

# THE FIFTH ANNOTATION

By MICHAEL NEVIN

*The first characteristic of jesuit spirituality is certainly indifference. Hence the sceptical, disillusioned, here and now, calculating, planning character, the occasional seeming disloyalty, the adaptability, which for good or ill makes up the jesuit character. Karl Rahner*

WHEN I WAS asked to give this paper, it was suggested that I concern myself with the problems of ignatian indifference. I hope I have done this, even though at first sight it may seem that I have not, seeing that the article might well be given the title, 'A Reflection upon Annotation Five in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola'.

In this annotation Ignatius tells us how we are to begin the Exercises:

For him who is to receive the Exercises it will be of great profit if he begins them with an attitude of *great generosity and courage* towards his Creator and Lord, offering to him his *whole liberty and desiring*, in order that his divine Majesty may be served in conformity with his most holy will in matters concerning both his person and *all* he possesses.<sup>1</sup>

This attitude of mind and heart Ignatius considered so important that he will ask it again of the person who is more advanced in sanctity; and where he is unable to elicit its total generosity he will attempt to evoke from the exercitant at least the affirmation that if as yet he does not desire such totality, then he does desire at least to have the desire of such a desire.<sup>2</sup> This is not subtlety; rather it indicates the desperate necessity Ignatius attributed to the quality of totality in the divine-human relationship, a totality which we shall see is but another name for love.

And yet surely this attitude, so difficult for someone advanced in the life of the spirit, is hardly to be expected of a man who is only beginning to walk the long and painful road towards God. One solution to this question must reside in the fact that *every* meeting with God is in a true sense a first meeting, whether it be on the part of saint or sinner.

<sup>1</sup> Ignatius composed the Exercises between April and July 1522, in the sense that this was the period when he made his own 'retreat' at Manresa. He began to write them down in the August of the same year. Annotations to the Exercises were, however, written down earlier. Cf *Obras Completas de S. Ignacio de Loyola* (ed. Ignacio Iparaguirre s.i., and Candido de Dalmases s.i., Madrid, 1952), p 134, and note 48. The spanish text of Annotation 5 shows that Ignatius originally wrote *dexándole* (allowing God to take his whole liberty, etc.) and then scratched it out in favour of *ofreciéndole*, a more positive and active word, a fact not insignificant for our consideration.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, when considering a candidate for entry into his Society, Ignatius requires such *desires of desires*. Cf *Constitutions, General Examen*, ch 4, 45; and *The Meditation on the Kingdom*, Exx 98.

There is a characteristic feel about the relationship with the three persons who are God: it is a sense of always beginning,<sup>3</sup> always starting afresh. St Augustine's description of the beauty which is ever ancient and ever new is indeed memorable, because christians down the centuries have recognized in his words an echo of their own universal experience of God, an experience which, however mediated, is a direct awareness of the divine reality.<sup>4</sup> One of the possible mistakes of christians is to believe in a notion of God which they possess rather than in a real God which they experience. Attempts may be made to conceptualize the experience, but they must always remind themselves that they are indeed attempts. As Aquinas notes, the proper receptacle of the divine reality, since that reality is infinite, is the divine mind. And even here it is important to recall that the divine conception is a person, the Logos begotten of the Father, a living reality and not a universal idea.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Even in the final state of blessedness God will only be found by being forever sought. Cf Henri de Lubac S.J., *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (London, 1967), pp 55-58. 'Nor can man, even simply *qua* religious man, consent to a simple finality in the experience and explication, in the apprehension and application of religion, either in looking back into the past; or in believing and loving, suffering and acting in the present; or in forecasting the future, either of the race or of himself alone. For the *here and now*, the concrete *immediacy*, the unique individuality of the religious experience for *me*, in this room, on this very day, its *freshness* [my italics], is as true and necessary a quality of living religion as any other whatsoever': Friedrich von Hügel, in *The Mystical Element of Religion* (London, 1909). Perhaps this approach is more fruitful than that of Karl Rahner confronting the problem of measuring spiritual progress in *Theological Investigations* (vol 3), 'Reflections on the Problem of the Gradual Ascent to Christian Perfection', where he emphasizes moral intensity as an indicator of progress. I do not see how this is to be measured.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent and fine defence of direct though mediated experience of God in all men, see Illtyd Trethowan, *Absolute Value: a Study in Christian Theism* (London, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> A christian can have a notion of God, which is not only inadequate from the nature of the case, but also from psychological and intellectual inadequacies in the particular man. To believe in this *notion* is never christian, however necessary doctrine may be to balance religious experience. We must begin by believing in the living God whom we experience, who may indeed be best *understood* by a series of negations. For this apophatic theology, see Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London, 1957), and for a more recent, brilliant but surely unacceptable apophaticism, Robert Neville's *God the Creator* (Chicago, 1968), to be read along with his 'Creation and the Trinity' in *Theological Studies* (March 1969), vol 30, no 1, pp 3-26. To our experience of God, balanced by doctrinal notions or philosophical definition, we must add the *historical* revelation of God in Jesus Christ. But notions and historical revelation are *means* towards the living experience of God in himself, and share with all creation and even the Son and the Spirit in a mediatory function towards the Father who dwells in inaccessible light. Finally, see von Hügel's remark that 'the fixity of the revelation and of the soul's assent to it will be as the fixity of a fountainhead . . . of a plant's growth . . . of the successive evolution and identity of the human body. The fixity, in a word, will be conceived as . . . a fixity of orientation'. *Op. cit.* And see the idea of inter-relating centres of energy in *Interpreting Human Experience*, P. R. Clifford (London, 1971).

Thus a christian must exercise a healthy atheism, disbelieving in the God of yesterday; for there is a real sense in which one can say that a christian is always at the start of being a christian. He is always wet with baptism and newly arisen. He is always falling in love for the first time.

This is why Gregory of Nyssa can write: 'On this account the Word speaks again to him who has already arisen and says, Arise: and to him who has already come he says, Come'.<sup>6</sup>

If a christian is always at the start of being a christian, christian writing is the first sentence of Genesis breaking in upon a startled world. It is the prologue of John and the black ink still not dry in Patmos. It is the voice of Christ penetrating the dullness of a Saturday afternoon in the synagogue at Nazareth: '*Today* this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'. The time-sense of the Spirit, the *kairos*, is something other than the mere succession of moments which common sense affirms of human life, something other than the dispersal of organization which modern physicists measure in their experiments.

It is therefore of no little importance that we should know how to receive the word of God which we are always hearing for the first time. A christian may experience various emotions, adopt different attitudes, employ varied words to describe his encounter with the revealing God. Joy, wonder, fear, reverence, awe, peace: these attitudes will appear spontaneously, first one, then another, or in different combinations with a multitudinous variety of feelings and evaluations and intensities. But if there is always to be found an anticipation of meeting God for the first time, revealed in Christ, there should also be an essential and consistent quality which, however coloured by other attitudes, remains true of every reception of the divine life. This quality may be called *the christian stance*.

Ignatius of Loyola answers the problem we have set ourselves in the fifth annotation. The first week of his Spiritual Exercises he considered to be useful for a rather insensitive, almost brutalized and ignorant christian, in order to lead him to a meeting with the incarnate Word in the second week. And what does this master of the spiritual life demand of such a man? 'An attitude of great courage and generosity, a *total* oblation of liberty and will'! It is true that Ignatius will ask this again and again throughout the Exercises, in the Principle and Foundation, in the oblation of the Kingdom, in the Third Mode of Humility, and finally in the Contemplation for obtaining Love; but here it stands at the beginning, here it is offered to someone steeped in sin, a mere

<sup>6</sup> *In Cant. Hom. V*, PG 44, 876c.

novice. And it is so offered because the *illuminated* man, even the perfect man, no less than the novice, is only at the beginning, meeting God for the first time.

In order to clarify the solution presented it is not only useful but necessary to reflect upon an analogous situation on the human level of experience. The relationship which is most to our purpose both because it is the one used constantly in scripture and because it is the closest between persons, is that of marriage. Indeed St Paul says that the relationship of christian marriage is the relationship between Christ and his Church. Let us see what help such an analogy affords us in the present dilemma.

If someone tells us that he is going to marry a woman because she has a lot of money, we would suspect that such a marriage was not going to last. And yet it is a sensible and reasonable approach. But there are times and situations when sane common-sense is inappropriate. The start of a marriage, with obvious qualifications, is such a time. The marriage in question was not starting out right.

What is the attitude that most christians bring to the idea of starting out with God: and starting, as Gregory of Nyssa reminds us, is what we *always* do in our relationship with God? I suspect that it is, for the generality of christians, compounded of gloom and fear. Somehow we have got ourselves caught up in this business of being christians and we cannot now escape from it. A common criticism of christian childhood as a process of brainwashing, heard also from christians themselves, is indicative of this mood. It is the mood that is often met among retreatants at the beginning of a retreat! Whenever the thought arises of doing something about being a christian, there also comes an awareness of something wrong or missing, or at least a suspicion that something wrong or missing will be found if one looks long enough, and that it is going to prove expensive to put it right. God impinges upon many christians as a celestial dentist or car-mechanic who is going to hurt either the body or the bank balance. But unlike the dentists of this world who might conceivably release a patient without treatment, the confrontation with God is always a confrontation between the imperfect and the perfect, the sinner and the holy. God surely cannot be satisfied with us: we cannot surely be satisfied with ourselves?

To return to Ignatius. The first week of his Exercises is centred on reform and sin on the one hand, while he demands on the other an almost light-hearted liberality. Moreover a healthy christian instinct denies that an attitude of gloom and fear, especially if it proves to be the

essential christian stance, is worthy of our experience of God who is revealed in Christ as Father. Although we may be aware that an encounter with God will prove a searching experience, it is not thereby essentially gloomy or fearful. It is better seen as a desired climbing of high hills than a rebellious child's walk to the dentist's chair.

Consider again the start of a marriage. Here in a human relationship is the beginning of something new, unknown, intimate, in which nothing of our deepest selves, the least weakness or strength of character, is going to remain unhidden.

It was seen above that a marriage can begin in the wrong way with the wrong motives. I suppose it might be generally agreed that the right way to begin is with a complete generosity, with a complete gift of self, mind and body, for the sake of the other person, or at least with the desire to act thus, or at least with the desire of such a desire. Marriages which begin this way *may* fail, but marriages which do not begin this way *will* fail. Not that what is being outlined here is some dramatic gesture of sacrifice at the pinnacle of ultimate seriousness, but a steady determination, not without humour and not without ecstasy, to turn from self as the object of one's attention to another. Moreover this attitude must be mutual. The relationship fails where there is no self-gift in return. The other person must respond. A one-sided devotion that is unreciprocated is a loss of humanity which has furnished the material for tragedy both in life and in art. It has also been the subject of comedy, since it is associated with a loss of dignity. What is under one aspect Hermione is under another Malvolio. I make this point in order to balance a picture of the divine-human relationship that makes us take it too earnestly, a tendency that finds its counterpart on the theological level with the neurotic anxiety of Kierkegaard or, and I hope that this will not be regarded as uneirenic, the tortured soul of Luther.

In the relationship with God, a christian claims that he can be sure of the divine side of the relationship. Thus Luther can speak of God as the goal of man's (ultimate) trust.<sup>7</sup> But the problem arises on the side of man's response. If a christian is to respond adequately, he will have to become something other and better than he is. He stands in need of reformation, and this is what causes the gloom and the despair. It is not that he is merely inadequate, but that he must sacrifice much if he is going to become more responsive. It is this saddening insight which surely stands behind the emotional temper of Luther's *simul justus et peccator*, and what might be termed the protestant pessimism of Karl

<sup>7</sup> Cited by Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology* (Bristol, 1970), p 212.

Barth. Theologically, Barth's reaction to a cheerful liberalism that was slowly evacuating the mystery from God and which has reached its peak in the cruder forms of secularism in our time, is valid enough; but unlike natural oscillation a theologian does not correct an imbalance by creating another. He does it by holding both extremes in what has been called a creative tension.

Christian spirituality has often been criticized for its negative quality, for its series of thou-shalt-nots; Christians cannot but admit the justice of much of the criticism. But the dogmatic formulation of the commencement of the relationship to God leaves no room for such negativity, such gloomy introspection of failing and falling. Thus the Council of Trent affirms: *Si quis dixerit, hominem suis operibus quae vel per humanae naturae vires, vel per legis doctrinam fiant, absque divina per Christum Jesum gratia posse justificari coram Deo, anathema sit.* (If anyone affirms that a man can be justified by works performed through his own natural powers or the teaching of the law, apart from the grace which comes through Jesus Christ: let him be anathema!)<sup>8</sup> If the Roman Church speaks thus, how much more emphasis will be placed by the reformers on this aspect of justification. Of himself man can do nothing towards his own salvation.<sup>9</sup>

When we return to our analogy the theology becomes a little clearer. We often hear the statement that marriage has reformed a person. But such a statement is made, so to speak, from the outside.<sup>10</sup> Thus a young man may know that he has been unconscionably idle before he met his future wife, and that laziness just won't do when he has a house and family to maintain. But if he loves his wife, and this is the essential conditional, he does not go about on the days preceding the ceremony of marriage in dread of its arrival because it means that he is going to have to mend his ways and face up to his shortcomings. Indeed, his thoughts are less likely to be centred upon himself and more likely to be centred upon her. Marriage, as long as he has her as the centre of his life, will form him rather than reform him. Reformation might be

<sup>8</sup> *Canones de Justificatione* 1.

<sup>9</sup> Thus Karl Rahner writes: 'From a certain point of view, every subsequent and all increase of grace is linked to some extent to grace which is absolute, gratuitous and unmerited; and furthermore, every salutary act and hence perseverance in increased, habitual grace depends immediately and ever anew [my italics] on each new efficacious grace. Thus all depends on something absolutely actual, the ever new event of God's goodness and favour, which as such cannot be merited at all'. *Theological Investigations* (London, 1966), vol IV, p 207. The ecumenical significance of this in the light of differing views of justification should be noted.

<sup>10</sup> For the failure of the 'outside' point of view, see Bernard Lonergan, *The Subject* (Milwaukee, 1968).

justly described as the preparation for a life still to come, as for example when we say that prison reforms a convict. But a young husband's love for his wife is that very life itself. It is a release of energy rather than a retention. Prison may or may not reform a convict, but the man we have in mind is not in prison but at home. Punishment reforms, but here is no punishment but joyous service. Reformation might be thought of as a coercion, a push from behind; but formation is understood as a pull, an attraction from in front. And this attraction, in the sphere of the divine-human relationship, is not the business or effort or self-sacrifice of man but God's justifying holiness. In the words again of the Council of Trent: *demum unica formalis causa est justitia Dei, non qua ipse justus est, sed qua nos justos facit*.<sup>11</sup> St John puts it another way: 'No-one can come to me except the Father draw him'. And again: 'In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us'.

No doubt a certain basic character will be required to achieve a requisite formation, and no doubt co-operation with the gift, once acquired, is necessary; but neither disposition nor co-operation make any sense without the initial gift, whether it be of love in the human relationship or of love (*justitia*) in the divine relationship.

It is the part that God plays in the relationship which responds to our question. If the gift of love is given, then what is judged from an external viewpoint as sacrificial, gloomy or desperately hard is, seen from the inside, the joy of giving and the ease of desire. Someone who has had no experience of love might look at the life of the young married man and see him go off to work in the morning early and return tired at night; he might see him mowing the lawn and painting the kitchen, going without cigarettes or drink or dancing, and say; 'Here is punishment, here is reform, here is prison'. But the man who is in love sees not punishment but reward, not reform but life, not prison but home. It is not an employer that he works for but a family. It is not fear which drives him forward but desire which pulls him on. He is not living in a dark wood of sadness but his walls are happiness and his hearth the source of life.

It is in the light of this gift, and in terms of the divine side of the relationship, the *initial* gift of justification or justifying love, that Ignatius can ask, at the *beginning* of his Exercises, an attitude of total generosity. He can ask, in Illtyd Trethowan's words, that we should *not refuse* him anything.

<sup>11</sup> *Decretum de Justificatione*, cap. 7.

A serious objection to the view taken above is that there is a place for fear and for being driven even in the christian scheme of things, just as in marriage it is only an immature enthusiasm which speaks in the way which has been used here. A more realistic, not to say cynical view, might express itself in this way: 'Wait until the first ten years of marriage are over, or even the first ten months, and then see the invalidity of your analogy. The journey to work in the morning becomes ever more reluctant, the arrival home less and less of a reward. The peeling kitchen is matched by a knee-high lawn. And the romantic quality of your imagined relationship will bear very little examination'.

There is no doubt much to be said for the realistic view. It would be as foolish to reject the breath of realism as it would be to breathe only the scented air of romanticism. There is a place for fear, though we cannot examine this here. There is a place for reformation. If a cynic is a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing, there are times when we need to know prices. *But the beginning is not such a time.* No-one would ever get married at all on the cynical view; and then there would be no cynics left to sneer over poor human failings. As I said at the outset, the beginning of our relationship to God, and this is a relationship which is *always* beginning, always a transcendence of time into an eternal now, is important psychologically because the initial attitude must be one of total generosity or it will never start at all. If a christian carries about with him the permanent luggage of his old stale experience of failure, a disconsolate loss of ideals, discouragement even in the finest and most expensive of efforts; if he allows the fear, which is the essence of his contingent creaturehood, and therefore continually with him, that one day he might *begin* to be a saint, *begin* to let the awesome and infinite God, the living God, to take him up into his powerful hands, to *form* him and to lift him; if he, in short, does not in some blind, rash, courageous moment say with his deepest sincerity: 'Take everything I want and change it into everything you want: everything which I am and change it into everything which you are', then he has never *started* to be a real christian at all. Thus Teilhard de Chardin writes:

The longer I live, the more I feel that true repose consists in *renouncing* one's own self, by which I mean making up one's mind to admit that there is no importance whatever in being happy or unhappy in the usual meaning of the words. Personal success or personal satisfaction are not worth another thought if one does achieve them, or worth worrying about if they evade one or are slow in coming. All that is really worthwhile is



action — faithful action, for the world and in God. Before one can see that and live by it, there is a sort of threshold to cross, or a reversal to be made in what appears to be man's general habit of thought; but once that gesture has been made, what freedom is yours, freedom to work and to love.<sup>12</sup>

But one important misunderstanding must be avoided here. This psychological attitude of total generosity is not perfect sanctity: indeed, as we have seen, it is only a beginning. There is no doubt that diminishment of resolution will take place and that committed generosity will give way to selfish retention. But, and here is the burden of these considerations, unless a christian *starts* with something of this state of mind and decision of will and dispossession of self then he has never started to be a real christian at all.

With the encouragement of scripture and in the light of our realization that theological truth must be anchored in experience, the examination of the state of mind of small children will not be out of place here. Those children who have been brought up in a balanced and loving family have learned to put their whole trust in their parents; and when they turn to God, unless they have been taught otherwise, they do so in the right way again and again. It does not matter if they have stolen biscuits or pulled their sister's hair during the day, they so easily give themselves to God in their prayers at night. I am not claiming too much here. The point I want to emphasize is that they are sure that God loves them. They have none of the cynic's experience of love rejected. They know only the love their parents are always prepared to give them, and so have the right idea of God.

The point I wish to make here is clarified for those who have had some experience of working with disturbed children; those children I mean whose psychological problems are traceable to an early environment of neglect or cruelty or family breakdown. Whereas you can ask a normal child if he is good and elicit the reply, from a mouth stained with stolen jam, that he is, from the disturbed child the same question is met with a frightened uncertainty. It is troubling to see how much they are at a loss for an answer. Until the child has had the experience of evil done *to* him, he hardly begins to apprehend the evil in himself. What parents are to children is important, and what God is to us is equally important. A christian who has the wrong *notion* of God is like

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<sup>12</sup> *Letters from a Traveller* (London, 1967), p 116.

a spiritually disturbed child. As I said earlier, it is easy to relate to a notion of God and not to God himself.

We can now begin to see that it is indeed God's side of the spiritual relationship which is the key to our problem. A christian must be convinced beyond any shadow of a doubt that God loves him and he will be healed. With Paul he must be able in wonder and sincerity to exclaim: 'He loved *me* and delivered himself for me'. In some spiritual sense he must be seventeen again and falling in love for the first time — without the deforming experience of rejection: five years old again and sure that 'Father loves me'. This may seem humiliating, but it is that necessary reversal of which Christ speaks when he tells Nicodemus that he must be born again, and the apostles that they must become as little children. It is Paul's major defence against the Gnostics in his letters to Corinth.<sup>13</sup>

And yet how is all this to be achieved in the light of those failures which psychologists no less than priests have noted? One cannot, by merely taking thought, conjure up a feeling or sustain an attitude. 'I do not *feel* young or generous or blindly courageous'. How basic to spiritual sickness this situation is! Books may be found in our libraries of spirituality which give a superficial answer. Love, they will tell us, is not a matter of feeling but a matter of good will. Truly want to be something and the will is taken for the deed. This response may be true as far as it goes, but does it go far enough? Truly want to be something and the will is taken for the deed. But what is the meaning of truly? It is clear enough that to have a vague or even desperate desire during one's morning prayer to be kind, and then to spend the rest of the day growling, argues that the original desire was a velleity. A true desire should express itself in action. But, as we have seen, at this stage of our considerations we are not yet in the external world of *action*. We are examining the *psychological* attitude of the christian, the basic christian *stance*. We want the attitude of youthful enthusiasm but not the actions of it. In practice the enthusiasm must be tempered by the gubernatorial virtue of prudence.<sup>14</sup> Truly to want the right attitude is not yet a question of proving the reality of our desires in terms of action, almost as if the action were making up for a lack of feeling. We do, if christian life is to be human at all, need the emotion of generosity, the feeling of utter trust. It will not do to undervalue emotion, since no-one has ever served consistently unless he had the drive and power of felt desire. As Teresa

<sup>13</sup> See Walther Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth* (New York, 1971).

<sup>14</sup> *Summa Theologica*, I-IIae, q. 57, a.6.

of Avila noted in another context, christian love is not less warm and real than 'natural' love, but more so.<sup>15</sup>

What then is the answer? What then is the christian stance? You have said it is not action. You have said it is not emotion. What can possibly lie in between? I say, indifference! We might even call it prayer as long as we understand it is not words or thoughts but a simple openness of heart. (It is a more sophisticated but less radical definition of prayer which sees it as a meditative consideration of the meaning of God.) It is first and foremost an unexplicitated awareness of the absence of God and a consequent demand for God's presence which may be expressed in the word *Come*. God is called upon to come with the gift of his justifying love which is called the holy Spirit of God. *Per Spiritum Sanctum caritas Dei diffunditur in cordibus*, as Trent points out in quoting Romans (5, 5); and it is this gift of love which transforms reformation to formation, negative to positive, gloom to joy, fear to trust, and *starts* the christian on the beginning of the long and indeed endless road, which is always beginning, of the possession and comprehension of the Father in, with, and through Jesus Christ, by the working of the holy Spirit.

There are many problems connected with indifference, but we shall solve none of them until we see clearly what it is, and once we do I think some of the problems go away. Let me end by quoting St Leo. He writes:

By loving us God restores us to his own image: and in order that he may find in us the likeness of his own goodness, he gives to us the power to do to other creatures what he does to us; lighting the lanterns of our minds, and kindling in us the fire of his own love, so that we may love *not only* him, but that we may *also* love whatsoever he loves.

The corollary of this is therefore also true, namely, that we do not love whatsoever he does not love. This is the negative aspect of that reality which goes under the name of indifference. What I have been concerned with here is the same reality under its positive aspect, the christian stance. Unless we know what indifference *is*, we will never know the point of its negative consequences. And if we overemphasize or confine ourselves to these, Rahner's description of the jesuit character will be only too horribly true.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> 'Con más verdadero amor, y con más pasión y más provecho amor'. *Camino de Perfección* (Rome, 1965), ch 7, sec 7.

<sup>16</sup> We are now in a position to see that indifference is not a detachment from people or even things, but primarily a detachment from self.