IGNATIAN MISSION

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THE FOUNDING AND DEVELOPMENT of the Society of Jesus between 1540 and 1556 was accompanied by an extraordinary outburst of energy and enthusiasm among its members, which led them into a very wide range of different 'missionary' activities. Jesuits, for example, were tramping far-flung parts of the world preaching the word of God and teaching the catechism to believer and unbeliever alike, bringing non-Christians to faith and baptism in great numbers and establishing churches like the Apostle Paul himself; others were working tirelessly in Europe to support and reform the weakened Roman Catholic Church; others still were engaged in theological ministries as teachers and writers, as advisors at the Council of Trent or in official meetings between Catholics and Protestants; some were giving the Spiritual Exercises to individuals or preaching to large audiences retreats and sermons based on the themes of the Exercises; an increasing number were being drawn into negotiating for, establishing and running colleges and universities; most of them saw some care for the poor and disadvantaged as an integral part of their Jesuit calling, while Ignatius himself took a lead in setting up refuges in Rome for prostitutes; all who were priests were engaged in sacramental ministries and preaching. All of this 'missionary' activity took place at the instigation or with the agreement of Ignatius himself and it was carried out according to his (often quite detailed) instructions.[1] Here, therefore, we might argue, is authentic Ignatian mission, and an answer to the question of what Ignatian mission is for will arise from a historical analysis of those first authentic Ignatian missions.

There are several reasons, however, why a discussion of Ignatian mission has to go beyond using the first Jesuit missions in a rather obvious way as a paradigm of authentic Ignatian mission. The approach which argues that, because Ignatius did X, Y and Z, being faithful to Ignatius today simply means imitating those actions as closely as possible, is inadequate. For one thing today's cultural, social and ecclesial conditions are very different from those of the mid-sixteenth century. At the present time, Ignatian spirituality touches a far wider and more diverse group of people than it did then. Christians of several different denominations now make the Spiritual Exercises and are engaged in 'mission' with a self-understanding and a theology that may

be very different indeed from those of the early Jesuits. Moreover, the fact that nearly all of those early Jesuits were priests and members of a religious order bound by obedience sets their activities in a very different context from that of today, when many people who are engaged in 'mission' under the influence of an 'Ignatian' inspiration may never preach a sermon, write a book, study theology, set up a college, give the Spiritual Exercises, prepare people for baptism, engage in formal dialogue with 'unbelievers' or people of 'other faiths' or take up a sacramental ministry. We need, therefore, to give an account of Ignatian mission that includes these people too.

'Mission' in the full sense in which Christians use the word is a theological term; it indicates more than a job, an occupation, an externally observable activity. It has an inner, spiritual dimension; it is something which engages a person at all levels; it may perhaps be described as a particular orientation of a person's, a group's or a community's life in the light of their experience and religious convictions.

Schematically Ignatian mission may usefully be seen as a continuing interaction between several different but interrelated factors (1) the experience of making the Spiritual Exercises; (2) the commitment and momentum that flow from this experience; (3) a realistic understanding and appraisal of the gifts and resources of the individual or group that is or is about to be engaged in mission; (4) an awareness of needs to be met (whether of the world as a whole, of the Church or of particular people and places); and since not all the needs can be remedied, a way of distinguishing between greater and lesser needs; (5) other pressures and demands (from, for example, family, from personal concerns, from community, from powerful individuals or groups within or outside the Church); (6) a capacity to make discerning choices in the path of the gospel, which is also fostered by the experience of the Exercises.

The experience of making the Exercises

Both in the past and in the present Ignatian mission has its origin in an experience which gives it its energy, momentum, shape and direction, namely the experience of making the Spiritual Exercises in some form. And we are fortunate in having a key to that foundational experience in the text of the *Exercises*, which is both what Ignatius distilled from his own time at Manresa and the basis of crucial experiences of countless people since that time. It is also important, however, to recognize that the experience of making the Exercises is peculiar to each individual: no two persons' experience is exactly the

same. Moreover doing the Exercises in Paris in the 1530s under the guidance of Ignatius was no doubt also very different from making them in Wales, Chicago, Nairobi, Ho Chi Minh City or Sydney in the 1990s. Nonetheless, these experiences at various times and in various place are based ultimately on the same text, like different productions of a play, and as such have sufficient features in common to enable us to talk legitimately about a single experience. Much of this article will be devoted to exploring the links between this experience and Ignatian mission.

In the process of making the Exercises there is a focus on two realities which stand in intimate and continuing relationship with each other. One of those realities is God, and especially God as revealed in the scriptures and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The other is the 'self': the individual in all his or her breadth and depth, complexity, individuality, history and experience. This 'self', of course, is not an isolated individual of no particular time or place. The person who is making the Exercises brings to the experience the 'world' of past, present and future, of varied personal, ecclesial and social relationships and networks which she or he inhabits. The contents of that world, including personal history and the different experiences and networks of relationships that it contains play a crucial part in the discovery and shaping of Ignatian mission through the experience of the Exercises. Because of this dual focus, therefore, the process of making the Exercises yields discoveries both about God and about one's own identity as a child of God and brother or sister of Jesus Christ. Under the guidance of Ignatius those who make the Exercises bring the two realities of God and self together, contemplate them and learn to understand them more fully in relation to each other. It is out of the interaction of these two realities in the mind and heart of the person making the Exercises that the shape and direction of his or her 'mission' emerge.

The initial stages of the Exercises offer several gifts of grace which prepare for the recognition and acceptance of such a mission. They include a more complete appreciation of God's love; a deepening understanding, with gratitude, of oneself and one's gifts as a child of God; an awareness of the abuses of love which constitute sin both in the world at large and in oneself; and a profoundly joyful recognition of the forgiveness and reconciliation offered in Jesus Christ.

From that point onwards, the Exercises are dominated by the figure of Jesus and he is the principal key to Ignatian mission. The person making the Exercises contemplates the Incarnation as God's gift of God's own Son whose mission is to lead humankind away from the paths of

darkness and destruction, which seem to attract it so irresistibly, into God's light and life. The exercises of the Second, Third and Fourth Weeks elicit in the one who makes them a deeply felt attraction towards being as Jesus was, living in communion with him, so that the heart and mind and ultimately the whole of life might be shaped or re-shaped by him and in him. Those who make these Exercises see themselves as the grateful recipients of the 'salvation' offered in Jesus Christ; but more than that: as invited by Jesus to take part in his mission, to work with him in bringing to fulfilment the desires of God for the world expressed in the Incarnation.

Here we touch the heart of Ignatian mission. Its theological core is an understanding of the Incarnation as the sending of the Son into the world by the Trinity, in order to rescue humankind from the consequences of its apparently ineradicable tendency to destroy itself (Exx 101–109) and draw it into God's own life by grace. Jesus is therefore the centre of what the Exercises say about mission. The figure of Jesus in the Exercises is none other than Jesus fulfilling the mission given to him by the Father.

In the unfolding of the process of contemplation, reflection and dialogue during the Second, Third and Fourth Weeks, the person making the Exercises is encouraged to determine, as far as can be done, what this invitation and its acceptance imply in terms of his or her own identity, gifts, life and circumstances. There come to the surface, therefore, such practical questions as: what does it mean for me at the present time to 'follow' Jesus? How am I in reality to play my part in establishing and sustaining the reign of God? What does it mean in practice for this 'me' (which I am still discovering), in the world in which I live, to help to fulfil the purposes of the Incarnation in union with him? And the discernment process, which is so central to making the Exercises (and to life outside the Exercises), helps each individual to discover or rediscover and confirm what the shape of her or his share in this enterprise might be.

The language of the Exercises

Obviously, the experience of making the Exercises is shaped by the text. A closer look at some aspects of the language used by Ignatius at crucial points in the *Exercises* throws further light on the nature and purposes of Ignatian mission.

In helping people to hear and act upon a call to mission in the Exercises, Ignatius uses several different but interconnected kinds of language. In the meditation on the Call of the King and on the Two

Standards, for example, he describes mission in terms of struggle and conquest. The struggle in which those who make the Exercises are urged to take part is against the 'enemy of our human nature' and the powers of evil. As regards conquest, the 'human king, chosen by God our Lord himself', announces, 'My will is to conquer the whole land of the infidels' (Exx 93); likewise the 'eternal king' says, 'My will is to conquer the whole world and all my enemies and thus to enter into the glory of my Father' (Exx 95). The response that Ignatius hopes to evoke in those making the Exercises at this stage is a generous offering of themselves in whole-hearted service 'under the standard of their Lord', a service which involves being with Jesus and sharing in his labours 'so that through following me in the pain, he or she may follow me also in the glory' (Exx 95).

Ignatius rarely uses the language of love. It is significant, therefore, that in two crucial places in the *Exercises* the word 'love' does actually appear. The first of these comes during the Second Week (and repeatedly): hour after hour, day after day during this week those making the Exercises are recommended to ask for 'an interior knowledge of our Lord, who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely' (Exx 104). Ignatius clearly sees our offering of ourselves to take part in the mission of Jesus as a gesture of love, founded on our experience of the love God has for us.

The other place in the *Exercises* in which Ignatius uses the language of love is, of course, the Contemplation to Attain Love. His description of love there is fully consistent with and helps to clarify the affective movement towards participation in the mission of Jesus which occurs in the Second Week. Characteristically, Ignatius' statements about love are not exactly lyrical but they do seem to get to the heart of the matter:

> First. Love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words. Second. Love consists in a mutual communication between the two persons. That is, the one who loves gives and communicates to the beloved what he or she has, or a part of what one has or can have; and the beloved in return does the same to the lover. Thus, if the one has knowledge, one gives it to the other who does not; and similarly in regard to honors or riches. Each shares with the other. (Exx 230–231)

This description of love offers a paradigm which underpins the Exercises of the Second Week. God has demonstrated the love that God has for humanity in deeds as well as in words by creation and by the action of the incarnation. Thus God 'has given and communicated to the beloved (humankind) what God has'. The movement which takes place in the

Contemplation to Attain Love is one in which a person who makes the Exercises first of all recognizes and contemplates all God's gifts of love, then in gratitude makes the return of offering to God 'what he or she has', using the prayer 'Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty . . .' (Exx 234). The result is that 'each shares with the other' (Exx 231).

In this context, then, Ignatian mission may be seen as a putting into practice in life this 'exchange of gifts' (which in fact is eucharistic in form). We recognize and contemplate God's gifts to the world and to us individually; moved by gratitude and love we in our turn make an offering to God of what we have received from God. And since love of God and love of neighbour are in fact one and the same thing, our response the Contemplation to Attain Love is that of sharing in God's name the gifts that we have received by placing them at the service of our brothers and sisters. The 'formation for mission' which the Exercises offer is essentially a formation in love.

There can be no doubt that, in Ignatius' own experience, accepting Jesus' invitation to take part in his mission meant making a commitment to 'poverty'. The emphasis on poverty recurs again and again in the text of the Second Week (cf e.g. Exx 98, 114, 116, 146, 147 etc.), while the crucifixion and death of Jesus, as contemplated in the Third Week, represent him in the depths of poverty and humiliation. It is important to remember, however, that this gift of poverty, for which those making the Exercises are encouraged to beg wholeheartedly, is not primarily an economic concept. It describes rather the essential quality of a person whose life is truly founded on the recognition that all we are and all we have depends upon God, comes as free gift from the hands of a loving God; the recognition that in an absolute sense we are nothing apart from God. When this basic fact of our creaturely state effectively becomes the foundation of life, it engenders a radical trust in God. The poverty that Ignatius is describing as characteristic of Jesus means acknowledging as a profound conviction total dependence on God and living out of the trust that this engenders. The cross of Jesus is a symbol of such trust because there Jesus 'emptied himself' and placed himself utterly in God's hands without reservation. Moreover, this way of poverty stands in sharp contrast with the way of riches which all too often means placing our security, not in God, but in the possession and exercise of wealth and power.

According to the language of the *Exercises*, therefore, Ignatian mission means an attraction and a commitment to voluntary poverty in the sense in which I have just explained it. That is the way in which the desires and purposes of God in sending the Son into the world are to be achieved;

the way in which the reign of God is to be established and sustained. Voluntary economic poverty is one way in which this inner reality of poverty might be embodied.

Although the Exercises provide a foundational experience with regard to Ignatian mission, the process of discovering how this mission is to be embodied in particular conditions of time and place obviously does not end there. Indeed there is a sense in which the experience of making the Exercises is only a starting point for a further continuing journey of discovery and engagement in the mission of Jesus. For that reason the Exercises also offer a process of continuing discernment which is as essential to Ignatian mission as the experience of the Exercises themselves. It is a process which has the same basic ingredients as the Exercises and allows the journey begun or fostered by the Exercises to be continued in daily life.

Further reflections

It seems to follow from our discussion so far that Ignatian mission is not something added on to a Christian's baptismal commitment. The Exercises do not so much bring another set of demands and commitments to the individual Christian as disclose what it means for this person to be a Christian here and now. They reveal to us or help us to see more clearly our Christian identity.

It is clear, too, that Ignatian mission has an ecclesial dimension, although this has not been emphasized in our discussion so far. The mission of the Church is to continue the designs of God in sending the Son into the world, to work to establish and sustain the reign of God on earth. The function of the Exercises, therefore, may be seen as inspiring and guiding those who make them to find their place in the Church's mission. Moreover, it is also worth noting that, if Ignatian mission has an ecclesial dimension, it also has a social one. The experience of making the Exercises has a strong this-worldly focus. The purpose of the Incarnation, so far as we can grasp God's purposes, appears to be to penetrate and transform by grace every level and corner of human existence. The call of Ignatian mission is to take part in this grand design, which includes the transfiguration not only of individuals but also of socio-political structures and institutions.

Ignatian mission, therefore, is a matter first of all of discovering and living one's Christian identity. And it is from this that the infinite variety of different forms of Ignatian 'mission' arise. Its purpose is to continue the mission of Jesus, and each person who responds to that invitation does so in his or her own way, according to his or her own perceptions,

gifts and circumstances. The experience of the Exercises in vastly different conditions across the world for people with vastly different histories, experience, perceptions and gifts, makes for an infinite variety of forms of Ignatian mission: marrying and bringing up a family in faith; taking part in the life of 'base communities'; engaging in ministry; caring for those who suffer; becoming involved in parish life; witnessing to the good news of the reign of God in a radically secularized environment; joining a religious order; taking part in movements for liberation, peace and justice; creating objects of beauty; living out a radical 'option for the poor'. The list is literally endless because the variety of people and circumstances is endless.

Moreover, it would be a mistake to imagine that we play our part in the enterprise to which Jesus calls us only by engaging in specifically 'religious' or 'sacred' activities and projects. For it is not as though we help to fulfil the purpose of the Incarnation only by recognizably religious activities such as those 'ministries' described in the first paragraph of this article. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin observed more than thirty years ago: 'By virtue of the creation and, still more, of the incarnation *nothing* here below is *profane* for those who know how to see'.[2] Consequently, 'All endeavour co-operates to complete the world *in Christo Iesu*'.[3] We may play our part in bringing to completion the work of the Incarnation, in establishing the reign of God, by engaging in whatever sphere of human endeavour and activity we are suited to by personal history, gifts, desires and circumstances. In the context of Ignatian mission the important element is that this engagement is part of our response to God's invitation to us in Christ.

So far in these reflections we have largely concentrated our attention on taking part in mission by way of engaging in activities. But the active is only one side of our lives. Besides what we do, there is also what we undergo, the passive side of life. And though for the most part we prefer to focus on the active aspect, because it is pleasanter to contemplate, the passive aspect is equally important, though often painful, especially when we undergo experiences which diminish us. Illness, physical and social privations, injustice, repression, pain of any kind, old age: all these things diminish us and the ultimate diminishment, of course, is death. The question here, then, is whether such diminishments have any place or meaning in the context of Ignatian mission; or does the word 'mission' only make sense for those who are strong, healthy and active?

The first point that might be made in response to these questions is that taking part in the mission of Jesus to establish the reign of God involves struggling against evil, wherever we encounter it, so long as

resistance is possible. That is a powerful theme in the *Spiritual Exercises*, especially in the Second Week. The grace of the Meditation on Two Standards is 'insight into the deceits of the evil leader and . . . help to guard myself against them' (Exx 139). Taking part in the struggle against evil and diminishments, whether personal or social, is integral to Ignatian mission. The *Exercises* do not set out a false notion of 'Christian resignation' which would recommend passivity in the face of evil, whether the evil is personal or social, physical or moral. Once again we may turn to Teilhard de Chardin: 'The more we repel suffering at that moment (of diminishment) with our whole heart and our whole strength, the more closely we cleave to the heart and action of God'.[4]

On the other hand, there are experiences of diminishment which, proving to be unavoidable or impossible to overcome, dominate or overwhelm us. Ultimately all of us have to submit to death, but for most of us there are also lesser 'deaths' to be faced in the meantime. Here again the experience of the Exercises points to a way in which these diminishments too may be included in a more complete understanding of mission. In contemplation and meditation, the person who makes the Exercises accompanies Jesus through not only his active ministry but also his suffering, death and resurrection. Moreover, the reign of God was established not simply through the Incarnation, but also through the death and resurrection of Jesus; or rather the death and resurrection of Jesus are inseparable from the incarnation. Here we touch the heart of the Christian mystery, when the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies if it is to produce fruit. In the resurrection of Jesus, God is seen to have transformed death into a life-giving factor. The radical surrender of Jesus in poverty in his suffering and death and the power of God to bring life out of death are grounds for believing, therefore, that not only our activity but also our diminishments, in which we too lose ourselves and surrender ourselves in God, contribute to the establishment of the reign of God, and so help ultimately to fulfil the desires of God in sending the Son into the world.

NOTES

[1] The most recent account of this expansion of energy and activity is John W. O'Malley, *The first Jesuits* (Cambridge, Mass./London, England: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[2] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The divine milieu* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p 35. I do not know a finer exposition of Ignatian mission than this book.

[3] *Ibid.*, p 25.

[4] *Ibid.*, p 56.