

BEYOND THE TRAIN OF IDEAS

Baltasar Alvarez

Baltasar Alvarez SJ (1533-1580) was spiritual director to Teresa of Avila and long-standing novice director in the Castile province. His convictions about prayer worried his superiors. They thought his teaching dangerous, vainglorious, and out of keeping with the Ignatian spirit. In 1577, after a long controversy, Alvarez received the following directive from Diego de Avellaneda, sent by Everard Mercurian, the then Jesuit General, as Visitor to the province: 'you should not use—neither for yourself nor for anyone else—a style of prayer different from that given and contained in our Institute'.¹ This text reproduces a submission that Alvarez produced during the controversy for his superiors, recounting how he prayed and the benefits it brought him. It represents the classic statement of one influential view on contemplation and Ignatian spirituality: the Exercises are merely a beginning, and true contemplation occurs later. But Alvarez' text is also a poignant human document, written with transparent honesty. It is difficult to edit, to translate and to read,² because it is so much in touch with areas of experience where we are normally inarticulate. It needs to be heard with the sensitivity of a good spiritual director. There is powerful witness here to how the Spirit can transform human vulnerability; there is also a moving sense of struggle, as Alvarez tries to defend before incomprehending authority the spiritual freedom which is so precious to him.

¹ Avellaneda to Mercurian, late 1577, quoted in Baltasar Alvarez, *Escritos espirituales*, edited by Camilo M. Abad and Faustino Boado (Barcelona: Flors, 1961), p. 152.

² This text has come down to us in two versions. One is a polished piece, reproduced in chapter 13 of Luis De La Puente's classic *Vida del P. Baltasar Alvarez*, edited fully in *Obras escogidas del V. P. Luis De La Puente*, by Camilo María Abad (Madrid: Atlas, 1958), pp. 1-292. The manuscript underlying this published version was lost, probably in the disturbances before the Spanish Civil War. La Puente reports that this version was sent to Mercurian. The manuscript of the second version lacks both the beginning and the end. Though it may be only a draft for what La Puente gives us, this text is richer in personal detail, and theologically less cautious; its addressee appears to be a Spanish superior. This translation chiefly follows the second text wherever possible. There are numerous textual and translational difficulties which are here passed over tacitly; readers wanting to explore these should compare this translation with the two originals in the Abad-Boado selection of Alvarez' writings referenced above.

read more at www.theway.org.uk

SIXTEEN YEARS I SPENT WORKING, like a person ploughing away and getting nothing. In those days, I was very faint-hearted; it hurt me that I didn't have what it takes like the others, so that they'd like me and respect me. I was divided in myself, moving from one thing to another. I wanted to be prayerful; yet I wasn't pulling my weight at the things I was meant to be doing, and couldn't find peace.

I overcame this trial by making a resolution not to do any more prayer than obedience required. I put an end to the restlessness and to the futile desire to be somebody special, somebody gifted in prayer, like those whose merits were greater.

During this time, I was also coming to see that my faults were making me embittered rather than humble. They seemed to me to be a block to God's designs. Because my heart was so narrow, the faults of those I was in charge of were bothering me, and I thought it was good government to treat them like dirt—that way I hoped they'd improve.

After fourteen of those years, I was led to put myself in the presence of the Lord, waiting like a beggar for a handout. At this time I was much absorbed in myself and hence very disconsolate—it seemed to me that I was just not made for reaching perfection, and the Lord was not imparting Himself to me with the gift and gentleness He was giving to others. I recognised that this was crazy: having put myself out of sorts with God, here I was, wanting to turn into something worse. As I mulled this over to myself, I was ashamed before God for many days. I couldn't speak; I was confounded; I just asked for punishment, forgiveness and remedy—until I was called to, placed within, another, higher activity. Other things healed too as a result of this.

The Great Change and its Fruits

At the end of the sixteen years, quite unexpectedly, I found myself with a heart that was changed and expanded. I was detached from creatures, with a shock like the blessed, who³ will respond, 'when did we see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you to drink?'⁴ as they marvel at how little they have done for Christ, yet how much they see themselves to be receiving.

Here I received many things at once. The first was a light deep inside, which gave me a true sense of things' value, a true appreciation for them, distinguishing the valuable from the base.

With what I received here, my former faint-heartedness was banished and consumed; instead I found it expanded, so very delightfully, and

³ Here Alvarez' own manuscript begins.

⁴ Matthew 25:37 (Vulgate).

with quite another feeling, the feeling of those who were to be saved, different from before. Here I found many who were for heaven, and me in the midst of a gathering that were all chosen to go there.⁵ I was so heartened, so reassured, because it was gradually dawning on me that God willed the same happiness for me. O what a joyful day that was for me! A loving-kindness that I will sing to the Lord for ever!

Here it began to seem to me that things were not as lost as I, for my part, had thought up till then. The estate was not without an owner able and willing to do good things for it, even if the workers He had taken on had been negligent. Here my being bothered about reforming others stopped; I got a grip and just minded my own business, and began the calm in which I have been living ever since. Blessed be the One who willed to bring about such a change, in a person who so little deserved to receive it!

Here I received an understanding of many new truths, and a feeling for old ones. These were something permanent; they sustained, gifted, energized my soul as it moved on. They led naturally to a sense of being quiet and sustained before the Lord. The things I saw remained with me, until they took me into the bosom of God, the place from where they had proceeded, as holy Gregory says.⁶ This went on for two years.

During this time, I was taught and instructed in many things that pertained to the direction of my soul and of others' souls. And about God's ways in this regard, and about how I was meant to *feel* the goodness of His features, attributes and perfections. Later I no longer had this abundance—it was like another bit of more ordinary time (the time when I thought I still needed to grow), except occasionally, as at Easter or big feasts. The time now is not as continuous as at the beginning, but also not so intermittent as it was later. There is just a contentment and peace at the way God wants to deal with me.

Here I received strength to live with the Cross, and in anything obedience landed me with. This was a great blessing, given how pathetic I had been in this regard. From here, I was able gradually to lose my fear of people with greater understanding, of learned people and even holy ones. I used not to have the courage to appear in their presence: I felt just in pieces in their company, and nor did I have enough virtue to like being humiliated. For I saw myself as without understanding, without personality, without learning. It was a great change in me, beyond what I've already said. I had thought I couldn't

⁵ The implicit claim here that Alvarez knows of his predestination for salvation would certainly have raised inquisitorial eyebrows; La Puente tones it down.

⁶ The Spanish editors are unable to clarify this reference.

live without one learned person on one side of me and another on the other, even when obedience landed me in situations where they weren't present. When I was put in jobs where they weren't going to be around, I thought my life was at an end. But later—and now all the more so, in God's goodness—it seemed that I could live in these situations without them, with God alone. Indeed, that way I was better off.

It feels as though here I was given insight into how this inner spiritual faculty works; and I found myself with the security David talks about in Psalm 30: 'you have looked on my humility, since you have saved my soul in its needs, and not confined me within the hands of my enemy. You have set my feet in a broad place'.⁷ For up to then, I had felt very hemmed in.

Transformed Interactions

From that time on, I have been experiencing a particular guidance from God in all things, even including the most trivial. Friendship has admitted me to the point that I handle all things, however small they might be, in company with Him. His Majesty has reminded me of when I have to do them; He has talked about them with me. I have been at peace as I handed them over to Him, and have found them better done than if I'd got all bothered, and burnt the candle at both ends thinking about they'd work out better. I've been 'casting all my care on Him', trusting in the words that follow: 'because He Himself is taking care of you'.⁸ When I fall short in my duties, I've learnt from experience how difficult it is to get back to this first state. This difficulty has made me careful in my dealings with others, in a way that has been a big obstacle to offences against God.

Here I received relief in matters of government, and an unburdening, just as it says in *The Imitation of Christ*:⁹ it's something your free will can do, to move through many concerns as if without concern—and this not like what you feel with a person who forgets things; it was rather a sign of being quite unusually free.

Here I received Christ our Lord entering within me, as well as seeing Him bodily: the one and the other came equally naturally, equally gently. Previously, I had found this very difficult, almost impossible—a clear sign that such a change came about through a favour of the Lord, pouring out His goodness measurelessly, immensely, on a person who had spent many years offending Him.

⁷ In the Hebrew Bible, Psalm 31:8-9.

⁸ 1 Peter 5:7 (Vulgate, adapted).

⁹ Book 3, chapter 26.

Freedom from Anxiety

Here the trials I have been speaking about fell away, the anxieties about having the time to give myself to prayer. I realised that by going along this way I was giving the Lord more time than if, by letting my will take the decisions, I had ten hours of prayer each day. For by obedience, I was giving Him 24 hours every day, whereas by my will I would be giving Him only six or ten. Moreover, I was experiencing how (as I heard you¹⁰ say once) a person well mortified receives more from God with a half hour of prayer than another person, not so mortified, receives in many hours. For, by being careful with obedience, and mortifying myself, by concentrating on others and on the directives of obedience, I received in my ordinary hour of prayer more from God than I did at other periods when there were many hours of prayer without this concern, and I concentrated on my devotions and my reading of the saints. So, learning from experience, I find myself inclined to the activities of our foundation and to the occupations arising from obedience, because I have received, by paying attention to these in a spirit of faith and honesty, the greatest things I've ever received from God our Lord. I've understood better and with greater relish the things I have received from my devotion by praying and reading. On the other hand, writing letters and attending to demanding activity did not take away my peace of soul, even though my heart was occupied, and although Our Lord was also showing me my weakness (for sometimes, when there's a lot on all the time, I find that it wears me down). This experience enables me to cope patiently with the little time I have here to give myself to prayer and to reading Scripture and the saints.

Here there fell away also the anxieties that devout people used to dump on me in great detail. I decided that the better spirit was encouraging me to leave aside the kind of concern that would bother me; it was a sign of something not right.

Faults

Since then my faults have been making me humble rather than embittered as they did before—indeed, in some way, they've been cheering me up. They make me humble, because they make me see how little I am in myself; they serve me as a means of letting go of myself and handing myself over to God. They cheer me up because

¹⁰ At the time Alvarez first wrote this text, he seems to have been addressing not the General, Everard Mercurian, but rather a Spanish superior.

they make me understand this truth clearly, and because of how helpfully God comes to a person when they have lost their illusions about how little they are in themselves. The person is sure that God is the whole of the good they have; they really do call on Him.

Here I understood how good this design of God is for souls: this design that they should not be free of faults, but rather that they should actually do things which at frequent intervals make them see how little they are, and not just have thoughts with one idea moving to another. Thus it seems that faults are like the soul's windows, through which God's light, uncovering the weaknesses, can enter. For now I think like this: if my past mortal sins were no obstacle to the largesse of Him who has called me so faithfully, nor will my present faults (even though I don't *want* to have them) be an obstacle to the fulfilment of His designs. So my dealings are not about them so much as about God: I just take enough from them to hold myself in shame when I appear in His presence—as it says, 'the just person is their own first accuser'.¹¹ It seems to me to stand to reason: a creature is created not to deal with creatures so much as with its Creator, and this applies even to itself, because it is commanded to forget everything in order to remember Him, and forget itself above all.

Since this time, the faults of others have aroused compassion in me, carrying me to God—I've spoken more to God and less to them. What I thought before about treating them like dirt I now see was impatience on my part. It was myself I should have been treating like dirt, not them—I should have been patient with them. It is for *this* reason we should infer that God puts people under us, as it says in the Psalm, 'subdues my peoples under me'.¹² This change of mine was noted in the whole province.

Quietly Resting in God

Since the point when it suited the Lord to communicate to me the mercy I have mentioned, my prayer has been one of putting myself in His presence, quietening myself before Him—a presence given both interiorly and corporally, permanently, like a *habitus*.¹³ Sometimes I just take pleasure with Him, following what St Thomas says in the 2^a-

¹¹ Proverbs 18:17 (Vulgate).

¹² Psalm 143.2 Vulgate (Psalm 144.2 Hebrew). This may be more than a mere proof-text justifying human authority. In the following verses, the Psalmist wonders at the patience of a mighty God, who cares for human beings even though they are 'like a breath'.

¹³ A technical scholastic term, signifying a permanent disposition. 'Interiorly and corporally' is one of a number of phrases in the text seeming to indicate that God is present in two ways: both through some kind of imagined realization in bodily form, and through an interior feeling.

2^æ, question 182, article 2, response to the first objection: although it is a sign of love for God to suffer willingly for Him, it is a more expressive sign of His love to leave all things belonging to this life and to relax with Him in prayer. He says the same thing in his *de Beatitudine* at the end of his third main argument, dealing with enjoyment, which is a fruit shared by the blessed in heaven and the just on earth.¹⁴ He says this:

Likewise in this life we should continually enjoy God fully, as something proper to ourselves—in all that we do and for all we do, in all gifts and for all gifts. For it is for this reason, specifically for enjoyment, that, as Isaiah bears witness, ‘a son is given to us’.¹⁵ There is in many people a great blindness, an enormous stupidity, that makes them always be searching for God, crying out to God and putting pressure on God every day, when according to Paul they are temples of the true God, and God is truly living among them, when their soul is the seat of God, in which God is resting continuously. Who other than an idiot would ever knowingly look outdoors for a tool that they already have inside? Who can get any *use* out of an instrument if all they do is look for it? Who is nourished by food that they long for but do not taste? But that is what life is like for any just person seeking God but never enjoying God. And all that they do is less perfect.

Sometimes I am silent and at rest before Him; other times my mind goes through feelings that are given regarding words of Scripture and interior teachings. Any other way, with points prepared beforehand, is just not possible, because the heart finds itself restrained by this preparation and these exercises. It’s as though it’s moved away from where things work best; the person has become incapable, frigid; they’ve lost what they’ve been allotted.

To be silent in His presence is a great treasure, relaxing in how all things are open to His eyes: my heart, my desires, my goals, my defects, my trials and obstacles, the meagreness of my resources; then His intimacy, His knowledge, His power. His eyes can take my defects away, understand my desires and give me wings to fly. These eyes look at my struggle but do not add to it, for He is wanting my good and His own service more than I do myself.

¹⁴ This treatise is no longer thought to be authentic. The text can be found in the Vivès edition of Thomas’ works, vol. 28, p. 418.

¹⁵ Isaiah 9:6 (Vulgate), alluding to 9:3: ‘you have increased its (the nation’s) joy; they rejoice before you’.

Thus the soul can take it that He is in the lead, getting through what I am finding so constricting, and hence that the soul too will certainly get through it—He indeed is ahead precisely so that the soul can follow. The soul relaxes in this truth of the faith. It consoles me that if the soul doesn't reach what it desires, it will reach something greater instead: conformity of its will to God's, and life with a love modelled on His. For it will be living with His desire, not wanting to know more about Him than He wants to give, nor to know it more quickly, not to know it by ways other than those He wishes to take. It is trying to arrive at what the *Imitation of Christ* is talking about: 'If you had got so far as not to be considering yourself, but to be purely at my will, then you would be giving me great pleasure and would be spending your life in enjoyment and in peace'.¹⁶ And responding to the heart's weakness, as it groans under the weight of its responsibility: 'Because the pain weighs you down, will this make what God does to you stop being the best? Because it seems bad to you, will He stop doing His will?' And at present, what I most dwell on and relax in is seeing myself passive in God's eyes, and acting as He wants.

Authorities and Arguments

As I followed this way, I would often have a sense of being rebuked if I left it and went off on to other, actively sought ways of thinking, and to meditations. I also found some people, both inside and outside the Society, who had been placed in this way, who were held back in their progress, and who were physically suffering because they were not fully adjusted to it. I therefore set myself to looking for authorities that support this way, and for arguments that justify it.

*Authorities*¹⁷

The authors are: St Denys the Areopagite, *On Mystical Theology*, chapter 1; St Augustine, Letter 119; St Thomas as cited above, what he says about those words in Revelation chapter 8: 'there was a silence in heaven for about half an hour'. And what St Gregory says about the same words, in book 3 of the *Moralia* at the end of chapter 29. And in the *Moralia* chapter 25, on the words in Job 39: 'to which I have given a home in solitude'. And what he says on Ezekiel, those words in

¹⁶ Book 3, chapter 32. It may be revealing that Alvarez tacitly omits what à Kempis puts on Christ's lips about 'the one I have put above you as a father'.

¹⁷ Here we revert to the La Puente text. The text we have of Alvarez' own draft breaks off halfway through the section just beginning. Given that Alvarez here becomes far less personal, the editorial tidying in the second version now rather improves the writing, whereas earlier it tames it and tones it down.

chapter 40, in Homily 14: 'and in the man's hand there was a measuring reed of six cubits and the length of a palm'. St Bernard, sermon 52 on the Song of Songs. Albert the Great, *On Cleaving to God*, chapter 20. John Climacus, in step 27.¹⁸

Then there is the Holy Spirit in Scripture, in Ecclesiasticus chapter 32: 'Listen in silence, and for your reverence a good grace will come upon you'¹⁹—listen in silence to what God is teaching you, and because of the reverence with which you are listening, God will give you His good favour, His intimate friendship. This relaxing seems to be the sleep that God tells the souls to maintain in chapter 2 of the Song of Songs: 'I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem: do not stir up or awaken my beloved until she wants to awaken!'²⁰ The beloved responds: 'this voice is my beloved's; such a call, so reassuring, so delightful, can be coming only from your hand. This is the rest promised when the labours of seeking God are past.' 'I have found Him whom my soul loves, after having sought Him; I have held Him, and I will not let go', says the bride in the Song of Songs chapter 3.²¹

When the soul is embraced with the repose that made all things so that they might rejoice, what reason does it have to take pains? Pains are what *we* take with *our* hands, looking for things that are themselves filled with pain; and we stop looking for what has life in itself, and joy. Thus our desires betoken something deathly. The whole point of any effort in the things of the world, even the most disordered, is relaxation. You work in your youth so as to rest in old age. The lives of those that are taken up completely in effort, and never in relaxing, are regarded as unhappy. Thus it is that St Thomas, in the short treatise mentioned above, rebukes those who spend their whole lives seeking God and never enjoying Him—what they do, he says, is of a lesser degree of perfection. The aim of the person who is building the house is to enjoy it; the aim of the person who is planting the vineyard is to

¹⁸ The sheer volume of Alvarez' referencing here says something about the intensity of his commitment. Some of these references are self-explanatory; others are more obscure, and sometimes either obsolete or wrong. The Spanish editors refer us to the following places in Migne's *Patrologia latina*: for Augustine, what is now Letter 4 to Nebridius, vol. 33, col. 66; for Gregory, vol. 76, coll. 546, 553-554, 952-953; for Bernard, vol. 183, col. 1029. The additional Aquinas text mentioned here, *Expositio II in Apocalypsim*, is again inauthentic; see the Vivès edition, vol. 32, p. 211. Albert the Great's *On Cleaving to God* has only 16 chapters, and not all of it is authentic; an English version can be found on the internet, at www.catholicfirst.com. The Climacus text referred to comes from *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*; both it and Denys' *Mystical Theology* are available in the appropriate volumes of the *Classics of Western Spirituality* series. The biblical texts cited from the Vulgate are Revelation 8:1, Job 39:6, and Ezekiel 40:5; the latter two are significantly different in the Hebrew Bible.

¹⁹ Sirach 32:9 (Vulgate).

²⁰ Song of Songs 2:7, in Spanish—Alvarez' own text quotes from the Vulgate.

²¹ Song of Songs 3:4—the La Puente version quotes both the Vulgate and a Spanish text.

enjoy the fruit. 'Who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk?', as St Paul asked the Corinthians.²²

Christ our Lord, in St Luke chapter 19, with tears in His eyes, said: 'Jerusalem, if only indeed you had known what would make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes'.²³ O Jerusalem, if only you knew the good you have, and were not shutting it out from your sight! For the person who does not realise that they have this good is made restless by the very desire they have for it, because they don't understand that they already have the good they are seeking for. But once they are satisfied that they have found what they are seeking for, they relax. It is like when a person is looking for someone with whom they are actually talking, and yet they don't recognise them, even though they are in their presence—and they are in pain because their desire is not satisfied. So it happened to Mary Magdalen when she was with the risen Christ: she would not rest until He revealed Himself and recognised her.

Is there anyone who always just prepares meals and never eats them? Ecclesiastes chapter 6 speaks of 'another evil under the sun':²⁴ it is that there are people who have gathered many riches, and God does not give them the power to enjoy them. The difference between those who are like this and those who are not is the same as that between a hungry person who is working so as to obtain something to eat, and a hungry person who, once they have obtained it, is eating it, and relaxing while they eat—and all the more so if the banquet is fine. Once you have worked at seeking God, and found God, what you need to do is to enjoy Him: 'taste and see how good the Lord is', as David says in Psalm 33.²⁵

The exaltation of this way is described by the Holy Spirit in the book of Wisdom in terms of many of its features. When this spirit of Wisdom comes into a soul, it remains so precious in the Spirit's estimation that there is nothing, however much it may be splendid in the eyes of the world, with which the Spirit can compare it: neither precious stones, nor gold, nor silver, nor health, nor beauty; it is with Wisdom that all goods come. And such is now the person's spirit that these goods are many: it is a Lord who is gentle, kindly, rich, and so on. When a person actually senses Wisdom, they neglect anything else until they have had their fill there. They begin to be free.

²² 1 Corinthians 9:7.

²³ Luke 19:42 (Vulgate).

²⁴ Ecclesiastes 6:1 (Vulgate); La Puente adds a Spanish translation.

²⁵ Psalm 33.9 Vulgate (Psalm 34:8 Hebrew).

Arguments

The arguments that justify this manner of prayer are as follows:

The first: although there may not, as a rule, be a flow of ideas, there is petition. The moment when Our Lord quietens the soul involves every exercise of virtue, and therefore there is also petition: *non in actu signato, sed in actu exercito*, as the theologians say—not petition through a sign, but petition actually made. For how can a soul be ceasing to make petition if it is silent in God's presence, in the faith that when it appears before Him, its heart and its desires are manifest to God? For it is desires that have the role in our relationship with God that words do in our human relationships. So David says, 'the Lord heard the *desire* of the poor'.²⁶ God does not hear just the words, but also the desires of the poor who are just. Thus, the one who appears at God's gates with faith believes that from there all that is good for them is to come. They are loving; they are humble; they go about their business—and because they are going along God's way, leaving behind what is theirs, they find the whole Good.

The second reason is that it is a means through which you can have a more exalted sense of God, more appropriate to God's greatness.

The third: they persist for longer in prayer if they do it from here. We can take it that the prayer of many saints has been like this. For they have continual prayer, yet the flow of ideas is tiring.

The fourth; the Lord is consolidating through this means, through this way, the kind of reformation of a soul that people seek to attain through the means of ideas. People here do live concerned for their growth, docile to those in authority; they are more detached from their passions and from adverse circumstances, and more effective with their neighbour.

Passivity and the Society of Jesus

It's true that this way is not for everyone; what's for everyone is the constitution of holy Father Ignatius. But it is indeed for all to whom God imparts it, or for those whom the superior—who is judge of this matter—thinks our Lord has prepared their rest in this way. And this is in conformity to what happened for our Father St Ignatius. Although at the beginning he went along the path and used the means he left us and taught us in the Exercises, he was later raised up to this other one, as it says in his *Life*: *postea erat patiens divina*²⁷—afterwards he was

²⁶ Psalm 10.17 (Vulgate).

²⁷ MHSJ FN 4, p. 276 (Ribadeneira): the tag originates in Denys, whom Ribadeneira invokes as an authority to explain why Ignatius could tell Laínez that he was now more passive than active in

passive in regard to things divine. In all the sciences there need to be beginnings, middles and ends; so it is here. And that there should be such people in the Society, since it so much wishes to please God, seems obvious. When there are people raised to this way by God our Lord, and when people who don't have any experience of this way take it away from them, harming body and soul, this is not something I can safely accept in conscience. On this Osuna says in his *Abecedario* that those who keep people away from God's way are not without blame.²⁸ And another person says that God will shorten the life of superiors who do this, unless they amend. It's another matter when they really examine it and test it—that's something that's proper, and part of the superior's job.

This is what I feel about what is happening and has been happening in me—about the mode of prayer, and about stopping the train of ideas for a time because of God our Lord's presence. With the humility due from a subject to his Father, I ask that this be for your Paternity alone.

Standard accounts of Jesuit spirituality present the proscription of Alvarez' spiritual doctrine as a sign that the Society of Jesus had by this stage become hostile to the contemplative life. Instead it opted for safer, more methodical forms of prayer. It is then said that Claudio Acquaviva, Mercurian's successor, restored the balance, by allowing that mystical prayer, though extraordinary, was nevertheless a legitimate option for those Jesuits called to it.

For at least two reasons, this account of the matter is too simple. Firstly, Alvarez' own text surely discredits the claim that contemplative prayer undermines ministerial commitment; ironically, Alvarez uses arguments about time, prayer and obedience standardly deployed by Jesuit authority figures against those whom they saw as excessively devoted to prayer. Secondly, Alvarez, despite the positions he held, had never experienced the Exercises in full; Mercurian was trying to establish Ignatian spirituality among the Jesuits in Spain, not to restore it.

What is significant here is not whether contemplative prayer was permitted, but rather how it was being understood. All concerned by this stage had begun to see the mystical as something extraordinary, esoteric. A religious culture was being formed that marginalized the contemplative. The Jesuit tradition was losing Ignatius' sense of a God acting freely in everyday experience.²⁹

divine things. The reference to San Ignacio is puzzling, given that even La Puente's *Vida*, let alone Alvarez' own text, antedates Ignatius' canonization.

²⁸ Osuna, *Third Spiritual Alphabet*, letter H (Eighth Treatise), chapter 1, significantly entitled 'The Right of Everyone to Learn Contemplation'.

²⁹ See Philip Endean, "The Strange Style of Prayer": Mercurian, Cordeses and Alvarez', in *The Mercurian Project: 'Forming Rather than Reforming' the Society of Jesus*, edited by Thomas M. McCoog (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, forthcoming).