itself: now sitting in the Father's presence, alone and far from the world, watching and experiencing how the world and Jesus, and the jesuit's own life too, come, *are coming just now*, from the Father's creating, redeeming hand; now pressing the details and events of that world, that Jesus, and the jesuit's own life too, in order to find and feel in faith the *Father* labouring and loving.

The Exercises call for this double process in plumbing the historical life of Jesus, as the Father's love and labour in the world, through the second, third and fourth weeks. In the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*, the whole world, all past, contemporary and future historical existence, becomes the material and milieu for this personal engagement of the jesuit with his Father through Jesus – the historical Jesus eminently, as given in the Father's word (the scripture), where he tells the story of his Son; but also the whole panorama of that Son's contemporary and worldly existence as the larger, total, cosmic and ecclesial Christ – a Jesus still largely history as suffering and cross in the poor and disadvantaged. And here the jesuit, while continuing a rhythm of formal prayer *and* action, continually moves to action *as* prayer: now watching the details of his own world and self and life and apostolic work come from his Father's hand; now pressing the smallest details of his own work and need and hope to find the mystery, the mystery of the Father's labouring love; and always choosing, choosing more and more, the *magis*: that is, not just what is general or abstractly better (what would this be?), but choosing the quite particular actions that are given *him* to know and love and do in this contemplative companionship – a contemplative compan-

ionship which occurs, not separately, but within the immediate, concrete circumstances and options of *today*, in *this* time and *this* place. Once again here, we have the meaning and the *conditions* of the searching cry that signals jesuit joy: God! Found in all things! Once again we see jesuit prayer, jesuit existence, as a *mysticism of service*.

What is envisaged throughout here, then, is prayer understood as a contemplative life-stance with *God*: the indispensable, permanent, living companion and milieu wherein alone a jesuit, together with his *brothers*, authentically experiences, knows and chooses the *world*. However, it is also seen that this cannot be richly managed except in vigorous and welcome dialectic with a far-reaching, and equally christian, secularity. For while this prayer – as the affectionate company of God our Father in Jesus – remains utterly primary in leading a jesuit to love and embrace poverty with the contemporary poor; to hunger for peace and justice with the contemporary victims of violence and oppression; and to admire and seek the beautiful and the true in contemporary culture and learning, etc.; yet also and at the same time: it is only in a broad and close experience of the human, and it is only in deeply personal, extensive involvement with the reality of poverty, learning, culture, Vietnam, our prisons, etc., that there is given to jesuit prayer that historical body and world and *actual human flesh* so utterly required if such prayer, indeed if God, is to exist at all for the jesuit as a valuably christian, that is, incarnational, event. And prayer that *is* this deeply contextualized, and is this fully responsible to experience and to evidence, may expect to show itself in, and to test itself against, a jesuit personality increasingly marked by those central ignatian traits of mind as well as of heart which lead to *discreta caritas*, that is, passionate discretion; fidelity; integrity; reverence; magnanimity; joy; and service.

4. Here a brief look at ignatian or jesuit 'method' in prayer – as opposed to multiple possible 'methods' or 'techniques'. From 'Consideration' to 'Meditation' to 'Contemplation' to 'Repetition' to 'Application of the Senses' (as all these are found in the Exercises), the dynamic and direction are single. Taken as a whole, it is not an arbitrary, however valuable, 'method', but an enunciation of the *human*. Only truths and beauties that get to the heart and emotions and sensibilities of a man can deeply affect him, that is, make him *care*, can make things *happen*. Ignatius is simply saying: don't just glance at God, or reasonably weigh the things of God (consideration). Don't just think about him, or even brood and daydream

about him (meditation). But let him *happen* to you, meet you in inter-*personal* relationship, so that he can increasingly shape and christify your very emotions and instincts and *way of looking at the world* (contemplation). Be with him, then, over and over again, as a very way of life (repetition). And sweep – let him sweep and gather – your entire physical, psycho-sexual reality and energies into his mystery, into this relationship (application of the senses).

5. A word on jesuit prayer as aimed at *service*, at *action* (rather more than simply at union, as some other spiritualities may be). There is need for the greatest care in understanding what we are about in such a statement. The aim is service, service of God in the world: jesuit prayer is apostolic prayer. Yet prayer must not be pragmatized. Prayer is, with entire primacy, an *end*, not a means. And the best way it serves its secondary existence as a means is by being treated as an end.

Prayer is a personal relationship. It ought therefore never to be used as a means. An example of how it does serve an *apostolic* end precisely by being treated as the purely *religious* event it is (we pray because God is – God): I have a friend, and our relationship is its own value, needing neither further justification nor explanation. Now, if it is a good relationship (genuinely, affectively involving me in the other's mystery and originality), I will, as a matter of *fact*, be profoundly altered by it. I will be aggrandized at the deepest level of myself as person, and I will be continually (if most often silently) summoned to become my best self – and at that level of myself where I may be fundamentally created and/or revolutionized with regard to my way of looking and *acting in the world*. So there *will* be by-products from this relationship, powerful by-products that, whether immediately or eventually, concretely affect my ethical conduct, my activity, my choices. So too of my relationship with God, *my jesuit prayer*. But if I say: 'I want to act better and make better choices, I want to be a more significant person: so I will seek this excellent man's friendship, *in order to* bring this about', then I degrade the relationship, I disrespect the mystery, I make of it an ascetical tool rather than a companionship. And the looked-for results for action, where *aimed at* thus pragmatically, are most unlikely to occur. So too of my relationship with God, my jesuit prayer. The call is to be with our Father – just because he is our Father. If we do that well – just *be* with him – we shall increasingly see the world, ourselves, and our brothers, from his point of view. And we shall increasingly act – invest all our freedom – after his mind and heart, which is Christ.

And there can be no doubt, therefore, that such apostolic action, even though it is not the *purpose* of jesuit prayer in any pragmatic sense, nevertheless remains the major criterion for judging, confirming and reforming the actuality and depth of such prayer. The Synoptics<sup>5</sup> and John<sup>6</sup> and the whole christian mystical tradition are at once adamant and unanimous on this.

6. A final word on details, details which are indispensable and perennially relevant (if love is to be realistic and human and have a history and if God is to have a place in my story) – yet details too which are always *relative*, relative to persons and circumstances.

How much should *this* jesuit (or community) pray? How often? How (what 'methods', habits, helps, direction, use of scripture, etc., etc., etc.)? What gestures? What's needed, what's *necessary*, at *this* time for *this* jesuit (or community) to keep alive this companionship, this jesuit prayer which is the one milieu for all *jesuit* choice, discernment, action in the world?

The on-going, always experimental and situational answers to these questions lie in three elements and conditions: the holy Spirit; the individual jesuit as man of prayer, as mortified man of prayer; spiritual government and/or direction.<sup>7</sup> It may be that discussion of jesuit apostolic prayer could most profitably delay on these questions. But this could be the case, I think, only where there is conscious appropriation of what the reality and experience are, what the vision and the hope are, which *any* answer to such necessary ascetical questions would be seeking to serve. Otherwise, the very dignity and necessity of these practical questions, and the legitimate variety of their possible answers, will seem neither practical, nor necessary, nor credible. It would seem a mistake, therefore, to find such questions as *alone* practical, and not also to find equally practical, real and concrete that reality and love and hope and faith and actual *experience of God* towards which these ascetical issues can only have themselves as means – necessary means, indeed, but nevertheless relative to the end proposed and felt in the faith-experience of God itself.

### Conclusion

If the jesuit is a man called to meet and act out of his *experience* of

<sup>5</sup> Mt 25, 31ff.

<sup>6</sup> Jn 15, 9ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Fiorito, Miguel: 'Ignatius's Own Legislation on Prayer', in *Woodstock Letters* (1968), pp 149–224.



the *Trinity* through *Christ* in the *world* – as these remarks suggest – then jesuit prayer can be nothing less than an existentialization and consequence of his situation. It is the permanent jesuit ‘composition of place’. If so, the jesuit grace, and the prayer which gives it flesh, is not complicated at all, but it is certainly complex. And it ought not to be made simpler than it is. If its rich simplicity is rendered *simpliste*, if its demanding adventure is avoided, tailored or domesticated (whether by some rationalism, pietism, humanism, christism, etc.), the victim will be the quality of jesuit *action*. That said, however, it ought to be noticed, too, that a successful *experience* of the jesuit grace and its prayer is doubtless immeasurably more common than any such reflex awareness of it as is inadequately attempted here.