

THE WAY

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IGNATIAN MISSION *A Joy That Is Shared*



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who died in June 2026

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Ignatian spirituality provides the basis for an ecological ethics that appreciates the interconnectedness of all things in creation, which fulfils its mission of manifesting God’s saving love through the resurrection.

FOR AUTHORS

The Way warmly invites readers to submit articles with a view to publication. They should normally be about 4,000 words long, and be in keeping with the journal's aims. The Editor is always ready to discuss possible ideas. Our next issue will explore Franciscan spirituality, so articles in this area will be particularly welcome.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Autobiography</i>	Ignatius of Loyola, 'Reminiscences (Autobiography)', in <i>Personal Writings</i>
<i>Constitutions</i>	in <i>The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms</i> (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996)
<i>Diary</i>	'The Spiritual Diary', in <i>Personal Writings</i>
<i>Dir</i>	<i>On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599</i> , translated and edited by Martin E. Palmer (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996)
<i>Exx</i>	<i>The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius</i> , translated by George E. Ganss (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992)
<i>GC</i>	General Congregation, in <i>Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus</i> (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009) and <i>Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus</i> (Boston: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2017)
<i>MHSJ</i>	Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu, 157 volumes (Madrid and Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1898–)
<i>Personal Writings</i>	<i>Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings</i> , translated by Philip Endean and Joseph A. Munitiz (London: Penguin, 1996)
<i>Papal documents may be found at www.vatican.va</i>	

FOREWORD

AT A CRUCIAL MOMENT in his life, St Ignatius Loyola was living with his companions just outside Venice. The house had no windows and no doors, and they slept on the straw that lay on the floor. They used to go out to beg for alms, but only raised enough to eat a little toast each day. He says of himself and his companions that, 'in this way they spent forty days, not attending to anything but prayers' (*Autobiography*, n.94).

After this time of austerity came an intensive burst of apostolic activity, during which they preached in the city with great energy. Their poverty must have given them a fragile trust that God was already at work in the places where they would go, and that the fruits of their mission would be God's and not their own.¹ This enabled them to move outward into a joyful encounter with those they served. Shortly afterwards, St Ignatius would receive confirmation that he had been 'placed with the Son' at La Storta, and discover a new direction as he and his companions headed for Rome.

This issue of *The Way* shares its theme with the St Beuno's Conference for Spiritual Directors, which was held in North Wales from 6 to 9 March 2026: Ignatian Mission: A Joy which Is Shared. The joyful mission of St Ignatius and the first Jesuits is now shared with many different partners, who have realised together the vision of the Second Vatican Council of a Church whose members 'in their diversity all bear witness to the wonderful unity in the Body of Christ'.²

In the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, the phrase 'the service of God' is often paired with 'the more universal good'. The latter has been interpreted as a criterion for choice of mission, but Patrick Riordan argues that it is better understood as a goal that always lies ahead of the mission: 'like the common good ... a heuristic notion that guides the aspirations, desires and decisions of those who wish to serve God'. This orientation is evident in the sheer creativity of Ignatian mission, much of which is conducted at the frontiers of the traditional Church.

¹ See Óscar Romero, *The Scandal of Redemption: When God Liberates the Poor, Saves Sinners, and Heals Nations* (Walden: Plough, 2018), 79: 'the church persists because she is composed of people who place their fragile trust in Christ, and Christ is in God, and God is in Christ and in us'.

² *Lumen gentium*, n.32.

At the frontier between Christianity and Islam, Felix Körner shapes an Ignatian approach to interreligious dialogue by offering twenty criteria that can help to make it fruitful. He moves beyond the use of the rules for discernment simply as a means to confirm decisions, exploring the graced perception of reality offered by consolation. As Muslims and Christians come closer to God, this reality allows them to participate in a shared mission which is personal, communal and great-hearted, creating real communion between them.

Although the *Spiritual Exercises* has sometimes been treated as a prelude to the Jesuit *Constitutions*, Gemma Simmonds argues that there is no such correlation between the two. The *Spiritual Exercises* was written before St Ignatius had any idea of forming a religious order, when he was still a layman. ‘What the Exercises offer’, she suggests, ‘is not a junior version of the Jesuit vocation’; rather they open up an innumerable array of places to belong in the Church according to each person’s experience and form of life.

Marion Morgan relates her own experience of living out an Ignatian lay mission. She observes that the world-view of St Ignatius embraces ‘the cosmic, timeless awesomeness of God as well as the blessed life of a human being with all its limitations, and the world in which we actually live and love and grow and act’. Just as God enters into our lives through the incarnation, so are we called to enter into the lives of others in a mission of listening, example and doing good. There is an expression of this in the mission of the Jesuit doctor David DeMarco, who sketches out how physicians can begin to attend to the landscape of their interiority, in order to discover that each encounter with a patient is a locus for discernment that can open up new avenues of contemplative care.

The commitment to a ‘faith that does justice’ made at the 34th Jesuit General Congregation in 1995 still resonates today.³ Deogratias Rwezaura traces its history both through the lives of the first Jesuits and the living tradition of the Church. He gives a timely reminder that we cannot offer the love of God to others without experiencing it first ourselves: ‘we need to experience how God loves us without any limits, unconditionally’. One expression of ‘faith that does justice’ is the work

³ GC 34, decree 2, n. 21. This orientation was already present in GC 32, decree 4. The phrase ‘faith that does justice’ was popularised by the 1977 book *The Faith That Does Justice*, edited by John C. Haughey (New York: Paulist, 1977).

of the Jesuit Refugee Service. Sophie Cartwright is the Senior Policy Officer at the London office of this worldwide organization. She explains how politicians attempt to dehumanise refugees and asylum seekers through a vicious circle of policy and rhetoric. However, faith in the presence of God, even in the most tragic situations, and the affirmation of the image of God in each and every person retain the potential to rebuild a resilient community of justice and joy. People who have been displaced from their homelands often experience isolation from their faith and community. Laurien Nyiribakwe and Isaac Mutelo explore the ways in which the creation of community and the mission of the Church can take new forms in the digital age. A number of initiatives aim to help migrants in particular discover a place of spiritual belonging online.

James Hanvey calls for the renewal of theology and spirituality in the light of the ecological crisis, arguing that creation has a mission too, which expresses God's providential care for humanity and is grounded in the truth of the resurrection. From that perspective, all of our efforts to engage with the mission God has given us are a participation in the mission of creation. 'Restored and available to us through the resurrection of Christ, the wonder and the gratitude that creation elicits in us now become our self-gift.' As we continue to place a fragile trust in God, may each one of us be led out to encounter those we serve, and find in them the great joy of a mission shared with Christ.

Philip Harrison SJ
Editor

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IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Deogratias M. Rwezaura

AT THE START OF THE SECOND WEEK of the Spiritual Exercises, the contemplation on the incarnation situates God's social role in the world quite vividly. St Ignatius invites retreatants to contemplate the Holy Trinity gazing at the world—seeing people,

... so diverse in dress and behavior: some white and others black, some in peace and others at war, some weeping and others laughing, some healthy and others sick, some being born and others dying, and so forth (Exx 106).

Ignatius then describes the Holy Trinity discerning what to do about the unhealthy side of things: the blindness that has beset humanity. The discernment process ends with the trinitarian decision to send the second person (Jesus) to restore things to their divine nature.

The divine gaze upon the face of the earth is not uniquely Ignatian. It is fundamentally and primarily rooted in the scriptures. For instance, Psalm 33:13–19 reads:

The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all humankind. From where he sits enthroned he watches all the inhabitants of the earth—he who fashions the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds

Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

The *Spiritual Exercises* remains deeply inspired by the word of God, but the Ignatian imagination brings to the fore a diversity in people's behaviour, attitudes and prospects which the Psalmist does not articulate.

Seeing in the same way that the Holy Trinity does immerses us in context. It is not merely seeing but being interested in what one sees that matters. I find this Ignatian contemplation and its use of the imagination very striking as it relates to our contemporary application of the See, Judge, Act methodology to social analysis. As a community of

Persons, the Holy Trinity sees what is going on, listens carefully and reflects on how this moves it to act, and then decides what to do. Reflection engages reasoning and asks critical questions about what is happening. In this case the Holy Trinity is concerned about the turn of events from the original purpose of creation to its perversion. Reason leads to judgment about what needs to be done to restore a lost relationship, to create right relationship.

In his book *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, Dean Brackley writes:

The Trinity observes humanity on the way to perdition and decides to send the Son to save all humanity from damnation and for eternal life. *This* is the cause for which Christ labors and to which he invites others to collaborate.¹

Brackley argues that Ignatian spirituality is apostolic. It is a call to labour in the vineyard as Christ's companions.² We live in troubled times, as were those of Ignatius, and so in our contemporary world we still need the Ignatian contemplation on the incarnation in order to collaborate in God's plan of salvation.

We may ask at this point how far our world is different from the one upon which St Ignatius contemplates the Holy Trinity looking down, or indeed the one over which the Lord stoops from the heavens with steadfast love according to the Psalmist. Today some people have comfortable homes and others are homeless; some have more than two meals a day and others sleep on empty stomachs; some earn decent living wages and others are jobless; some work hard to make ends meet and others are idle; some are displaced by effects of climate change while others are spending billions of dollars on space exploration—and the list can be expanded.

So the divine plan continues: Jesuits and those who work alongside them still need to 'save souls';³ we still need to be 'men and women for others';⁴ we still need to be just reconcilers in our broken world;⁵ we

¹ Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 258.

² Brackley, *Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, 257.

³ See *Constitutions*, Examen 1.2 [3].

⁴ Daniel Cosacchi, 'Jesuits and Social Justice', *Journal of Jesuit Studies*, 6 (2019), 663. The phrase originates with Pedro Arrupe; see below 17–19.

⁵ GC 36, decree 1.

still have frontiers to which God sends us.⁶ Above all we are still called to the ‘faith that does justice’—which John W. O’Malley and Timothy W. O’Brien consider to be ‘the most important development in Jesuit pastoral strategy in recent years’.⁷ Subsequent Jesuit documents have put an emphasis on ‘moving toward the margins of society’.⁸ This invitation challenges us all, whether we are Jesuits or not, to keep the social justice dimension of Ignatian spirituality relevant.

O’Malley and O’Brien, in their sketch of how Ignatian spirituality has been constructed over the past several decades, suggest that it can best be understood by looking at its constitutive elements. These include, but are not limited to, the Ignatian texts—the *Spiritual Exercises*, the *Autobiography*, the *Constitutions*—the Examen, discernment in common and seeking God in all things. Especially during the twentieth century,

... certain elements in the Jesuit tradition have been put together and articulated in a new way what is now called *Ignatian spirituality* is fundamentally faithful to the original inspiration of the Society and, paradoxically, is at the same time new.⁹

The authors refer to particular ‘words and expressions’ that illustrate this process: Jerónimo Nadal’s formula ‘contemplative in action’ is a key aspect of Jesuit identity and mission.¹⁰ Another expression of Nadal’s, ‘the world is our house’, is used to highlight the fact that ‘the order’s spirituality could not be one of retreat from the world, lived in isolation from problems of contemporary life’.¹¹ Both these phrases capture something of the marriage between Ignatian spirituality and social justice to which we now turn.

Social Justice in Church Teaching

Introduced by Pope Pius XI for the first time within Catholic Social Teaching in his encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* of 1931, the concept of social justice was meant to safeguard an equitable and disinterested

⁶ See GC 35, decree 3, ‘Challenges to Our Mission Today: Sent to the Frontiers’.

⁷ John W. O’Malley and Timothy W. O’Brien, ‘The Twentieth-Century Construction of Ignatian Spirituality: A Sketch’, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 52/3 (Autumn 2020), 38.

⁸ Pope Francis, ‘Address to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus’, 24 October 2016, in GC 36, accompanying documents, 38. See also GC 35, decree 3, n. 29.

⁹ O’Malley and O’Brien, ‘Twentieth-Century Construction of Ignatian Spirituality’, 3.

¹⁰ O’Malley and O’Brien, ‘Twentieth-Century Construction of Ignatian Spirituality’, 31; Jerónimo Nadal, ‘In Examen annotationes’, MHSJ MN 4, 651.

¹¹ O’Malley and O’Brien, ‘Twentieth-Century Construction of Ignatian Spirituality’, 37.

distribution of social and economic resources. It was intended to promote the common good so as to bridge the increasing gap between the few super rich and the poor majority (n.58). To achieve this, there was a need to regulate 'economic life' through 'reform of institutions' (the state) and the 'correction of morals' (among citizens of the state) (n.77), allowing for the principle of subsidiarity (n.79) to prevail among 'the institutions themselves of peoples and, particularly, those of all social life' (n.88) under the guidance of the Church with its 'divinely imposed mandate to be vigilant and to teach' (n.96).

It is important to note that social justice was meant to address issues related to the living wage, raising or lowering of wages, livelihood, unemployment and the need for being realistic in all these matters given the great economic depression that began in 1929, during which *Quadragesimo anno* was written. Raising these important issues related to labour relations has a scriptural basis. We read in Leviticus 19:13, 'You shall not defraud your neighbour; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a labourer until morning'.¹² This is a call to justice and fairness in relation to the working conditions of the poor, when withholding a day-labourer's wage could have serious implications for the family which was depending on that wage for survival.

According to O'Malley and O'Brien, 'the momentum' of social justice 'culminated in Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes*, which made concern for the world and its betterment an essential element in any authentic Catholic spirituality'.¹³ Subsequent papal teaching inspired by Vatican II expanded the Church's engagement in the social and economic milieus. For Paul VI in *Populorum progressio* social justice forms part of,

... a three-fold obligation: 1) mutual solidarity—the aid that the richer nations must give to developing nations; 2) social justice—the rectification of trade relations between strong and weak nations; 3) universal charity—the effort to build a more humane world community, where all can give and receive, and where the progress of some is not bought at the expense of others. (n.44)

In 1971, when the declaration of the Synod of Bishops on *Justice in the World* brought together justice, the proclamation of the gospel and participation in the transformation of the world as integrally intertwined

¹² See also Deuteronomy 24: 15.

¹³ O'Malley and O'Brien, 'Twentieth-Century Construction of Ignatian Spirituality', 6.



The preferential option for the poor, mural by Maximino Cerezo Barredo, 1980, Lima, Peru

(n.6), the Church opened a window for evangelical social justice.¹⁴ But the document pointed out that for this to be effective, the Church must be just in its own way of life (n.47). The signs of injustice within the Church led to what Pedro Arrupe, then Jesuit superior general, referred to in his commentary on *Justice in the World* as ‘a credibility gap’ that can only be bridged by a life of witness.¹⁵ This was arguably one of the greatest inspirations for Fr Arrupe’s shift from regarding the social apostolate and its social justice dimension as one of the works of the Society of Jesus to making it an inseparable aspect of the Society’s mission.

Decree 4 of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, held in 1975, states:

¹⁴ World Synod of Catholic Bishops, *Justice in the World* (1971), in David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 305–318.

¹⁵ Pedro Arrupe, ‘Witnessing to Justice in the World: Urgency for Bold Action by the Church’, in *Justice with Faith Today: Selected Letters and Addresses II*, edited by Jerome Aixala (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980), 81.

The life we lead, the faith-understanding we have of it, and the personal relationship to Christ which should be at the heart of all we do are not three separate realities to which correspond three separate apostolates. To promote justice, to proclaim the faith and lead others to a personal encounter with Christ are the three inseparable elements that make up the whole of our apostolate. (n.51)

The 32nd General Congregation mandated the Society of Jesus ‘to engage, under the standard of the Cross, in the crucial struggle of our time: the struggle for faith and the struggle for justice which it includes’.¹⁶ This social justice that is strongly anchored in faith is now integral to Jesuit identity. As Daniel Cosacchi affirms: ‘social justice has been a significant lens through which the Society has framed its mission in the postconciliar period (1965–present), especially with the documents of General Congregation 32 (1974–75)’.¹⁷

The Social Justice Dimension of Ignatian Spirituality

I argue that the social dimension of Ignatian spirituality begins with the contemplation on the incarnation. Pope Francis speaks of ‘social love, as a reflection of the Trinity’.¹⁸ Could this trinitarian deliberation and decision to send the second person to earth be construed as social justice? Isn’t Ignatius’ trinitarian contemplation of God reaching out of God’s self to save humanity—to ‘save souls’—an important way of understanding social justice?

This may sound anachronistic, since the idea of social justice does not appear in what we consider today to be the foundational documents of Ignatian spirituality and of the Society of Jesus, such as the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions*, but the elements that constitute it date back to the founding of the Society.¹⁹ The ‘progress of souls and propagation of the faith’ (*Formula of the Institute*, n.3) have been rearticulated as ‘the service of faith and the promotion of justice’, pointing to the social dimension of the Ignatian charism and spirituality inspired by the *Formula*.²⁰ These two expressions reflect the outward-bound mission of the Society of Jesus right from its founding,

¹⁶ GC 32, decree 2, n. 2.

¹⁷ Cosacchi, ‘Jesuits and Social Justice’, 651–652.

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, n. 324.

¹⁹ See Cosacchi, ‘Jesuits and Social Justice’, 655.

²⁰ GC 32, decree 2, n. 9, and n. 11, which quotes this passage from the *Formula of the Institute*. GC 33, decree 1, n. 38 describes the mission articulated in GC 32, decree 2 as ‘the application today of the Formula of the Institute and of our Ignatian charism’. This is reaffirmed in GC 34, decree 2, n. 14.

but always thinking with the changing times and evolving doctrine within the Church under the guidance of ‘the present Roman Pontiff and those to come’. Such openness to the dynamism of circumstances, time, people and places is clearly expressed in the *Constitutions*.

Pius XI’s reminder that ‘social justice’ must go hand in hand with ‘social charity’ also remains pertinent to the roots of Ignatian social justice, since the early Jesuit ministry of reconciling the estranged, works of mercy and the constant search for peace embraced justice as an essential expression of charity.²¹ These same ministries, albeit adapted to the changing times, continue to mark the Society’s commitment to social justice globally.

In founding the Society, St Ignatius did not want simply to add another congregation to the existing ones. He had a trinitarian-inspired passion which was outward-looking—‘saving souls’. In its contemporary application, saving souls means integral human liberation—‘leading to participation in the life of God’.²² Ignatian spirituality employs graced human deeds to transform human hearts to make the world a better place where a healthy relationship with God, with self and others, and with the rest of creation can be forged. This is what ‘praise, reverence, and service of God’ (Exx 23) concretely means: to practise faith through acts of justice.²³ As James Hanvey puts it, it entails ‘the whole Divine purpose of working the “redemption of the human race” (Exx 107)’.²⁴

What Constitutes Ignatian Spirituality

Rather than defining Ignatian spirituality, David Fleming suggests that we consider what it has to offer instead. He sums this up in three ways: a *vision of life*, a *vision of work* and a *vision of love*.

As a *vision of life*, Ignatian spirituality invites us to recognise God as a creator and source of life who is constantly at work giving life to all created things—including you and me. For Fleming, this is the vision that inspires the Principle and Foundation in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

As a *vision of work* Ignatian spirituality challenges us to rethink our ways of working and ask ourselves: ‘What is our work in this world all

²¹ Pius XI, *Quadregesimo anno*, n.88.

²² GC 32, decree 2, n. 11.

²³ Brackley, ‘Appendix II (to Chapter 10), The Meaning of the Two Standards’, in *Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, 263.

²⁴ James Hanvey, ‘Some Political and Cultural Implications of the *Spiritual Exercises*’, *The Way*, 63/1 (January 2024), 24–44, here 30.

about? Why do we do what we do? What values would govern our choices?’²⁵ This requires humility and a constant discernment because the mission belongs to God, and we are simply co-workers. The Exercises invite us to contemplate the eternal King—Jesus—who has great ambitions to transform the world and end everything that oppresses human beings. You and I are invited to join Jesus in this enterprise. As Fleming puts it, Jesus invites us ‘to be *with him*’ and put on the mind and heart that are his. Jesus also invites us ‘to work with him’: to become helpers in his mission.²⁶

From the invitation to *be with* Jesus and work with him in transforming structures of evil we join in his Kingdom of justice and peace. We cannot afford to be bystanders once we heed his call. Through the *Spiritual Exercises*, especially in the Principle and Foundation, Ignatian spirituality challenges us and places before us a fundamental choice where there is no middle ground. As James Hanvey reminds us: ‘The Exercises confront us with the ultimate reality of choice: are we for Christ, or not? They do not allow us the luxury of neutrality. This, too, is part of their theo-political character.’²⁷

Salvation of souls is rooted in an incarnational spirituality that journeys with the risen Jesus, who is not just ‘on the cross’ but one who is ‘*carrying* the cross’—a pilgrim.²⁸ In this pilgrimage our work becomes that of Simon of Cyrene. We help Jesus carry the cross. Saving souls may sound daunting to contemporary ears, but for Ignatius being



Mural by Maximino Cerezo Barredo, 1977, São Félix, Brazil

²⁵ David L. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago: Loyola, 2008), 2–3.

²⁶ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* 4.

²⁷ Hanvey, ‘Some Political and Cultural Implications of the *Spiritual Exercises*’, 35.

²⁸ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* 102.

placed with the Son of God meant *helping* souls: 'Ignatius described service much more simply. He used the Spanish word *ayudar*—"to help". The work of the Jesuits, he often said, was to "help souls".'²⁹ Helping souls denotes a humble service in the mission of Christ humble and poor. Here again Fleming's words are instructive:

In helping others, we need to be wise, discerning and disciplined. We do not have to be anxious about helping souls. We can relax because we are working alongside God. God calls us to service and gives us colleagues and friends to work with. The work is his. We are merely helping him with it.³⁰

One of the most basic ways of understanding Ignatian spirituality, which I have experienced personally on the two occasions when I have done the long retreat, is that it starts with God loving us.³¹ Ignatian spirituality offers a *vision of love*. Divine love manifests itself in two ways: 'God creates, and by so doing God is actively showering us with gifts. God acts, and all his actions show his wisdom and love.' As 'Love loving', God invites us to love without measure. Ignatius, according to Fleming, raises a series of questions to help us see how God loves: 'What does it mean for us to love? How do we go about expressing our love? How do we show our love for God, for ourselves, for others, and for the world?'³²

To respond adequately to these questions, we need to experience how God loves us without any limits, unconditionally. This is why at the end of the Spiritual Exercises we do the Contemplation to Attain Love (*Contemplatio ad amorem Dei*) so that we can grow in love as God loves. The Spiritual Exercises thereby ignite in us a burning desire to serve God and our neighbour. This virtue and practice are perhaps one of the major elements, if not a central purpose, of Ignatian spirituality.

Men and Women for and with Others

Pedro Arrupe remains an icon of the Society of Jesus' recovery of its charismatic social apostolic dimension. On the Feast of St Ignatius of Loyola in 1973, Arrupe addressed the European Jesuit alumni in Valencia, Spain. The title of his address was 'Men for Others: Training Agents of

²⁹ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* 104.

³⁰ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* 102.

³¹ Each finally professed member of the Society of Jesus does the long retreat at least twice in his Jesuit life.

³² Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* 8, 5.

Change for the Promotion of Justice'. For Arrupe, a talk to Jesuit alumni was not merely one item on the agenda of his international travel activities. It was a response to the Church's call since the Second Vatican Council to read the signs of the times, which culminated in making justice an integral part of evangelization in *Justice in the World*.³³

Later the phrase 'men and women for [and with] others' was used to express the idea of 'saving souls' in terms of dedicated service to our neighbours, especially those who are marginalised, to bring about a positive difference in their lives and the world around them.³⁴ Here we find the very profound zeal for faith that is expressed in active love with justice. As Arrupe affirms, 'love of God which does not issue in justice for others is a farce'.³⁵

According to Elias Omondi Opondo and Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, social justice remains an integral part of the gospel because it is rooted in the fact that everyone is created in God's image.³⁶ 'Social justice is about people' and their dignity; it is essentially about creating right relationships (societal, structural or ecclesial) that ensure the realisation of an impartial and equal dignity for all. For them, social justice ensures equal treatment of everybody; promotes solidarity among peoples; serves the needs of all; and conforms to God's dream or vision for the world. It is a Kingdom value.³⁷

Decree 4 of the 32nd Jesuit General Congregation reminds us:

A key element in the pedagogy of the Exercises is that its aim is to remove the barriers between God and man so that the Spirit speaks directly with man. Inherent in this Ignatian practice of spiritual direction is a deep respect for the exercitant as he is and for the culture, background and tradition that have gone into making him what he is

The Exercises help to form Christians who, having personally experienced God as Savior, are able to stand back from the spurious absolutes of competing ideologies, and because of this detachment can play a constructive part in the reform of the social and cultural structures. (nn.57-58)

³³ Pedro Arrupe, 'Men for Others: Training Agents of Change for the Promotion of Justice', in *Justice with Faith Today*, 127-128.

³⁴ Cosacchi, 'Jesuits and Social Justice', 663.

³⁵ Arrupe, 'Men for Others', 124.

³⁶ Elias Omondi Opongo and Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Faith Doing Justice: A Manual for Social Analysis, Catholic Social Teachings and Social Justice* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2007), 44.

³⁷ Opongo and Orobator, *Faith Doing Justice*, 45-46.

Here inculturation poses its strongest challenge, because we always carry our biases and cultural baggage with us. This has implications for all our lives, calling for the incarnation of faith among both local and global cultural values. To be able to listen attentively to God's voice within and around us requires 'that the ears of our heart have to be trained'.³⁸ We must avoid what Pope Francis calls 'cultural colonization', resulting from 'loss of the sense of history' and the imposition of 'a single cultural model'.³⁹ And we must remain open to encountering other cultures and learning from them:

The different cultures that have flourished over the centuries need to be preserved, lest our world be impoverished. At the same time, those cultures should be encouraged to be open to new experiences through their encounter with other realities, for the risk of succumbing to cultural sclerosis is always present.⁴⁰

In African liberation theology, incarnation may be particular (contextual), familial and cosmic. According to Engelbert Mveng, 'the Incarnation [is] considered not as a limited event, but as the assumption by the Son of God of the whole human nature and condition in their cosmic, anthropological and historic dimensions'.⁴¹ The link between faith, life, personal and cosmic relationship with Christ is impossible without open hearts ready to listen, learn from others and recognise the presence of God in a culture different from one's own.

Compassion and Humility

One of the graces for which we pray for during an Ignatian retreat is compassion: to suffer with and for others. This is the grace that draws us out of ourselves—out of our comfort zones—to reach out to those in need. It is a virtue that allows us to be totally present to others in their affliction. Indeed, 'compassion refers to the most active and engaged form of empathy, namely, disposition directed particularly to those in great need or suffering'.⁴² Compassion expresses the social aspect of our faith

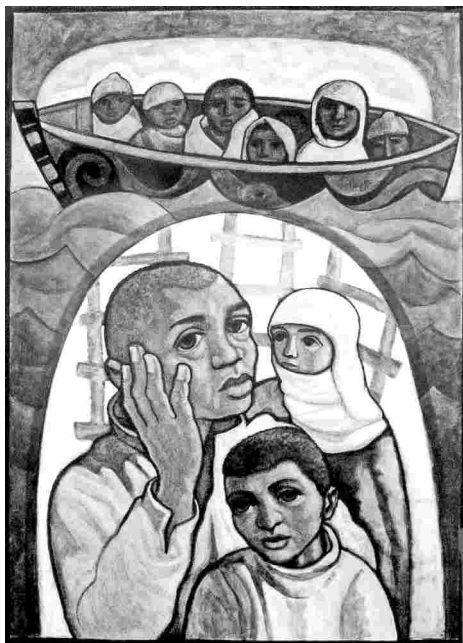
³⁸ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* 44.

³⁹ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, nn. 13–14.

⁴⁰ Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, n. 134.

⁴¹ Engelbert Mveng, 'African Liberation Theology', translated by Barrie Mackay, *Concilium*, 199 (1988), 17–34, here 30.

⁴² William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 90.



Blessed Are Those Who Seek Justice, by
Maximino Cerezo Barredo, 2006

in Jesus, whose compassionate love led him to reach out to the socially excluded of his time and resulted in his untimely death for our sins. In Jesus we come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of a God 'whose passion is compassion'.⁴³

For Christians, compassion derives from the compassionate Christ. As Dean Brackley states, 'contemplating the suffering and death of Christ intensifies our union with him. It should also draw us to know and love the crucified people of God today.' These crucified people of today include victims of war, forced migration, human trafficking homelessness, landlessness, all

forms of addiction, corruption, rape, terrorism, xenophobia, religious extremism, tribalism and genocide. To counter injustice, social justice takes a preferential love for the poor, the exploited, the oppressed, the neediest and most vulnerable members of society. It is neither impartial nor neutral. We are invited to focus on and spend time with the victims of injustice and not dwell on their pain, which we need to transform whenever possible: 'The focus is not on pain but on *being with* the one who suffers'.⁴⁴ In the words of José García de Castro, it is Ignatian to 'look at the world (Exx 106–107), feel it, suffer and encounter it through our actions'.⁴⁵ This is what it means to be 'contemplatives in action'.

Inspired by the Ignatian contemplation on the incarnation, Ignatian spirituality hinges on Jesus as poor, humble and sent. In this way it is a missionary spirituality that invites you and me to be sent as Jesus was.

⁴³ Peter McVerry, 'A Kingdom Here on Earth: Jesus the Social Revolutionary', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 112/448 (Winter 2023–2024), 431–438 at 432.

⁴⁴ Brackley, *Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, 173, 178.

⁴⁵ José García de Castro, 'Alcanzados por las fuentes: ¿por qué? ¿cómo?', *Manresa*, 81 (2009), 311–328.

So, where do we want to be sent in imitation of Christ? We can focus on Luke 4:16–20 and on the meditation on the call of the King, who is intent and determined to rid this world of all evils that beset humanity. It is a personal call in need of a personal response, but it is also an ecclesial, a congregational call in need of a communal or corporate response. It is a partnership with God as co-workers in God's vineyard.

Discernment is required in situations of oppression and violence to come to decision about what to do in addressing injustice and liberating people from their afflictions. One approach could be to form social as well as individual consciences so that people can make well-informed decisions. Dean Brackley has this to say about Ignatian spirituality:

We are more aware today of the social and institutional dimensions of our lives. Christians are more aware of the social implications of their vocation and of the mission of the church. We are all more conscious of the scope of the misery in the world, of the institutional mechanisms of injustice, and of the global dimension of our moral drama. Responding to massive injustice according to one's calling is the price of being human, and Christian, today. Those looking for a privatized spirituality to shelter them from a violent world have come to the wrong place.⁴⁶

The compassion of Ignatian spirituality and its humility invite us to guard against what Pedro Arrupe called 'religious alienation'—'religion without "social commitment"'.⁴⁷ Pope Francis has described this as 'the globalization of indifference':

A globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them.⁴⁸

Such indifference leads, according to Francis, to a selfish 'spiritual worldliness' which we must combat 'by making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor'.⁴⁹ He cites *Libertatis nuntius*: 'Spiritual

⁴⁶ Brackley, *Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, 7.

⁴⁷ 'Padre Arrupe: toda la verdad sobre la Compañía de Jesús', interview with Manuel Alcalá, *Vida Nueva*, 727 (25 April 1970).

⁴⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 54.

⁴⁹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, nn.93 following, 97.

conversion, the intensity of the love of God and neighbour, zeal for justice and peace, the Gospel meaning of the poor and of poverty, are required of everyone'.⁵⁰

Pope Francis's use of the term 'spiritual conversion' is significant here. It reminds us of Ellen Calmus's account of her own conversion in her foreword to Dean Brackley's *Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*. She understands conversion as 'spiritual transformation'—as opposed to the abandonment 'of a supposedly inferior religion in favor of a supposedly superior one'.⁵¹ Pedro Arrupe describes it as,

... a putting away of something we are: our old self, with its all-too-human, all-too-worldly prejudices, convictions, attitudes, values, ways of thinking and acting; habits which have become so much a part of us that it is agony even to think of parting with them, and yet which are precisely what prevent us from rightly interpreting the signs of the time, from seeing life steadily and seeing it whole.⁵²

Conversion blends spirituality with a social transformation that must stem from our inner transformation and reach out to the marginalised in our society. In Arrupe's terms, social justice presupposes conversion, which is a prerequisite for discernment:

There can be no true discernment without conversion; for discernment, when all is said and done, is nothing else but being guided by the Spirit: seeing the world, and what we must be and do in the world, no longer with our own eyes, but with the eyes of the Spirit.⁵³

Breakfast on the Beach

St Ignatius had a great sense of imagination and encourages us to use our gift of senses in prayer. Contemplation and imaginative prayer enable us to learn from Jesus and humbly to seek the grace to act as he does. So, for example, in contemplating the biblical scene of Jesus preparing breakfast for his disciples after the resurrection (John 21:9–14) we can do the following:

⁵⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Libertatis nuntius*, 11.18, cited in *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 201.

⁵¹ Ellen Calmus, introduction, in Brackley, *Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, xviii.

⁵² Arrupe, 'Witnessing to Justice in the World', 95.

⁵³ Arrupe, 'Witnessing to Justice in the World', 95.

1. Apply our sense of sight to envision Jesus going to the sea to catch some fish.
2. With our eyes, observe him preparing a charcoal fire.
3. Apply our sense of smell to smell the roasted fish that Jesus has just prepared for his disciples' breakfast.
4. When the fish is ready, apply our sense of hearing to listen to the voice of Jesus calling his disciples for breakfast.
5. With our sense of touch, feel the fish in our hands as we eat it along with the disciples.
6. Through our sense of taste, savour the fish and enjoy all the spices in it.

But, above all, with the eyes of our hearts we see the love with which Jesus prepares the breakfast to teach disciples how to witness to the Risen Lord by ministering to each other and to their neighbour in love and service.

This pericope helps us to be not simply observers in prayer but participants in God's act of love and service to his disciples and therefore to us. We can then through this contemplation how God cares for us, feeds us and teaches us how to care for one another. This form of prayer may lead us to ask for the grace to love and care for others as Jesus loves and cares for us. Contemplative prayer then enables us to come out of our comfort zones, readies us to become socially active and in this way help us bring together Ignatian spirituality and social justice, contemplation and social action at the service of our neighbour.

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DISCERNMENT AT THE BEDSIDE

Ignatian Spirituality and the Practice of Medicine

David G. De Marco

OUTSIDE THE STRITCH SCHOOL OF MEDICINE at Loyola University, Chicago, there is a large bronze statue of St Ignatius Loyola. As superior general of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius sits at his desk in Rome with a quill in his right hand—poised to write in an open copybook. Perhaps this is a draft of the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*. Or perhaps it is one of the two books that comprise his *Spiritual Diary*, the entries in which afford us a remarkable glimpse of Ignatius' interior landscape, 'not in a time fixed and dedicated to a retreat and within the limits of the meditations made at such a time, but in the midst of the ordinary occupations of his life', when he was actively writing the *Constitutions* and governing the Society of Jesus.¹ In these diary entries, we see Ignatius



¹ William Young, introduction, in *The Spiritual Diary of Saint Ignatius Loyola*, translated by William Young (Rome: CIS, 1990), 13.

sifting his *mociones*, or interior movements, and allowing God to guide him through attentiveness to them and discernment.

This is an image of Ignatius seeking and finding God in the very midst of governing, of Ignatius ‘being a contemplative in the thick of action’.² And it is an image that is profoundly compelling for a physician who is drawn to become more contemplative likewise in the act of caring for patients—especially in the harsh and uncertain climate of contemporary medical practice, which finds today’s practitioners weary and worried.

The encounter between physician and patient can be a vital locus of Ignatian discernment. A physician’s attentiveness to and discernment of interior movements can profoundly shape the quality of his or her presence and accompaniment during an appointment, and offer a pathway for reimagining it. With the physician inhabiting a contemplative attitude this encounter may transcend professional service and become something more.³ It can become Spirit-guided accompaniment situated within the physician’s ongoing relationship with God. It can become a nourishing spiritual exercise. It can become prayer.

The clinical examples that follow arise from the experience of medical practice in the United States, in the context of a broken health-care system within which increasing administrative demands, productivity pressures, electronic documentation requirements and uncertainty about the rapidly expanding role of artificial intelligence in patient care have reshaped the daily experience of medical practitioners. But the deeper questions that these examples raise about patient accompaniment, discernment and the physician’s interior life transcend any particular health-care system.

Diminishing Satisfaction among Physicians

While the institutional structures of health care may vary from country to country, many physicians across different health systems describe reduced satisfaction in their work.⁴ A colleague recently told me,

² Young, introduction, 15; and see MHSJ MN 4, 651.

³ William Barry and William Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: Harper, 1982), 48. Barry and Connolly describe the *contemplative attitude* as one that ‘allows one to find some ease and spontaneity in paying attention to the Lord as he reveals himself in Scripture, creation, one’s own life, and the life of the world’.

⁴ See Daniel S. Tawfik and others, ‘Physician Burnout, Well-Being, and Work Unit Safety Grades in Relationship to Reported Medical Errors’, *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, 93/11 (November 2018), 1571–1580.

*I could have easily done this—continued to practise for several more years—if it weren't for the pandemic and what has followed it. Now, I really can't manage another year. I can't keep having the same conversations with patients about why you should really get vaccinated and what will happen to you if you don't.*⁵

His experience reflects the toll exacted by practising medicine during a pandemic of historic proportions and in the ongoing and politically charged aftermath of anti-vaccination disinformation. Superimposed on the pre-existing dysfunction in the health system, this toll is something that should concern everyone.⁶ Ultimately, we are all patients who depend on the well-being of the physicians who care for us: who listen to our congested lungs in the emergency department; who hold the scalpel that relieves our carpal tunnel syndrome; who remove our inflamed gall-bladders; and who prescribe the medications we need for high blood pressure, or diabetes, or pneumonia, or depression, or hay fever.

The crushing demands and friction within contemporary medicine exacerbate endemic dissatisfaction among physicians and threaten to undermine the medical profession.⁷ Some well-intentioned observers have sought to protect physicians against these forces by encouraging them to become more resilient through a variety of practices outside work. For example, they exhort physicians to fight burnout by exercising, meditating and cultivating supportive relationships. This strategy, according to the relevant literature, will help physicians move towards a more salutary balance of life and work. However, in her compelling essay 'Beyond Burnout', Catherine Humikowski rightly observes that this conception of balance 'pits work and life at odds, framing them as counterweights against each other'. She adds, 'I can think of no other dichotomy so damaging to a young physician or the patients he or she will treat, than to imagine that life begins only once a shift has ended'.⁸

The antidote to this potentially damaging dichotomous perspective is to reorientate the physician towards a more 'wholehearted engagement

⁵ This vignette reproduces a personal communication from 15 February 2022.

⁶ See Michael Philip Atkinson, 'Physician Care as a Moral Obligation in Health Care Practice', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 335/11 (March 2026), 933–944.

⁷ Tait D. Shanafelt and others, 'Changes in Burnout and Satisfaction with Work–Life Balance in Physicians and the General US Working Population between 2011 and 2014', *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* 90/12 (December 2015), 1600–1613. The incidence of burnout among physicians exceeds 50 per cent, a figure much higher than that for the general population.

⁸ Catherine A. Humikowski, 'Beyond Burnout', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 320/4 (July 2018), 343–344, here 343.

with—not withdrawal from—the often-harsh realities of the workplace’.⁹ This kind of engagement points beyond merely surviving the daily practice of medicine to flourishing in the very midst of it. It assumes that the ordinary moments of medical practice can be transformative for one who inhabits an attitude of openness to the meaning that flows from the encounter between physician and patient.

The Inward Turn

For physicians who have begun to turn towards their interior landscape, and who experience a deep resonance with the Ignatian way of seeking and finding God in all things, engagement of this sort opens the door to exploring the intersection of Ignatian discernment and the clinical care of the patient. The physician is disposed to care for the patient contemplatively—that is, while simultaneously attending to and discerning interior movements. Patient care is thrust into the very midst of the practitioner’s relationship with God. Even dissatisfaction can become an opportunity to situate Ignatian discernment within patient care.

It is wise to offer a caveat here. I do not pretend that inhabiting an intentional attitude of seeking and finding God through Ignatian discernment exercised in patient care will fully address the debilitating



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⁹ Ronald M. Epstein and Michael S. Krasner, ‘Physician Resilience: What It Means, Why It Matters, and How to Promote It’, *Academic Medicine*, 88/3 (March 2013), 301–303, here 302.

effects of burnout and dissatisfaction that plague many medical practitioners. By itself, practising medicine contemplatively will not address the distressing elements of medical practice fully. It cannot. Deep-seated dysfunction grips too many of the systems that directly or indirectly support contemporary medical practice. Without dismantling and reconstructing these dysfunctional systems in a way that enriches the clinical encounter, physician dissatisfaction will remain stubbornly endemic. However, inhabiting a discerning attitude within clinical medical practice may offer a way of practising that is profoundly meaningful, contributing to the greater fulfilment and well-being of the physician.

Furthermore, it is at least conceivable that an attitude of discernment may contribute to the radical systemic changes that will one day reduce the heaviest burdens of practising medicine—and witness to something that the physician and educator Sir William Osler said almost a century ago: ‘Faith has always been an essential factor in the practice of medicine’.¹⁰ For the physician who seeks to respond to Osler’s words within the context of the Ignatian spiritual tradition, making an inward turn and becoming more aware of the interior landscape is essential—just as it was for the wounded Ignatius lying on his tower house bed, beginning to recognise his own spiritual movements and then slowly discerning the qualitative differences between them.

The early stirrings of a contemplative attitude of receptivity to experiencing God always and everywhere emerge in this account of a clinical encounter that became a place of discernment. An interventional cardiologist was preparing to undertake coronary angiography (cardiac catheterization) and percutaneous coronary intervention (angioplasty) to examine the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart muscle and relieve the chest discomfort of a patient with worsening symptoms of angina. As he started the procedure, the cardiologist suddenly realised that a group of visiting cardiologists was touring the catheterization laboratory. The visitors paused in the observation room to watch the procedure. He now had an attentive audience of his peers. In that moment the cardiologist noticed within himself the unbidden impulse to add a flourish to his catheterization technique. It was unnecessary, but it might impress his peers. Suddenly, though, the cardiologist observed something about the character of this impulse. It began to feel obviously self-centred, prideful and needy. And with that recognition—

¹⁰ William Osler, ‘The Faith That Heals’, *British Medical Journal*, 1 (1910), 1470–1472, here 1471.

that attentiveness to and qualitative characterization of his interior movement—the cardiologist chose to let go of the self-centred impulse and focus more intentionally on the patient before him.¹¹

This vignette offers a modest but revealing act of Ignatian discernment. Ignatius described the spiritual life in terms of attentiveness to movements that may draw a person either towards self-centredness (and away from a deepening love of God and neighbour) or towards other-centredness (towards a deepening love of God and neighbour). The cardiologist noticed and then characterized his interior movement: to add a flourish seemed attractive because it met a superficial need for peer admiration, but it also undermined the cardiologist's patient-centred (other-centred) orientation. By attending to the character of that movement and then letting it go, the cardiologist returned his attention to the patient before him. He chose an other-centred path that increased the depth of his faith, hope and love (Exx 316). His awareness of this dynamic in real time is an example of an emerging contemplative attitude, disposed to seeking and finding God in the midst of patient care. Such moments of awareness, though often easily overlooked, lie at the heart of Ignatian discernment.

As a way of encountering God, of seeking God in all things (Exx 235), the Ignatian approach privileges the richness of human experience—it excludes nothing. It disposes the physician to a deepening relationship with God experienced within the intimacy of the interior landscape. Medicine practised contemplatively may become an encounter with God that guides and sustains the physician's care of patients. This is patient care as a Spirit-shaped experience.

Depth of Accompaniment

The example of the cardiologist hints at an aspirational hallmark of contemporary medical practice. Henry George Plimmer (1856–1918), a physician and lecturer at Saint Mary's Hospital Medical School, London, wrote in 1899, 'It is quite as important for the doctor to know what kind of patient the disease has for a host, as to know what kind of disease the patient has for a guest'.¹² This is a primordial description of what medical educators today call the *patient-centred* approach to

¹¹ This is an actual, anonymized account.

¹² Henry George Plimmer, 'On Some Motives and Methods in Medicine', *Saint Mary's Hospital Gazette* (October 1899), 116–121, here 117.

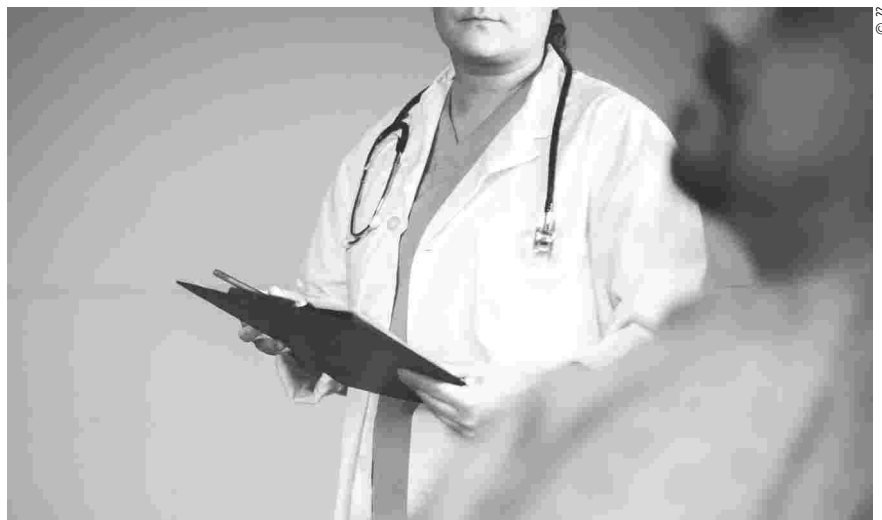
health care. The patient-centred approach seeks holistic presence from the practitioner—more than superficial accompaniment. The depth of accompaniment offered to the patient may vary considerably depending on the circumstances of the patient's concern, or the willingness of the two to engage with one another. Here I am concerned with physicians' role in modulating their quality of presence or depth of accompaniment.

Many years after my residency training and just a few years after priestly ordination, I found myself navigating this question of the quality of my clinical presence. At the time I was working in Jesuit spiritual formation in the Detroit metropolitan area, and volunteering in the evening at an inner-city faith-based primary care clinic for uninsured and underinsured patients. One evening, as the clinic's brisk activity was winding down, a young man in his early twenties returned to the clinic for a follow-up visit. Several weeks beforehand one of my colleagues had diagnosed him with type 2 diabetes mellitus. Since that visit, the patient had received skilful instruction about his new condition, including the appropriate diet and exercise programme he should use; how to monitor his blood sugar at home; and how to take his new medications.

A nurse escorted the young man to my examination room. As I stood outside reviewing his patient record, the nurse approached me and said, *You know the next patient seems like he knows exactly what he is supposed to do—but he's ambivalent about all of it.* As she was talking, I began to imagine the encounter that was about to unfold. I thought to myself, *I'm going to have to discuss all the dangers of poorly controlled type 2 diabetes. And I'll need to review how essential diet, exercise, weight control, medications and regular blood sugar checks are for his condition.*

Having run through several different scenarios in my head—which, in retrospect, betrayed a certain need to bend the patient's perspective towards my own—I knocked on the examination room door, walked in, introduced myself and sat down in front of the patient. As I looked at him, I was suddenly aware of a question forming in my mind, which carried a kind of invitational energy. I leaned forward and, rather than talking about blood sugars or diet or exercise or medications, I asked, *Would you be able to share with me what it's like for you to have diabetes at your age?*

The sound of my voice was still hanging in the air when tears began rolling down his cheeks. Some time passed before my patient could speak; but when he could, he said, *It's tough. You know, my friends do whatever they want. Eat whatever they want. Drink whatever they want. But here I am.* Over the course of our conversation, the patient came to see that he



did not want to collaborate with anyone in the care of his diabetes. In fact, he did not want to have diabetes at all. However, as he recognised and owned the reality of his grief, resistance and anger, he seemed to experience a measure of peace and imagine a way forward.

This encounter highlights the vital role of the awareness of interior movements in the interaction between physician and patient. A contemplative attitude guided this encounter through my awareness of a compelling interior movement in the form of a question that insisted on being heard. Rather than drain my energy, this encounter enhanced it. At the end of that day, I found myself deeply consoled, having surrendered to what I discerned was the Spirit's invitation to me to care for this patient in an unexpected way—to offer a more profound accompaniment that engaged the patient's affective life. This was patient-centred care that stepped beyond what is usually meant by the term.

Without discernment I could have followed my initial reflexive impulse and stayed at a safer distance. I could have used a safer form of patient-centred medicine that allowed me to limit the encounter to a more conventional discussion of the dangers of not checking one's blood sugars or the importance of following the prescribed diabetic diet or the wisdom of taking medications properly. And the patient would probably have left the clinic that day still struggling to navigate his grief, resistance and anger. In retrospect, the most important moment in the encounter was not a clinical intervention but the appearance of a pregnant question—a question that opened a space in which the patient

could articulate his experience and begin to imagine a new way forward. Discernment did not replace clinical judgment; rather, it guided the encounter to a deeper level of accompaniment.

Weaving Discernment through the Clinical Encounter

Of course, the discernment need not be confined to a single moment. Instead, it may weave through the entire fabric of the patient encounter. This was my experience one afternoon in the internal-medicine residency clinic. I had already spent several hours listening to resident physicians present their three-minute summaries of the patients whom they had evaluated and were preparing to treat. Towards the end of the day a resident described his last patient:

Juanita is a 42-year-old woman, working two jobs, who presents to the outpatient clinic today complaining of headache and difficulty sleeping. Her headaches have been waxing and waning for several months. They have the character of a tightening band wrapped around her head and the back of her neck. Recently, her sleep has become restive and non-restorative. She reports no other unusual symptoms. Her physical examination, including her blood pressure, pulse, temperature, respiratory rate and neurological assessment is completely normal.

He then added, *I think her symptoms may be secondary to work-related stress.*

As I walked into the room with the resident, the patient's appearance spoke volumes. Nearly bent over, Juanita seemed to carry an impossibly heavy burden. *She looks depressed*, I thought to myself. And quite suddenly there it was—a question moving across the landscape of my mind. There was an easy authenticity to the question; it felt like a gift that had just been handed to me. I sat beside Juanita and asked, *What is it like to be you right now?* And then it began. Her story poured forth in vivid detail. The two jobs every day. The twelve-hour shifts. The chaos at home. The tears. The resident and I looked at one another and then asked Juanita to complete a questionnaire that confirmed moderately severe major depressive disorder.

As we were reviewing our treatment plan with her, something shiny around her neck caught my eye. Turning my head slightly, I could see the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe or *La Guadalupeana*. And there it was again—another invitation to ask a question: *Could you please tell me about that image around your neck?* I asked. Juanita sprang to life, grabbed the medal, and began describing what it meant to her and how she drew

strength from her devotional practice to *La Guadalupeana*. When she had finished, I experienced yet another invitation: *Invite her to draw on her faith during this transitional moment*. She nodded avidly in response.

Whether the physician uses discernment once during a clinical encounter with a patient, or continuously as I did with Juanita, such discernment can shape the quality of holistic presence—inviting the practitioner to progressively deeper levels of accompaniment. James Keenan defines ‘mercy’ as ‘as the willingness to enter the chaos of others to answer them in their need’.¹³ As accompaniment deepens the physician may well be led into the patient’s chaos.

Discernment and Radical Accompaniment

Physicians choose, consciously or not, the depth of their accompaniment. They can modulate the degree of engagement, just as the three travellers in the parable of the Good Samaritan modulated their degree of engagement with the ‘half dead’ victim lying in the road to Jericho (Luke 10:25–37). Contemplative physicians are not only attending to and discerning their interior movements, but also considering the extent to which they will surrender to the Spirit’s guidance.

The power of patient-centred accompaniment unfolded for me during my second year as an internal-medicine resident. It was 1986, and the medical community was struggling to care for the rising tide of patients infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). By the time they were admitted to the hospital almost all these patients had advanced and uniformly fatal acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Many physicians (and other hospital personnel) at the time, fearing the disease itself or perhaps swayed by some of the toxic social commentary of the day, sought to put distance between themselves and these patients—literally and metaphorically.

The draconian infection control measures at the time often reflected more fear than science. For example, just to enter a patient’s room I had to stop at the door, remove my white coat, wash my hands, and then put on a surgical cap, a full-length surgical gown, gloves, a protective mask and shoe covers. On my way out, of course, I had to reverse the entire process. With all visitors so attired, patients could easily feel like social pariahs. Despite the fear and uncertainty surrounding HIV disease,

¹³ James Keenan, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), xv.

some physicians chose to move towards these patients. They became for me an image of the physician willing to enter the patient's chaos: 'But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity' (Luke 10:33).

One afternoon I was making rounds with my attending physician, a faculty member and specialist in diseases of the immune system. Between patient visits he commented on the social dimension of HIV infection, *This disease evokes in patients a sense of tremendous shame and fear; it also scares everyone else. Perhaps worst of all is the way we have allowed our fear to distort how we care for patients. We find ways to keep them at arm's length.*¹⁴ Just as he finished saying this, we stopped at the door of the last patient on our rounds that day—a young man in his mid-twenties with *Pneumocystis jirovecii* pneumonia.¹⁵

At the door, I stopped and dutifully began the mandated infection control ritual. However, during my ablutions I was suddenly aware that my attending was no longer standing next to me. He had brushed past the infection control station and had walked right into the patient's room. I was stunned—I had never seen anyone do that before. When I looked up, I could see that he was already sitting on the edge of the patient's bed, leaning towards the young man with his hand resting gently on the patient's arm. As I stepped into the patient's room, I heard my attending ask, *And how are you doing today?* The patient wore a

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¹⁴ Personal communication, March 1986.

¹⁵ At the time, we called it *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia, or simply *Pneumocystis* pneumonia. This is a kind of pneumonia that can infect patients with poorly controlled HIV.

wide-eyed look of shock. After all, he was used to seeing all his caregivers covered from head to toe and keeping a safe distance.

As I looked on, the patient's expression changed from one of shock to one of relief—and then finally to gratitude with tears streaming down his face. He kept repeating, as if it were a mantra, *Thank you ... thank you ... thank you*. Someone had actually touched him. Someone had poured oil and wine on his wounds. Someone had drawn near. Someone had risked entering his chaos.

This encounter remains for me an enduring image of radical patient-centred accompaniment. It enshrined a willingness to close the distance between patient and physician; to be Christ for the patient and see Christ in the patient. That manifested concretely when my attending physician discerned *and* elected to move against fear and stand with a patient nonjudgmentally and with genuineness and empathy. However, this encounter could have unfolded quite differently. My attending could have discerned the call to radical accompaniment but still chosen to stay at a safe distance. He could have crossed over to the other side of the road and stayed with the clinical facts. He could have been content knowing that the patient's oxygen saturation level had improved overnight. Incidentally, he did learn that too—but he accomplished much more as he accompanied the patient on his journey towards wholeness in a terminal illness.

Encounters like this reveal the true horizon of patient-centred care. Ignatian spirituality invites the believer not merely to perform acts of service but to seek Christ present in the concrete realities of human suffering. By choosing to draw near rather than remain at a safe distance, the physician manifested a form of accompaniment that mirrored the compassion of the Good Samaritan. In such moments the practice of medicine becomes more than professional service; it becomes a contemplative participation in the healing work of God.

Writing in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Suzanne Koven points to a crucial moment of discernment, although she does not use such language. During a consultation with a young woman Koven observes:

Though the symptom she describes is relatively minor—some diarrhea on and off—she appears distraught I find myself in a quandary: Do I ask the patient why she's so upset, or do I order a culture, prescribe antidiarrheal medication, type my note, and send her on her way?

Koven chooses at that moment to set aside any further exploration of and engagement with the patient's plight, although she believes that the

symptoms have a psychological dimension. In doing so she recognises a 'new doctor's dilemma': do doctors take the time to reach out to patients and 'fall hopelessly behind in administrative tasks and feel more burned out' or 'avoid the kind of intimacy that not only helps the patient, but also nourishes us and keeps us from feeling burned out'? The encounter leaves her 'on the verge of despair'.¹⁶

Physicians may want to offer patients more radical accompaniment, but the challenges they face in doing so are formidable. As Koven suggests, a physician's time and energy level may conspire to undermine generous desires to enter the patient's chaos. Sometimes physicians may pull back to a safe distance—to the most obvious clinical level where a conventional focus remains tightly on symptoms, signs, investigative test results, diagnosis and treatment. However, modulating the degree of engagement with a particular patient is itself something that may be discerned in the context of a given encounter. Authentic discernment—surrender to the Spirit's guidance—need not always point to a lengthy exchange of extraordinary depth. Rather it invites the physician to offer the kind of patient-centred accompaniment—the depth of accompaniment—that is appropriate for that moment. This is not just patient-centred, but Spirit-guided care: care that unfolds through discernment.

Perhaps this is why the bronze statue of Ignatius outside the medical school remains so compelling. Each day Ignatius sits once again at his desk, quill poised above the page, attentively discerning his interior movements in the very midst of ordinary work. For the physician who seeks to practice medicine contemplatively, the clinical encounter itself may become such a page—yet another place where one attends to and discerns spirits, often imperfectly, and finds God in all things.

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¹⁶ Suzanne Koven, 'The Doctor's New Dilemma', *New England Journal of Medicine*, 347/7 (February 2016), 608–609.

IGNATIAN CRITERIA FOR CHRISTIAN–MUSLIM DIALOGUE

Felix Körner

CAN IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY help us to renew Christian–Muslim engagement today? Interfaith encounters with Muslims are significantly different for Christians (and especially for people in the Ignatian tradition) from encounters with people of other faiths.¹ Islam is the world religion whose scripture explicitly reacts to the Christian creed, rejecting some of its core tenets.² Therefore, even today Muslim–Christian dialogue is often considered a mission impossible, a hopeless effort.³

In the eyes of St Ignatius, Islam was among the most frightening dangers facing Roman Catholicism. Indeed, when he stated that his new religious order was ready to be sent ‘among the Turks or to other infidels’, he was not envisaging dialogue.⁴ The first Jesuits did see dialogue in the sense of constructive personal encounter as part of their mission (see Exx 22).⁵ And they did accept that they had a mission to the Muslim world. But they did not put the two together to make Muslim–Christian dialogue a priority. After all, St Ignatius lived 400 years before the Church found itself able to say that if missionary activity is to witness to Christ, it must follow Christ’s own style. Only

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¹ Emanuele Colombo, ‘Defeating the ‘Infidels, Helping Their Souls: Ignatius Loyola and Islam’, in *A Companion to Ignatius of Loyola*, edited by Robert Aleksander Maryks (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 179–197.

² The Qur’anic sura al-Ikhlās states that God ‘is not begotten and has not begotten’ (112:3); and an-Nisā’ warns the ‘people of the Book’ (that is, the members of other revealed religions) they should not say that God is somehow ‘three’ (4:171).

³ Felix Körner, ‘Hope in Christian–Muslim Dialogue. A Catholic Perspective’, in Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims, *Christians and Muslims: Bearers of Hope in Troubled Times* (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 2020), 4–29.

⁴ *Formula of the Institute*, n. 3.

⁵ The *Spiritual Exercises* is quoted here in the translation by Michael Ivens (Leominster: Gracewing, 2004).

in 1964 did Pope Paul VI teach that Christian witness takes place through dialogue, that is, in 'a climate of friendship, indeed, of service'.⁶ On the face of it, St Ignatius may seem to have come centuries too early to offer helpful advice on Christian–Muslim dialogue.

Let us, therefore, explore the more general question first: what are Ignatian criteria for work in any field? After all, the foundational Ignatian texts apparently presuppose much reflection on the right method in spiritual and practical matters, since they keep referring to '*nuestro modo de proceder*': our manner, or way, of proceeding.⁷ So there must be Ignatian criteria not only for choosing what to do but also for learning how to do things well.

Misleading Approaches

Where do we turn for such criteria? We might look at how St Ignatius himself behaved in particular situations and then imitate him. That is certainly an interesting and edifying approach.⁸ It was the declared goal of the Portuguese Jesuit Luís Gonçalves da Câmara (d.1575) when he wrote his *Memoriale* about St Ignatius. To modern eyes, however, the book presents St Ignatius as an impulsive—indeed compulsive—personality. So, we are left wondering what exactly to imitate. In fact, even the author seems unable to distil principles from what he observed in the founder. Often, da Câmara can only admire St Ignatius' behaviour. He is unable to discover a system behind it, let alone imitate him.⁹ And, of course, St Ignatius would probably have objected to the idea of anyone imitating him anyway: it is Christ whom Ignatian spirituality is encouraging us to follow.¹⁰

We are more likely to find inspiration from studying Ignatius' written advice than from narratives about him. And when we read his own words we see how he underlined the importance of adapting

⁶ Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*, 90, my translation.

⁷ With or without 'our': *Constitutions*, Examen. 4:35 [92], I. 2:4 [152], II. 2:4 [216], IV. 2:2 [321], IV. 7:3 [398], VI. 1:1 [547], VI. 3:6 [589], VII. 2: F [624], VIII. 2:2 [680], IX. 5:1 [778]; *Remembering Iñigo: Glimpses of the Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. The Memoriale of Luís Gonçalves da Câmara*, translated by Alexander Eaglestone and Joseph A. Munitiz (Leominster: Gracewing, 2005), nn. 3, 16, 50, 195.

⁸ St Ignatius' first known Islamic contact features in most studies on Jesuits and Islam: his wish to stab a Muslim was only hampered by the 'decision' of his mule to take the other way (*Autobiography*, nn. 15–16). However, this story's aim is not to present St Ignatius' attitude towards Muslims. It is, rather, an amused confession of his initial inability to find out God's will for himself (by leaving the decision to a mule), in other words, his lack of discernment.

⁹ *Remembering Iñigo*, nn. 2, 248, 86.

¹⁰ See Exx 98 and elsewhere.

instructions to ‘circumstances of place, time, or persons’.¹¹ St Ignatius was vividly aware that each new situation can be unforeseeably different from previous ones and that making good decisions continually requires ‘a loving discernment’ (*discreta caritas*).¹² It turns out that to be Ignatian we should precisely *not* take St Ignatius’ advice on any given situation as the last word.

What is to count as characteristically Ignatian, then, if we are not to take his specific advice as normative? One might look at what members of the order he founded have done and do. Observers of Jesuits and their works, however, are often unable to find a common denominator. Failing that, we may point to a characteristic use of antithesis—the creative tension between contrasting concepts. There are two well-known examples.

One is the classic *in actione contemplativus* (contemplative in action), which means being a contemplative in the midst of an active life, rather than creating a dichotomy between the two.¹³ The other is the so-called Hevenesius maxim: ‘this should be your rule of action: trust in God, as if everything depended on you; yet apply yourself, as if God alone brought everything about’.¹⁴ Less well known are ‘unconstrained by the greatest yet contained in the least’¹⁵ and the motto of an ‘Ignatian



A Jesuit priest, Mughal, seventeenth century

¹¹ *Constitutions*, IV.6.K [382], II.V.3.A [455]; and see Exx 18.

¹² See Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, ‘Discreta Caritas’, in *The Lord of Friendship: Friendship, Discernment and Mission in Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: Way Books, 2011), 216–230.

¹³ MHSJ MN 5, 162. Here we also find the fundamental Ignatian orientation that God is to be found in everything: ‘Deum esse in omnibus rebus inveniendum’.

¹⁴ Gabriel Hevenesius, *Scintillae Ignatianae* (Vienna: Joannis Georgii Schlegel, 1705), 230 following.

¹⁵ From the anonymous *Elogium sepulchrale S. Ignatii*, included in *Imago primi saeculi Societatis Iesv.* (Antwerp: Officina Plantiniana, 1640), 280.

mysticism of joy in the world'.¹⁶ Later theorists have come up with stimulating one-word designations representing a tension, such as the Ignatian 'dialectic' or 'drama'.¹⁷

Can we, however, establish principles in a field as contested as Christian–Muslim dialogue on the basis of theologically stimulating but intrinsically fuzzy concepts? Should we not, rather, look for the spiritual centrepiece; the Ignatian insight that holds it all together; the seed from which the other insights grew? What is at the core of St Ignatius' thought?

The Core Ignatian Insight: Consolation

A plausible candidate for that core Ignatian insight is discernment of spirits.¹⁸ However, discernment of spirits is not unique to Ignatius. It is already a theme in the early Church in the context of determining whether charismatic prophecy was authentic or not (*diákrisis*: 1 Corinthians 12:10; *dokimázein*: Romans 12:2; 1 John 4:1). In the late medieval spiritual tradition to which Ignatius was exposed, discernment of spirits (or spiritual discernment) was called for when personal decisions were to be taken in an unclear situation. And it is here that we do find St Ignatius' core insight. For him, discernment is linked to consolation. Indeed, everything should start from consolation.¹⁹

Now, consolation is often presented in the context of specific moments of discernment, as described in St Ignatius' *Autobiography* and *Spiritual Diary*.²⁰ Consolation is a sign of a decision according to God's will and desolation signals a wrong decision. Such *confirmatory consolation* is part of Ignatian spirituality. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, however, consolation means something more: it is consoled perception of reality, 'perceptory consolation', as one might say. It is not a *consequence* of a decision taken according to God's will, but rather its

¹⁶ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, volume 3, *Theology of the Spiritual Life*, translated by Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1967), 277–293. In 1937, when first using it, Rahner does not take responsibility for the expression; 'the formulation of this theme was determined by a request for a paper on the subject under this heading' (227).

¹⁷ See Gaston Fessard, *The Dialectic of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*, translated by James Colbert and Oliva Blanchette (Leiden: Brill, 2022); Raymund Schwager, *Das dramatische Kirchenverständnis bei Ignatius von Loyola. Historisch-pastoraltheologische Studie über die Stellung der Kirche in den Exerzitien und im Leben des Ignatius* (Zurich: Einsiedeln, 1970).

¹⁸ Hugo Rahner, *Ignatius the Theologian*, translated by Michael Barry (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 230: 'the very heart of the theology of the *Spiritual Exercises*'.

¹⁹ Pope Francis also seems to understand consolation as the Ignatian nucleus. When he addressed the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, his first main point was: ask for consolation!

²⁰ *Autobiography*, n. 8; *Spiritual Diary*, 23 February 1544.

precondition. St Ignatius understands consolation as the joyful growth of faith, hope and love which enables us to love God in everything and everything in God (Exx 316; *Constitutions*, III.1.26 [288]).

When we look at the *Spiritual Exercises*, we see that for Ignatius, consolation entails a threefold insight. We can classify the three elements of that insight as ‘metacognition’ (perception of perception), ‘phase-awareness’ (a perception of times) and ‘perception of reality’.

Metacognition

Ignatius begins the key section of the *Spiritual Exercises* on consolation by saying: ‘What I call “consolation” ...’ (Exx 316). Thus, he acknowledges that he is not applying the concept in a way that is already obvious within the tradition. Consequently, one should pay more attention to how he himself describes what he calls consolation than to what the word ‘consolation’ means in itself, in scripture and in church tradition. The same is true for his use of the word ‘desolation’. For Ignatius, consolation is the transformation of a human being into a loving person. Desolation is what moves us away from love. A consequence of these movements is that the consoled person *perceives* everything differently from the person in desolation.

St Ignatius wants us to see reality as completely as possible. He encourages us to recognise what he calls the movements of the soul. That recognition is particularly difficult because these movements themselves have an influence on how we perceive reality. Therefore, Ignatius teaches us not to trust our perceptions blindly. To see the full picture, we must also look at how we look. Are, so to speak, our glasses dirty or clean? In other words, he warns us about either trusting or distrusting our perceptions directly. And he gives us a criterion to test whether we can trust them or not: in consolation, you can trust your perception. So, Ignatius encourages us to have a perception of our perception; one might speak of ‘depth perception’ or, indeed, of ‘metacognition’.

Phase-awareness

Ignatius continues: ‘I use the word “consolation” when ...’ (Exx 316). So, there are different ‘times’.²¹ Consolation and desolation are movements, and since they come and go unpredictably, they must be seen as phases. Ignatius says this because we should not take at face value what appears

²¹ Exx 13; 175; 318.

to us in times of desolation. He warns us against drawing existential conclusions when our perceptions are clouded. That is why he tells us, wisely, not to change a decision in time of desolation (Exx 318 following).

Metacognition or depth-perception allows us to take a distance from our perceptions and recognise the influence of desolation or consolation. Phase-awareness helps us to see that the present moment may not be the right time to take a decision. This gives us the freedom not to act prematurely on the basis of our immediate perception of things. We must accept desolate times; but we need not surrender to them. In prayerful, grateful openness, we can prepare ourselves for a new time of consolation—‘keep in mind that consolation will not be long in coming’—and thus train ourselves in patience confident of God’s benevolence (Exx 321). We can neither remove desolation, nor create consolation. The Spiritual Exercises are not a means of generating emotions; they are not soul-programming. Consolation is a gift; this can become painfully clear in times of desolation.

Perception of Reality

Ignatius admits that what he means by consolation and by desolation goes beyond the common understanding of his day. Since consolation plays such a crucial role in his teaching, we need to inquire further how exactly we are to recognise real consolation. The *Spiritual Exercises* describe the effects of consolation in a mnemonic scheme, reversing the trinitarian formula of Father, Son and Spirit: love of the Spirit, love of Christ, love of the Creator (Exx 316). We find both dynamic and calm spiritual gifts as signs of consolation: the growth of hope, faith and love; motivating joy, but also, simply, inner peace. All are recognisable as gifts of the Spirit named by St Paul.²²

But now the signs of consolation gain a christological focus when we find ourselves overwhelmed, indeed seized,²³ even to the point of tears—if what captures us is our own neediness, or the history of Christ, or anything that draws us into God’s salvific project. The foremost sign of consolation, however, is this: to love the Creator and to love creation with the Creator, ‘loving him in all creatures and all creatures in him’ (*Constitutions*, III.1.26[288]). This then, is St Ignatius’ core insight: consolation as loving *with* God.

²² Galatians 5:22; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Romans 14:6.

²³ Philippians 3:12: ‘Christ Jesus has made me his own [katelēmphthēn]’. The Greek *katalambanō* can be translated as ‘to seize’.

Theology of Consolation: Reality

Three questions arise at this point. First, why should we trust our perceptions at a time of consolation and distrust them during desolation? Second, is consolation the proof of God's will for the unconvinced? And third, isn't consolation precisely the proof of God's existence in the first place? The answer to these last two is 'no'. Consolation is not about 'proof'. For Ignatius, the history of salvation as attested in the Bible is always presupposed. Consolation is the blaze of love for the God of Jesus. Being seized to the point of tears is consolation if what moves us is the paschal mystery. The spiritual gifts mentioned by St Ignatius as signs of consolation (hope, faith, love; joy and peace) deliberately echo the New Testament literally: they are already St Paul's criteria for the work of the Spirit of Jesus. Ignatius assumes that we are already shaped by the gospel and want to be shaped more deeply by it (Exx 104). Therefore, only if that is granted, can we say that during consolation we perceive truthfully and in desolation we don't.

Consolation in this sense does not mean that we clearly perceive one particular object (we generally do not hear the voice of our personal calling). Rather, during consolation we are able to see the whole picture, get a sense of the total context. This does not, of course, mean grasping the whole of reality conceptually. What becomes clear to us in times of consolation is an intuition of the whole of reality. Our perception of the full picture is pre-conceptual: facing a future fulfilment. Ignatius teaches us to pay attention in this way to God's activity in everything. And the point of this recognition is not to know more but to get ready for the 'interior knowledge of all the good I have received, so that acknowledging this with gratitude, I may be able to love and serve his Divine Majesty in everything' (Exx 233).

During consolation we are able to see the whole picture

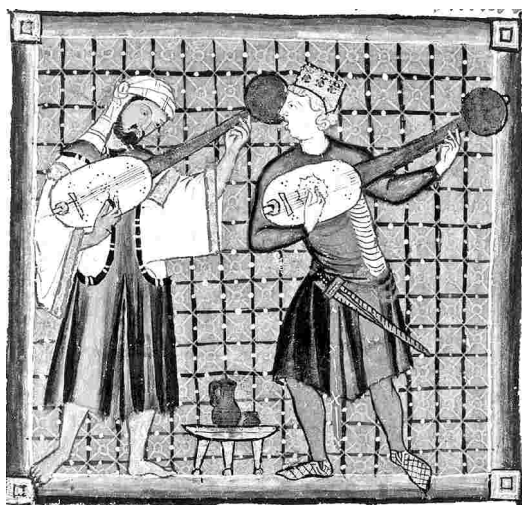
Thus Ignatius writes that in a time of consolation, 'the soul comes to be inflamed with the love of its Creator and Lord; and when it can in consequence love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but in the Creator of them all' (Exx 316). With 'soul', of course, he simply means the human person, but here considered from a specific point of view. Soul is us in the perspective of our eternal salvation.²⁴

²⁴ Therefore, *iuvare animas*—helping souls—means to allow people to find their divine destiny: *Autobiography*, nn. 26, 45, 50; *Examen*, I. 2 [3], *Examen*, 6. 2 [113], *Constitutions*, I. 2. 5 [153], I. 3.1 [186], III. 2.G [304], Preamble, IV.e.1 [307], IV. 2. 4 [324], VI. 2. 2 [555], VI. 2. 8 [567], VI. 3. 4 [586],

To say that the soul can no longer love any created thing in itself except only in the Creator of them all, is therefore to say that the reality of God becomes so tangible to us that we no longer rely on any creature as if it could save us. That does not mean turning away from the world. It implies no lack of love for that which is not God. Rather, ‘loving everything in God’ is to recognise all things as components of God’s salvific project. Everything will be a part of it, everything has its place in it. In this perspective, everything can be acknowledged, including our own actions—and even the creaturely attempts to hold up God’s project. This is how consolation enables us to perceive reality in its fullness.

Christian–Muslim Dialogue

So we return to our initial question: can Ignatian spirituality help us to renew Christian–Muslim engagement today? We are now better able to respond with a sense of what is most characteristically ‘Ignatian’. We have uncovered as the fundamental Ignatian dynamic the growing ability to love all things in God and God in all things; and we saw that this growth of love is what St Ignatius calls ‘consolation’. What will make



*A Christian and a Muslim playing the oud, from
Catinas de Santa Maria, thirteenth century*

a programme authentically Ignatian is not the number of quotations from the *Spiritual Exercises* or the *Constitutions* but its foundation in the experience of consolation, in the growth of love.

Using this foundation, I would like to suggest twenty questions that might help us test whether an interaction with Muslims is faithfully Ignatian; or, more positively, twenty questions to inspire a fruitful Christian–Islamic engagement.

VII. 1.B [605], VII. 1. 7 [616], VII. 4. 1 [636], IX. 2. 1 [723], IX. 6. 10 [803], X. 1 [812] following, X. 12 [825]; also repeatedly the ‘good of souls’, the ‘benefit of souls’.

Theology of Mission: servir

When our loving with God is growing, we perceive reality more aptly: that is the claim behind St Ignatius' procedures. During those times of increasing love, we also see ourselves more clearly. We understand our own role in this world better. We come to sense how all things belong together. We understand, therefore, that there is a goal in creation, indeed, that our own life has a purpose (see Exx 23). All creatures come to their fullness when they abandon their self-obsession and join in the divine project of love. That is why St Ignatius can write that the whole point of creation is God's praise, honour and service. So now, out of what we called 'perceptory consolation', there arises clarity of 'choice'. The Spiritual Exercises accompany us towards choice.

However, this choice is not simply about taking a decision. In the process of the Exercises the concept of choice itself undergoes a fundamental transformation. During the Second Week, we are prepared to choose a way of life (Exx 169–174); but as we stand before Christ, we discover that it is the Lord who is choosing us.²⁵ Our choice becomes a response to the invitation to participate in God's own choice (Exx 135). Thereby, our life becomes a mission in a very literal and personal sense.

During the Exercises, we may discover for ourselves how Christ encounters us, addresses us, wants us in the team, and then does not cling to us for his personal satisfaction. Rather, Christ commissions us and sends us out in order to liberate others from the satanic 'nets and chains' (Exx 142, 145). That is our mission and each person's particular capacities have a role in the project. Realising that we are sent means realising that we are sent *to serve*. But service here does not imply a role of secondary importance. Rather, serving means belonging to a communion of action. It means taking part in a common project.

We can highlight here three aspects of this Ignatian mission as service. And these will help us to frame our first questions, our criteria for evaluating the quality of our dialogue. The mission is personal, communal and great-hearted.

Personal

When consoled in St Ignatius' sense, we can recognise reality ever more authentically. What exactly we notice, however, will still differ from person to person. The Exercises are not a brain-washing technique.

²⁵ Exx 98, 146, 147, 168; and see John 15: 16.

Indeed, we are all challenged to see for ourselves, with our own inner eyes. When it comes to the details of a contemplation, St Ignatius does not tell us what to see, but simply asks us for example whether the road from Bethany to Jerusalem ‘is broad or narrow, level, etc.’ (Exx 192).

In fact our personal involvement goes even deeper. The exercises that St Ignatius proposes challenge us to be mentally, personally present, without anyone to regulate and control us. In contrast, if we are praying the Psalms, for instance, the rhythm of the verses channels our train of thought, its direction, its duration, its concentration. Again and again, the words bring us back to their content. However, a fifteen-minute Examen (Exx 43) or indeed a sixty-minute meditation (Exx 12) allow us space for ourselves, even for our distractions. St Ignatius asks almost too much of us, trusting to our honesty and discipline.

That is why the Spiritual Exercises are founded on the bold presupposition of personal integrity and trust (see Exx 22). This hermeneutic of benevolence has, of course, a practical purpose: it makes for a better understanding of the other. But underlying that practicality there is a very particular theology. In a spiritual conversation, we can trust that what others say is honest and meaningful because we trust that God wants to work with this person and that person wants to work with God (Exx 15). Out of this Ignatian model of personal engagement and trust, we can develop our first four criteria for Christian–Muslim interaction.

We may disagree with others—with our collaborators and interlocutors, with people from other faiths and from our own faith. We may have different agendas and approaches, priorities and positions. We may even disagree on whether we really disagree in matters of faith; but,

1. Are we prepared to keep the dialogue going?

Without a minimum of good will, it is impossible to understand others. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves,

2. Can we feel that goodwill is growing in us?

Once mutual trust grows, we will find ourselves sometimes moving beyond general topics into a more personal space. When that happens,

3. Are we willing to engage in personal conversations in which we ask each other how God is at work in our lives?

A typical question we may ask after such encounters is, ‘where was God in this?’—whether the encounter was a happy or a difficult one.

The question does not imply that God is present in some places and not present in others. 'Where was God', or indeed, 'Where was God calling me?' are a challenge to our attention. It prompts us to notice God's particular call to us in a particular situation. In fact the question has a double aspect: *what was going on when* I felt I was being addressed, and *to what* do I feel I might be invited? If God is at work in history (see Exx 236), whatever is happening, whatever is being said and done contain a message for us. So, we need to keep asking,

4. Are we open to learning, including through the words and witness of the Muslims we meet?

Communal

Goodwill in interfaith encounters should, however, not lead to homogenizing claims along the lines of *basically, we all mean the same thing*. Nor should personal interfaith encounters dissolve into a sweeping relativisation such as: *in the end, beliefs are personal opinions*. In interreligious relations, each party also represents a religious community. When it comes to theological interaction with Muslims, the Catholic Christian is also a representative of the Church. We need not agree with everything that comes from Rome; we are not obliged to defend the administration of our parishes. Indeed, by not blindly identifying with every aspect of the Church, we can also show our interlocutors our understanding of critical loyalty. Nevertheless, St Ignatius does challenge us to have a filial love of our 'holy mother the hierarchical Church' (Exx 353) and to praise practices such as 'the lighting of candles in churches' (Exx 358), even if our spirituality may be shaped by a more personal faith experience. From this follows another Ignatian criterion for our context,

5. Are we ready to present, without arrogance but with joy, the Catholic creed and tradition, the Church's liturgy and life as somehow accessible and indeed beautiful?

Great-hearted

Ignatian spirituality is extrovert. It reaches out beyond the bounds of the established Church, marked by missionary zeal. We want to offer ourselves to God and God's project 'in a magnanimous spirit and with great liberality' (Exx 5). But here, too, good discernment of inner movements is in order, for 'even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light' (2 Corinthians 11:14; and see Exx 332). We may discover that

the apparently holy intention of finding new candidates for baptism turns out to be motivated by selfish ambition rather than by God's Spirit of consolation and joy.²⁶ Wisely, St Ignatius reminds us, 'a person will make progress in things of the spirit to the degree to which they divest [*salir*] themselves of self-love, self-will, and self-interest' (Exx 189). So if our outreach aspires to be truly Ignatian, it will not be selfish but offered in a spirit of service, and therefore we should ask ourselves unselfishly,

6. Are we ready to pass on elements of Ignatian spirituality to Muslims if they ask for it?



Akbar and the Jesuits, by Narsingh, 1600–1603

It is worth dwelling here on what an Ignatian approach might mean for Muslims. Ignatius' key concepts are founded within the Christian tradition and experience. Still, many of his observations and formulations are comprehensible to non-Christians. Becoming aware of consolation and desolation can certainly be helpful to people irrespective of their beliefs. For an Islamic context we can make use of the Ignatian formula that consolation is growing ability to love everything in God and God in everything. We could also re-express this by saying that in times of consolation, *rahma* (God's mercy), is growing in your own heart. That is in line with Qur'anic wording which says both that God has *rahma* and that people should have it.²⁷ Thus, Muslims, too, can take consolation as the mark of those times when their view

²⁶ See Romans 14: 17.

²⁷ Qur'an, 6: 54 and 17: 24; 48: 29.

of reality is unclouded, so that they have the clarity necessary to take wise decisions.

Some spiritual directors even go beyond that. A Jesuit working in South Asia says that Muslims entrust themselves to him for spiritual accompaniment. He has invited some of them to contemplate Qur'anic passages such as Sura 1, *al-Fātiḥa*, in an Ignatian manner. He reports good progress among the Muslims he accompanies spiritually. That is, he observes the growth of *raḥma*. There is a Catholic nun in the Arab world who goes a step further and gives Ignatian retreats to Muslims. Incidentally, this possibility had actually been anticipated and defended by St Ignatius' close collaborator, Jerónimo Nadal (d. 1580).²⁸ The religious sister presents Muslim retreatants with scenes from Muḥammad's life as material for contemplation. She finds her work well received and fruitful. The scenes have to be carefully selected, of course. In St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, the point is precisely not to leave Jesus alone in his darkest moments, at his passion and death. However, accounts of Muḥammad's life contain dark moments that one would not present to retreatants.²⁹

But there is another aspect to St Ignatius' greatness of heart. The Church's primary purpose is to evangelize. Evangelization, however, does not mean proselytization. Proselytizers are those who only take an interest in humanity in order to recruit new members to their own group. In contrast, 'to evangelize means to make the kingdom of God present in the world'.³⁰ An evangelizing Church is, then, a sign and instrument for humanity furthering their unity with God and one another.³¹ Such a Church engages in bettering the living conditions of all peoples, transforming the 'temporal order' in the sense of the gospel.³² It engages with politics and social structures, with the economy and ecology. Ignatius' intention to 'help souls' must not be confined to the proclamation of the Good News but refers to the integral flourishing of humanity. This gives us another Ignatian criterion,

7. Are people's situations really improving through our work?

²⁸ See Jerónimo Nadal, 'Exercises for Infidels, Heretics and Sinners', *The Way*, 43/1 (January 2004), 43–50.

²⁹ For example: Muḥammad is reported to have had all men of the Medinan Jewish tribe of the *Banū Qurayza* killed (in 627).

³⁰ *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 176.

³¹ *Lumen gentium*, n. 1.

³² *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 2.

Theology of History: en todo

The consoled perception of reality sees God at work everywhere, and therefore in all religions. Some might contest whether such a view is faithfully Ignatian. Doesn't the view that God's spirit is at work in other religions lead to a radically pluralistic theology, even to a kind of pantheism? Well, no, not necessarily. St Ignatius' theology is christocentric; and any way of proceeding that legitimately refers to him will be the same. Once we accept the message of Christ's resurrection, we see why consolation is more than a beautiful illusion. The claim that in times of consolation we perceive reality more truthfully has a christological basis. It is in the light of Easter that we can see the fulfilment and meaning of creation. So we need to ask how to witness to the risen Christ in our work. From this, two further criteria follow for authentically Ignatian Muslim–Christian interactions.

8. Do we ourselves and our interlocutors come to know Christ better in our encounters?

Increasing knowledge of Christ (see Exx 104) is often triggered by remarks and questions from the other side. Even in the midst of a heated theological debate, a new aspect of Christ may be waiting to be discovered. And the trigger need not even be a remark or question. Many of us have Muslim friends who are so disarmingly humble that sometimes in their presence we cannot but think of Jesus.

9. Do we, in our theological encounters, confine ourselves to arguing for a rational theism, or can we present a compelling narrative of Jesus' claim to be the dawn of God's Kingdom, indeed, to be the definitive turn of world history?

We have already quoted the observation, 'a person will make progress in things of the spirit to the degree to which they divest [*salir*] themselves of self-love, self-will, and self-interest'. We should now take another look at the divestment (*salir*). Jesus himself was marked by that attitude: he clearly sees the danger of self-centred and self-satisfied piety (Matthew 23). Belittling others is contrary to his way (Luke 18:11). St Paul presents Christ's lifestyle as opposed to 'selfish ambition or conceit' (Philippians 2:3); he surrenders what is his by right and risks, as one might say, a new exodus.

This offers another perspective on the theme of loving everything in God and God in everything: if God is at work in everything, then this includes non-Christians. They are a 'positive challenge' for the

Church.³³ Even what contradicts our own ideas of God's will and the growth of the Kingdom is part of God's history and can become a source of enrichment or purification for us.³⁴ That may help us to recognise another Ignatian criterion for Christian–Muslim dialogue,

10. Can we see Islam as part of the history of salvation?

Pope Francis encouraged us to be the 'Church which goes forth'.³⁵ In Spanish, that is, *iglesia en salida* (a Church opening up to get moving, in departure, risking a new exodus). This is, perhaps not accidentally, the same word that St Ignatius used when speaking of ridding oneself of self-love, self-will and self-interest. How to deal with these self-obsessions? *Salir*—by going out and leaving them behind.

What does that mean for our interreligious encounters? Many Christians, including Catholics, denounce dialogue with Islam as dangerously naïve and a waste of time. Certainly, credulous naivety is a pitfall for anyone of good will. There is always the need to enter dialogue with one's eyes open. But alarmism is the contrary pitfall, and fear is as bad a counsellor as ingenuousness. The advice that follows from St Ignatius' theology of discernment here is: only make your decision when your fear has passed and consolation allows you to appreciate the full reality.

A Church that goes forth looks at the world with the 'joy of the gospel'.³⁶ Our vision in times of consolation recognises God at work in all events. Any evil there is due to creatures themselves. The Creator's project is to heal and redeem. The way God is at work in all events, then, is by calling us to collaborate courageously and creatively in God's salvific project. Thus, another Ignatian criterion for an authentically Christian cooperation with Islam is this:

11. Is our interaction with Muslims constructive, unhampered by fear—our own and that of other Christians?

Keen missionaries sometimes look at Muslims with a desolated sense of humiliation. They are a proof of our weakness! We have not succeeded in converting them (or at least, not yet)! But if we are truly in consolation and love all things in God, we see the world as a history of salvation. In such a history, Muslims have their place. In that perspective,

³³ *Redemptoris missio*, n. 56.

³⁴ Pontifical Secretariat for Non-Christians, *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, n.21, available at <https://www.dicasteryinterreligious.va/dialogue-and-mission-1984/>.

³⁵ *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 20.

³⁶ *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 84.

the question is no longer: ‘who sinned?’ (John 9:2). As if in interfaith relations we were to find out whether *they* closed their minds, or *we* were not convincing enough. Rather, the question is how ‘God’s works might be revealed’ (John 9:3) in this particular situation in which we now encounter Muslims. How are we to give space in this very situation for the growth of God’s Kingdom—or, in St Ignatius’ preferred wording, for the greater glory of God? What then is the point of looking at Islam as if it were an offence? An Ignatian criterion will take us in a different direction:

12. Is our first question when we encounter Muslims how we can help: help them in their current situation and help the Kingdom of God become more present through both of us?

Some interlocutors in theological dialogues among Muslims and Christians will want to compare credal positions, as if there is our timeless deposit of faith on one side, and theirs on the other. But the *Spiritual Exercises* suggest a more adventurous approach. As we contemplate a scripture passage, St Ignatius wants us to ‘come upon things which throw further light on it or which more fully bring home its meaning’ (Exx 2). This is a reminder that in matters of Bible and faith, discovery is still possible. Something new can happen. Indeed, such unforeseen results of our own reflection and reasoning or of a God-given enlightenment bear much spiritual fruit, says Ignatius.

Of course, Ignatius would not have applied this principle to theology itself. His era was one of constant suspicion and wariness of heretics.³⁷ Out of conviction as much as expediency, he would not want to see dogma changed. He realised, however, that an ever-deeper exploration and understanding of the Christian faith was possible (as practised and expressed in the Church Fathers) to ‘bring better understanding’.³⁸

In our time, we can say quite simply that encounters with non-Christians can become something like a source, a *locus*, of theological insight. Often it is a question (or a misunderstanding) from the interlocutor that triggers such discoveries. Perhaps St Ignatius would today encourage us to bring such insights back to the community of the

³⁷ See *Autobiography*, n. 58.

³⁸ Vincent of Lérins (d. c. 445) sees that there is organic growth and indeed progress of ecclesial teaching, as understanding, knowledge, and wisdom increase: Christian doctrine is, he writes, ‘consolidated by years, enlarged by time, refined by age’ (*Commonitory*, translated by C. A. Heurtley [Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1894], n. 56).

Church, presenting them not as new doctrines, but as an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the faith. So, we can also ask ourselves:

13. Do we promote our interreligious debates to be places (*loci*) of theological insight, and do we bring those insights back to the Church to enrich its growth in self-understanding?

Our work for and with Muslims is, however, by no means restricted to theology. Fair theological debate is only possible where the legal and cultural framework grants some parity to the parties, and that is not always the case. However, other forms of engagement are almost always possible—in particular, education. The consoled mind recognises that God dwells in human beings, giving them understanding. If God grants understanding, teachers can see themselves as co-workers with God. So, taking St Ignatius’ core insight seriously, we need to ask:

14. Do our interactions with Muslims have an educational quality?

Theology of Sin: magis

To look at the world with the eyes of consolation does not mean to see everything in a rosy light. Rather in times of consolation we are able to look at the world more realistically. A deeply realistic view also sees that we make mistakes, that we—all of us—are sinners. The love experienced in consolation allows us to see that our own life is not yet fully love. That awareness is invaluable in our work of encounter.

Christians in dialogue with Muslims can sometimes start with high expectations and then become disillusioned when just those people whom they expected to be great game-changers turn out to be human after all. If, however, we keep reminding



A Jesuit missionary, Mughal, late seventeenth century

ourselves that no one is perfect, we will not nourish exaggerated expectations of our dialogue partners' integrity, reliability and efficacy.

To put it in classical terms, accepting 'original sin' is a liberating realism. It protects us from declaring our favoured interlocutors to be heroes or considering ourselves as saviours of the world. We will not expect our Muslim friends, our co-workers or our popes to work miracles. St Ignatius encourages us to see, sense and confess our sins (Exx 44). The painful recognition that I have sinned and the joyful message that I am pardoned liberate us to a life of realism without cynicism. A seriously Ignatian Christian–Muslim encounter is shaped by that attitude:

15. Are we aware, with realism, but without despair, that we are flawed human beings working with flawed human beings?

An examination of conscience is part of spiritual life in many traditions. St Ignatius' specific touch is that each such review begins positively, with the grateful memory of the benefits received (Exx 43). That memory can open us to the experience of consolation. It enables us to look joyfully at God, the world and ourselves. This leads us back into the dynamic of love: to serve more faithfully, to love more intensely. The experience of consolation thus quite naturally draws us into the practice of reviewing, both personally and communally.

We need to recognise and express clearly, openly—indeed joyfully—what went wrong (it would be something of a clerical pride if the only interaction among the friends of the Lord was mutual applause). We will rarely have to deal with catastrophic failure, but we can always develop our sensibility for where, led by love, we can serve the Lord better and follow him more consistently (Exx 104). Along these lines, an Ignatian inspiration for interfaith dialogue lies in the question:

16. Are we reviewing honestly what we have done and experienced so far, and learning from it?

An honest, constructively critical gaze takes us even further when, in times of consolation, we become aware of the bigger picture. We come to see more clearly the context of our dialogues. We come to understand the other's experience from within, and to notice the structures, social and economic, which shape that experience from without.

The Ignatian attention to the phases of consolation and desolation focuses on what is going on in people's *hearts*, their inner movements. But since consolation in St Ignatius' sense is growing ability to see the full picture, a consoled person will also come to see what is going on in

people's *lives*, even their sociopolitical context. In Muslim–Christian dialogue we sometimes focus on the truth value of our interlocutor's last statement. That can, of course, advance theological knowledge and is part of an authentic encounter among equals. And yet, every text has a subtext. We need to take into account the conditions from which we ourselves and our interlocutors speak. If we take that perspective seriously, it opens our gaze both towards the inside and the outside. Conditions at play are both internal and external. We need to take into account both the soul and the social.

Can we begin to see why they speak the way they do? We can try to see the other's background, personal and communal. And we need to become aware of our own. Which memories seem to resonate while we speak? Are colonial, abasing, abusive experiences at play? Can we talk about that with them, too? We must avoid categorizing and 'othering' others. But what Pope Francis recalled in Jerusalem in 2014 is fundamental for intercultural and interreligious encounter. He said: 'May we learn to understand the sufferings of others!'³⁹ So, a further Ignatian inspiration for Christian–Muslim dialogue is:

17. Are we able to perceive and articulate unjust power structures behind us or between us: colonial and abusive, humiliating and traumatizing experiences? Can we get a sense of our interlocutors' personal and communal memory? Are we able to empathize with them?

But it is not enough just to empathize. We must also ask ourselves, and ask the others in dialogue: what must change in terms of social and ecological justice? How can we promote transformation? Thus, it should be characteristic of the Ignatian dialogical mindset to wonder:

18. What needs to happen for socio-ecological justice to improve? What is our role in this transformation, personally, as Church and together with Muslims?

Communicating about Communication: circunstancias

As we have seen, when St Ignatius gives instructions, he has a keen sense that contexts vary. Superiors must decide 'whatever will seem suitable to them in accordance with the circumstances of persons, places, and times'.⁴⁰

³⁹ Pope Francis, address, visit to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, 26 May 2014.

⁴⁰ *Formula of the Institute*, n.6.

In light of this provision, two final Ignatian criteria for Christian–Muslim dialogue come into view.

It seems typically Ignatian to have a sense of the *kairos*, the right moment. For some decisions or some outcomes, now may not be the right time. In one case, years of patience may be needed. In another, swift action may be called for. But having a clear sense of the right moment does not necessarily mean waiting for universal approval. At times, our conscience may call us to resist the common trend and defy common expectations. For example, Jesuits in dialogue with Muslims may, precisely because of their work, encounter distrust among certain ‘good Catholics’. Conflicts should not be avoided at any price. They can be necessary and even helpful. So, the question we need to ask ourselves in the tradition of St Ignatius is this:

19. Do we have a sensibility for what needs to be done now (even in the face of intra-Christian opposition) and for what still needs time and patience?

Above, we called the attention to the ‘deep perception’ of consolation and desolation, a form of metacognition. Through such attention we become aware of the movements which influence our perceptions themselves. Ignatius instructs the retreat-giver to draw the retreatant’s attention to those often undiscovered movements (Exx 6, 8). In Christian–Muslim encounters, we should act similarly. After all, a particular Muslim–Christian dialogue is often the beginning for creating conditions for genuine dialogue in the first place. So, we should, finally, ask ourselves:

20. Are we prepared to communicate about our communication? Do we have the courage to address difficulties in our interaction and discuss their possible sources?

These, then are the twenty criteria we propose for guiding those engaged in Muslim–Christian encounters under the auspices of St Ignatius of Loyola.

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WALKING WITH REFUGEES IN A CONTEXT OF DEHUMANISATION

A Practice of Solidarity

Sophie Cartwright

The Ministry of the Jesuit Refugee Service in the UK

AT THE JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE (JRS), we accompany, serve as companions, and advocate for refugees and forcibly displaced people. JRS was founded in 1980 by Pedro Arrupe in response to the horrific situation of the Vietnamese boat people. It now works in fifty countries across the world, and the exact form of its mission in these different countries is responsive to local context and needs.

At JRS in the UK we have a particular ministry to people incarcerated in immigration detention and to people who have come to the UK for safe haven but have been refused asylum by both the government and a court, and made destitute. In working with these communities, we seek to stand in solidarity with people who are among the most profoundly marginalised and dehumanised, and subjected to the systemic injustices of a broken and inhumane asylum system. Based in our Ignatian ethos, this reflects a commitment to going where the need is greatest and attending to needs that others are not addressing.

Concretely, we run outreach services to Harmondsworth and Colnbrook immigration detention centres next to Heathrow airport. We offer practical, pastoral and casework support. For example, a big part of our outreach team's job is to help detained people get access to legal advice and health care. From our centre in East London we run a legal project, extensive casework support, activities and an accommodation project for destitute asylum seekers. We also conduct research, communications and policy work across these areas and seek to amplify refugees' voices. We advocate for a just and person-centred asylum system.

Our work is grounded in a faith in a God who is present in human history even in its most tragic moments. Often, as we walk alongside refugees who have been detained and made destitute, we are working

to uphold human dignity in a context of profound dehumanisation. This involves seeing, hearing and encountering, and allowing ourselves to be transformed.

Context: The UK's Asylum System

First, let's briefly examine the structures and lived realities of both immigration detention and asylum destitution. The external policy context of JRS UK's work is long-standing and growing hostility. People seeking asylum in the UK face a hostile and complex determination system in which they are interrogated about the most traumatic experiences of their lives by people who are looking for reasons to disbelieve them.

Additionally, it is all but impossible to navigate the asylum determination process without a good lawyer. However, there is a crisis in the availability of asylum legal advice. Changes to how legal aid is funded, going back many years, mean that there are fewer and fewer asylum lawyers. Now, there are so few that many people seeking asylum cannot get a lawyer. Access to legal advice is even worse in detention.¹ In this context, many people in desperate need of protection are refused it, by both the Home Office and the courts.

Even when waiting for a decision on their claims, asylum seekers cannot access public funds and normally are not allowed to work. Instead, they are forced to rely on asylum support to survive. This entails accommodation that can take various forms but, in any event, is typically rundown and very often unsafe; and financial support so low that people living on it face a daily struggle to survive.² After refusal of asylum, even this meagre support is cut off and people are evicted from asylum accommodation and left completely destitute, with no formal means to meet their most essential needs. They are entirely dependent on charity and informal support from friends and the wider community simply to survive. This leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and puts them in a situation where both mental and physical health are prone to decline very quickly.

¹ See Sophie Cartwright and others, *Accessing Legal Advice in Detention: Becoming an Impossibility* (London: JRS UK, 2025), available at <https://www.jrsuk.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Accessing-legal-advice-in-detention-july-2025.pdf>, accessed 23 June 2026.

² See Asylum Matters, *Surviving in Poverty: A Report Documenting Life on Asylum Support* (Leeds: Asylum Matters, 2023), available at <https://cdn-d2po0k1vdlkvv.asylummatters.org/uploads/2023/12/Asylum-Matters-Surviving-in-Poverty-Report-A4-SINGLES-Dec-2023.pdf>, accessed 23 June 2026.

Under the Hostile Environment—established and so named in 2012, and continuing to operate—they are excluded from myriad areas of community and daily life, and denied access to essential services. This is done largely through a system of placing checks on immigration status across different layers of civil society, including hospitals and the police. It means that people can face immigration control when going to hospital for treatment or seeking to report that they have been a victim of violence or abuse. The Hostile Environment thus fundamentally distorts relationships of trust in actively seeking to marginalise migrants.³

Operating alongside this system, immigration detention entails incarceration in prison-like conditions without time limit. Anyone subject to immigration control can be detained, and a large proportion of people in detention either are seeking or have sought asylum here. Even a short period in detention is profoundly damaging to mental health, and a long one even more so. I have heard from many torture survivors that being in detention was, for them, like being tortured again.⁴ Many people talk about being treated as less than human in and by the process of immigration detention, and of coming to lose a sense of their own humanity in that context.



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³ For further details, see Sophie Cartwright and others, *Destitute and in Danger: People Made Homeless by the Asylum System* (London: JRS UK, 2024), available at <https://www.jrsuk.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Destitute-and-in-Danger-JRS-UK.pdf>, accessed 23 June 2026.

⁴ See JRS UK, *Detained and Dehumanised: The Impact of Immigration Detention* (London: JRS UK, 2020), available at https://www.jrsuk.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Detained-and-Dehumanised_JRS-UK-Report_28.06.2020_FINAL-1.pdf, accessed 23 June 2026.

This is all done to administer immigration procedures and does not go before a judge. The lack of procedural justice is at once discomfiting and brutal, and contributes to the dehumanisation so many people feel in detention: denial of procedural justice is itself a denial of dignity—as was highlighted in research Dr Anna Rowlands conducted with refugees at JRS UK.⁵ Refugees supported by JRS who contributed to our research on detention explained: *Going into detention, I felt terrible, dehumanised. I had nobody, no voice. I felt so much hatred for people like me.* And also, that they felt they had lost part of themselves in detention: *You go in there with all your senses and you come out senseless. Something happened to you because you are no longer the same person.* Reflecting this reality, the Catholic bishops of England and Wales have declared that immigration detention violates human dignity.⁶

Asylum destitution, the Hostile Environment and immigration detention are deeply embedded features of our immigration and asylum system. Over the last few years, successive governments have also passed laws and policies attacking refugees' rights. Within a policy landscape already scarred by the Hostile Environment, a specific and concerted attack on the very principle of refugee protection can be dated from March 2021, when the government released the New Plan for Immigration.⁷

Since then, UK governments have erected further barriers; passed laws punishing and criminalising people for seeking asylum; warehoused people in out-of-town camps; and increased the use of immigration detention. Justifying these policies, diverse politicians have used dehumanising rhetoric about refugees and people seeking asylum, painting them as a threat. Often, this rhetoric has involved a particular, catastrophizing emphasis on 'small boats'. In 2022, a Conservative home secretary, Suella Braverman, referred to an 'invasion on the south coast'. In 2025, the Labour prime minister, Keir Starmer, said that, without further securitising borders, we risked becoming 'an island of

⁵ Anna Rowlands, *For Our Welfare and Not for Our Harm: A Faith-based Report on the Experience of the Refugee and Refugee Support Community at JRS UK, 2017–2019* (London: JRS UK, 2019), 39. Available at https://www.jrsuk.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/For-our-welfare-and-not-for-our-harm_Dr-Anna-RowlandsJRS-UK.pdf, accessed 23 June 2026.

⁶ Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, Department for International Affairs, *Love the Stranger: A Catholic Response to Migrants and Refugees* (London: CBCEW, 2023), principle 14, at <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/03/CBCEW-Love-the-Stranger-A4.pdf>, accessed 23 June 2026.

⁷ See HM Government, *New Plan for Immigration: Policy Statement* (London: HM Stationery Office, 2021).

strangers’—a phrase that has been likened to Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech. He did later apologise, but his words still had an impact on wider discourse.

Concurrently, and partly consequently, far-right ideas about refugees and migration have become mainstream in social and traditional media, and among some sections of the public. For example, there have been riots outside hotels where families seeking asylum are housed. Among refugee, migrant and minority ethnic communities this has naturally generated profound fear—and made them less safe in a real and physical sense. For people who have been refused the asylum they desperately need and forced into long-term destitution, this can intensify an experience of dehumanisation that already felt as if it had hit rock bottom.

JRS walks with people in this situation. As such, we confront systems that undermine human dignity and flourishing, and work to uphold, protect and promote these values. This is an act of solidarity: we stand with refugees who are themselves resisting their dehumanisation in myriad ways, by creating spaces for community and belonging and by demanding justice, and we seek to amplify their voices.

The Dehumanisation of Refugees: A Cycle of Policy and Rhetoric

In this context, policy and rhetoric often work together in dehumanising and demonizing people seeking asylum. Politicians use their own language to justify and normalise cruel and inhuman policies. Erfan, a refugee placed at the asylum camp at the former Napier barracks, put it better than I could in his foreword to JRS UK’s report:

*I was just an ‘illegal immigrant’, an ‘invader’, ‘swarm’ ... these are not just words. They build a completely new identity, which then justifies how you will be treated, seen and talked about. The language that dehumanises people makes it seem acceptable to place them in inhumane conditions and cut off from society, acting as if they are criminals by putting them in a disused army camp, surrounded by barbed wire fences*⁸

Once you have built a new identity for a group of people as ‘invaders’ or an inhuman ‘swarm’, cruel laws and policies follow. If the new identity is built successfully enough, they come to feel like an appropriate response.

⁸ Erfan, foreword to Sophie Cartwright, *Napier Barracks: The Inhumane Reality* (London: JRS UK, 2023) at https://www.jrsuk.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/JRS-UK-Report_Napier-Barracks-the-inhumane-reality_March-2023_WEB.pdf, accessed 23 June 2026.

Moreover, these policies are themselves dehumanising. They reinforce the idea that people seeking asylum are ‘other’ and ‘threatening’ and direct the public imagination away from individual human beings like themselves seeking safe haven—away from our common humanity.

By being placed in Napier barracks, like other asylum camps, people seeking asylum are isolated in a forbidding, prison-like site. It is out of town, so they are held apart from the community and designated as ‘other’ by physical space. This obstructs encounter and human relationship on a very practical level, and creates and feeds suspicion. Political narratives attacking refugees and anti-refugee policies are therefore cyclically reinforcing. This creates a downward spiral that acts to obscure humanity, and legitimise and further unjust and inhumane practices.

Accordingly, there are a number of instances where policies that were initially used with trepidation because they infringe human rights come to be presented as common sense. For example, the UK’s immigration detention estate has grown mainly since the start of the twenty-first century. In the year 2000, UK government documents about immigration detention said that it was used ‘with regret’. This appears to acknowledge that there is something problematic about depriving people of their liberty purely for the purposes of immigration policy. In subsequent documents, the reference to regret was removed.⁹ Immigration detention simply was no longer considered problematic. This shift in attitude was needed to justify the expansion of immigration detention that had already occurred and its continuation. Locking up thousands of people indefinitely every year for immigration reasons has not always been considered normal. It does not need to be considered normal now.

As a society, we are thus invited to participate in dehumanisation. We are urged to accept a distorted vision of refugees, in which their humanity is profoundly obscured. We are told to accept policies that violate human dignity as normal and even good. And this is powerfully reinforced by societal structures that hold people seeking asylum apart from local communities and work against encounter and community-building, be this models of destitution, detention or isolating asylum accommodation. Pope Francis’s words in *Fratelli tutti* are painfully reflective of the current situation in the UK:

⁹ Amnesty International, *A Matter of Routine: The Use of Immigration Detention in the UK* (London: Amnesty International, 2017), 17, available at https://www.amnesty.org.uk/documents/1296/Amnesty20International20Report-20A20Matter20Of20Routine20-20The20Use20of20_zE0WILv.pdf, accessed 23 June 2026.

‘In some host countries, migration causes fear and alarm, often fomented and exploited for political purposes. This can lead to a xenophobic mentality, as people close in on themselves, and it needs to be addressed decisively.’ Migrants are not seen as entitled like others to participate in the life of society, and it is forgotten that they possess the same intrinsic dignity as any person. Hence they ought to be ‘agents in their own redemption’. No one will ever openly deny that they are human beings, yet in practice, by our decisions and the way we treat them, we can show that we consider them less worthy, less important, less human.¹⁰

The Image of God in Refugees

As Francis goes on to emphasize, the dehumanisation of refugees in law, policy and rhetoric stands in direct opposition to Christian beliefs about the human person, and about relationship to God and each other. Relatedly, it stands in contrast to Christian beliefs about how we encounter God in people seeking sanctuary in particular.

It is foundational to Christian anthropology that each human being is made in the image and according to the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26–27). This entails that we each have inherent value, and our dignity should be protected and promoted. When we are told to accept a distorted, inhuman vision of refugees, we are told not to see the divine image. Similarly, when we are told to accept and even applaud laws and policies that violate human dignity, we are told to accept social and political structures that do not reflect this reality. Resisting such structures is key to building a better, juster world and striving for systemic change.

***We learn
from the
image of God
in each other***

As each human being bears the image of God, we can learn from each other about God. We can also learn from each other about being persons created and loved by God—that is, about being human. This seeing and learning are inherently relational. Part of what we learn from the image of God in each other is our kinship with each other. As Pope Francis explains in *Gaudete et exsultate*:

Jesus clears a way to seeing two faces, that of the Father and that of our brother. He does not give us two more formulas or two more commands. He gives us two faces, or better yet, one alone: the face

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, n.39, quoting *Christus vivit*, and ‘Message for the 2020 World Day of Migrants and Refugees’, 13 May 2020.

of God reflected in so many other faces. For in every one of our brothers and sisters, especially the least, the most vulnerable, the defenceless and those in need, God's very image is found. (n.61)

Thus, in migrants and refugees we see Christ's image and so encounter Christ in a particular way. As Pope John Paul II says in *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*: 'In migrants the Church has always contemplated the image of Christ who said, "I was a stranger and you made me welcome" (Matthew 25:35).' The reference to welcoming the stranger here points immediately to the act that is required in response to the image of God in another human being. We do not just need to see this image of God that dehumanising policies tell us not to see; we need to behave accordingly. Further, *welcoming* is specifically a *relational* act. Seeing rightly, right relationship with others and acting rightly are all closely bound up.

The fact that God's image is found especially in the most vulnerable is an indictment of oppressive laws and policies. Correspondingly, in Catholic Social Teaching, the common good is measured by what is good for the most excluded, the poorest and the most vulnerable. Connected to this, the fact that God's image is found in a particular way in migrants and refugees indicates that they can teach us something valuable about God, and about our society.

This is not always an easy lesson: when you see and encounter the image of God in refugees, the sheer brutality of the laws and policies that detain them and make them destitute becomes glaringly evident. However, the image of God in refugees also points forward in hope for a world in which people seeking sanctuary are welcomed and protected as neighbours. It calls on us to 'turn the world upside down', as Paul and Silas were seen to be doing in the book of Acts (17:6). It helps us to envisage and strive for a different way of doing things.

Building Communities of Joy and Justice

Accordingly, at JRS UK, we seek to build communities of hospitality, where the command to love the stranger is played out and where human dignity is upheld. For example, our programme of activities creates space for destitute refugees to meet together, develop and learn new skills, and maintain resilience. Many of these are led by refugees, who are not only active participants in the community at JRS UK, but integral to shaping it. We want to foster communities where refugees are not simply



Two refugee friends—the chefs—with the activities coordinator at the JRS social drop-in

recipients of charity, but, as Francis says ‘agents in their own redemption’. Building communities of hospitality together is an act of solidarity.

Solidarity involves not simply building nice spaces for and with people who have none, but caring about and responding to the problems they face. So, concurrently, we support people to address and change their situation, and to fight the impact of an unjust and inhumane system on their own lives. JRS UK’s legal team helps people to resolve their immigration status so that they can finally begin to rebuild their lives. Our accommodation project provides people with safe and secure places to live, enabling them to engage with their case and other aspects of their lives on which it is hard to focus when they are homeless.

People housed via JRS’s accommodation project tell us that this is truly transformative for them. For example, one woman with multiple serious health problems explained that she had been completely unable to manage them when homeless; now that she was living in JRS UK’s Emilie House, she could, and her health was much better: *Before Emilie House I was ... homeless. [I have] a lot of medication, a lot of problems, diabetic, a lot of stress. Very struggle. Not easy. Now, [I] take medication properly.*¹¹ In detention, where access to legal advice is very difficult, JRS UK’s team helps people to find a lawyer who will take on their case. This means they have a chance of getting released from detention

¹¹ This testimony is drawn from research published in JRS UK’s report *Destitute and in Danger*, 21.

and receiving the protection they need. All of this supports people to live in safety and dignity, and to flourish.

Furthermore, solidarity involves challenging the underlying unjust laws, policies and structures. Looking at the image of God in refugees, and therefore seeing asylum destitution and detention for what they are, we want change. This means that as well as building counter-cultural communities of hospitality and helping those within them, we also help these communities to grow outwards and translate into wider cultural, political and structural change. Over the last few years, this has been an uphill battle.

My own work at JRS centrally involves shining a light on the realities faced by refugees and advocating for a fairer system. Very often, this means highlighting suffering and injustice, and the sinful structures that underlie them, and then trying to envisage a world where flourishing and justice predominate instead. It involves concretely envisaging systems, laws and policies that support people to live in dignity. This can be challenging in the current hostile context. As human suffering and injustice become increasingly entrenched, there is a risk that it may become difficult to believe that another way of doing things is possible. But the communities we build together at JRS, and the faces of the refugees we serve, my brothers and sisters, give me hope. We can and must build a better world.

To this end, JRS UK has come together with the Caritas Social Action Network and St Vincent de Paul Society to run a campaign to defend asylum grounded in our Christian faith. What we ask is simple:

1. restore the right to asylum;
2. put dignity and protection at the heart of the asylum system;
3. end immigration detention.

We warmly invite you to join us.¹²

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¹² You can find more details on JRS UK's website at <https://www.jrsuk.net/defend-asylum/>.

THE MORE UNIVERSAL GOOD

Patrick Riordan

IGNATIUS, IN THE *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, frequently invokes the ‘service of God’ conjointly with ‘the more universal good’. The references occur primarily in part VII, where the missions are treated. My purpose here is to explore what is meant by this phrase, *the more universal good*. I approach the task as a Jesuit, but with the speciality of political philosophy, a branch of practical philosophy, within which the questions of practical rationality and the requirements of good decision-making are addressed.

In addition to the text of the *Constitutions* itself and Ignatius’ letters, there are many commentators who provide useful insights for understanding what is at stake. The notion of the *criterion* is frequently encountered: it is widely considered that the more universal good is a criterion for the choice of mission. I do not find this helpful. I suggest that whatever role it might play in decision-making, this is not that of a criterion in the strict sense. It remains, then, to see what the role of the more universal good actually is.

What Ignatius Says

Ignatius uses many cognate expressions without explicitly distinguishing between them. In *Constitutions*, VII.2 [618] we find mention of advantages ‘that are common or universal’; ‘the greater service of God and the universal good’; ‘the greater glory of God’; ‘his greater service and praise’. In VII.2D [622] the superior is to have ‘the greater service of God and the more universal good before one’s eyes as the guiding norm’. Later in the same section we find the following:

The more universal the good is, the more is it divine. Hence preference ought to be given to persons and places, which, once benefited themselves, are a cause of extending the good to many others who are under their influence or take guidance from them.

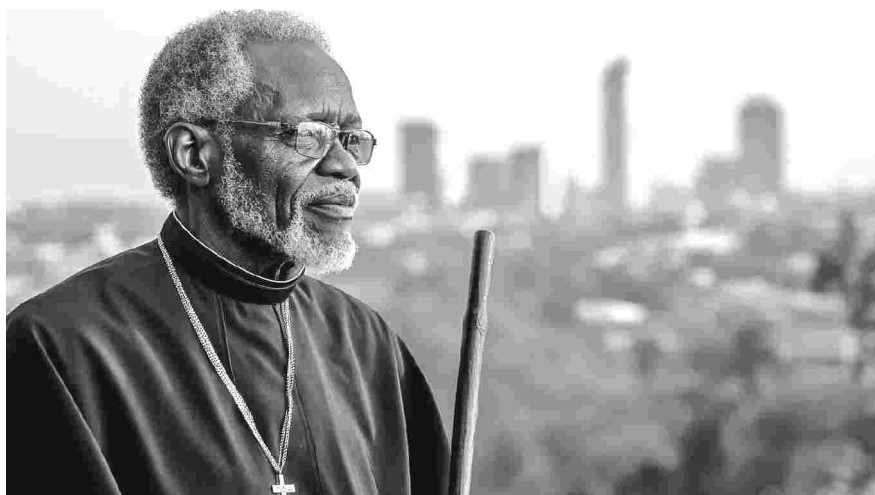
There are two further mentions of the ‘more universal’ good in the section.

Ignatius uses the expression ‘guiding norm’ when presenting ‘the greater service of God and the more universal good’ as the purpose of mission. He would seem to intend the two elements as identical: the more universal is the good attained, the more God is served. Hence, he writes of the guiding norm in the singular, not in the plural. However, the referents of these terms are so vague and unspecific that we cannot be completely sure about the singularity of the ‘norm’ in question.

Joseph Veale explores the context of the principal passage in which Ignatius refers to the more universal good. While the case of missions assigned by the general superior of the Society is the locus for its main use, the context outlines a total of four forms of missioning, to each of which a chapter is devoted. The first is the case of missions received from the Pope; the second includes missions assigned by the general; the third refers to missions where it is left to the discretion of Jesuits sent to particular places to decide how they will fulfil their mission, whether in lecturing or teaching or pastoral care, or some combination of these; and the fourth concerns the reality of Jesuits who remain in their assigned place doing their specified ministry.

Veale draws attention to an interesting assumption shaping the recommendations about the duration of missions. In *Constitutions*, VII.2 [615] we read that unless the Pope specifies the length of time for the mission, ‘it should be understood that the stay ought to last three months, and longer or shorter depending on the greater or lesser spiritual fruit’. In support of this Veale also refers to VII.2.H [626], where the nature and duration of mission is discussed. This passage recalls

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the original inspiration of the Society, which envisaged a very mobile and flexible group of individuals, designed ‘to travel through various regions, staying for longer or shorter times in accordance with the fruit that is seen’.

Does this context of frequent short-term missions require a reappraisal of the guiding norm? Even with such short assignments, it is impressive how many factors Ignatius mentions that might be relevant in a decision about sending someone to this place or that, for one purpose or another. The superior is encouraged, when other considerations are equal, to choose, among others, ‘greater need; greater fruit “through the means which the Society uses”; a greater debt of gratitude; a greater multiplying effect; greater opposition to the Society’. Veale remarks, ‘the articulations of it are an attempt to show how the norm might be applied in concrete situations. They are not to be taken absolutely or rigidly.’¹

Commentaries

Barton T. Geger roots the notion of *magis* in the overarching aim of the Society of Jesus, the *greater glory of God* (AMDG). This he interprets as equivalent to the guiding norm of the ‘more universal good’.² General Congregation 35 had explained the *magis* in these terms also: ‘our aim is to be ever available for the more universal good—indeed desiring always the *magis*, that which is truly better, for the greater glory of God’.³ Geger suggests two sources for Ignatius’ idea of the more universal good: the vision at the Cardoner and the theology of Aquinas.

The theological vision of God working and present in everything not only forms part of the intellectual illumination that Ignatius experienced shortly after his conversion, but also animates the Spiritual Exercises, especially the contemplation to attain love (Exx 230–237). Brian O’Leary stresses the theme of *de arriba* (from above), in this context. This is present in the contemplation on the incarnation, in which the exercitant is invited to see the whole earth and all its peoples, and the blessed Trinity regarding this whole history and reality of human depravity and need (Exx 106). In the contemplation to attain love (Exx 237), the

¹ Joseph Veale, ‘Ignatian Criteria for Choice of Ministries’, *The Way Supplement*, 55 (Spring 1986) 77–88, here 80–81. And see Veale’s four lengthy endnotes elaborating on each of the factors.

² Barton T. Geger, ‘What *Magis* Really Means and Why It Matters’, *Jesuit Higher Education* 1/2 (2012), 16–31, at 18–19.

³ GC 35, decree 2, nn. 16, 22.

divine perspective on the world is considered again, but now with a new emphasis. The exercitant is desiring to join in the divine activity:

And since God's goodness is universalist of its essence, our human goodness is divine through its participation in the universalist goodness of God. Hence, to choose always the greater good is to deepen this participation or, in other words, to grow more and more into the image and likeness of our Creator God.⁴

The second source identified by Geger is the theology of Aquinas, who used the terminology of *common goods*. Geger refers to Thomas' treatise *On Kingship*, which was a major influence on constitutional theory in the sixteenth century and was popular when Ignatius was studying in Paris.⁵ He speculates that this short treatise influenced the Jesuit *Constitutions*, picking out the themes of the common good, the glory of God and the more universal as the more divine. O'Leary explicitly asks about the provenance of the expression found uniquely in *Constitutions*, VII.2D.8[622]: 'the more universal the good is, the more it is divine' (*Quia bonum, quo universalium, eo divinius est*). He suggests a possible source in *On Kingship*, citing the following similar but not identical expression: 'Furthermore, the human mind knows universal good through understanding, and desires it through will: but *universal good is not found except in God*'.⁶

There is an interesting possible precursor in Aristotle, as cited by Aquinas. Aristotle, in book 3 of the *Politics*, addresses the question of whether rule by the best person is preferable to rule by law, a position espoused by Socrates in Plato's *Republic*. The core of his answer is given in chapter 16 of book 3:

Therefore he who asks Law to rule is asking God and Intelligence and no others to rule; while he who asks for the rule of a human being is bringing in a wild beast; for human passions are like a wild beast and strong feelings lead astray rulers and the very best of men. In law you have the intellect without the passions.⁷

⁴ Brian O'Leary, 'The More Universal ... the More Divine: Ruminating on an Enigmatic Dictum', *The Way*, 56/2 (April 2017), 7–18, here 16.

⁵ Geger, 'What Magis Really Means and Why It Matters', 53. He refers to St Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno ad Regem Cypri*: see *On Kingship: To the King of Cyprus*, translated by Gerald B. Phelan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Religious Studies, 1949).

⁶ O'Leary, 'More Universal ... More Divine', 17, emphasis added by O'Leary. He is citing the text as Ignatius would have read it, in the composite work *De regimine principum*.

⁷ Aristotle, *The Politics*, translated by T. A. Sinclair (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), 3.16. Aristotle had already engaged with the question of the unity of the city in book 2, chapter 2, reacting critically

Of interest to us here is the linking of universal rationality with divinity. It is the more divine situation if rule is according to law that bears the qualities of universality and rationality. Alas, we only have Aquinas' commentaries on the early passages of Aristotle's *Politics*, so it is not definite that St Thomas borrowed this thought.

The US Jesuit theologian David Hollenbach, in his book on *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, also makes the link between Ignatius in the *Constitutions* and Aquinas borrowing from Aristotle on political matters.

Ignatius harked back both to Aristotle and to Aquinas when he set forth the spirit that should govern the Jesuit order he was founding. He wrote that all the decisions of his followers should seek the broader, common good, rather than goals that were less comprehensive in scope.⁸

Hollenbach underlines the Ignatian emphasis on universality, drawing attention to the manner in which the global outreach of Jesuit missions—encountering many different cultures from the Americas to Asia—gave practical effect to the concept. He glosses the phrase we are discussing, acknowledging a possible source in Aristotle, but emphasizing the greater breadth of the Ignatian vision: ‘Thus echoing Aristotle but going well beyond him by stressing the scope of the common good, Ignatius wrote that “the more universal the good is, the more it is divine”’.⁹

Pros and Cons

In *Knowing What to Do* Sophie-Grace Chappell compares Ignatius on decision-making with the recommendations of other authors. Chappell reviews the suggestions made by Benjamin Franklin, Charles Darwin and Jeremy Bentham, all of whom recommend drawing up lists of pros and cons when faced with an important decision—as, for instance, in Darwin's case, whether to marry. While the listing of advantages and disadvantages of various options emerges as a common strategy, Ignatius' proposals from the *Spiritual Exercises* are introduced, not to underline similarities but to highlight differences.

to the view of Socrates presented in the *Republic* about the degree of unity required. There Aristotle argued from the variety and equality of the citizens: excessive unity would be inappropriate given their plurality and equal status. Law is generated from the experience of the many, reflecting a universal rationality and not a particular one.

⁸ David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2002), 5.

⁹ Hollenbach, *Common Good and Christian Ethics*, 6.

Chappell paraphrases Ignatius at length to illustrate the complexity of his approach, numbering the elements involved to stress that complexity in a comparison with the method of Benjamin Franklin. There are three occasions for making a serious choice, and in the third instance there are two possible approaches, one of which is to work on lists of advantages and disadvantages. Chappell notes the difference:

Unlike Franklin's pro and con method, the pro and con method that Ignatius offers is just two steps out of six (iv–v). The six steps (i–vi) *together* capture one of two alternative ways of deciding (3a, 3b), in one of three different possible cases for decision (1, 2, 3), where all of these three different cases are cases of choice between alternatives, all of which are already agreed to be morally permissible. To think that the pro and con method might be *just a part of one* way of deciding *one* sort of choice *between licit alternatives* is a world away from thinking that the pro and con method is, quite generally, the best method of decision, as Franklin evidently believes (at least in the case of *big* decisions, where the cases for and against any alternative are not simple).¹⁰

Chappell's principal target here is not Franklin, but utilitarians, headed by Bentham, who advocate the pro and con method as the only rational approach to decision-making—even to determining what is moral.

This book is the continuation of the argument of Chappell's earlier book, *Ethics and Experience: Life beyond Moral Theory*. The central question of ethics is specified there as 'how should life be lived?', and an important consideration is whether any moral theory provides a good answer.¹¹ *Knowing What to Do* continues the attack on moral theories, such as Kantianism, contractualism and consequentialism. Utilitarians offer several versions of the latter, but Chappell views them all as inadequate.

Knowing What to Do argues,

... this change from Ignatius, via Franklin, to Bentham, and then on to modern utilitarians or consequentialists—this dropping of qualifications, caveats and contextualising factors—is the opposite of progress. It is not a theoretical or practical advance in our thinking about how to make good decisions, but a decline.¹²

¹⁰ Sophie-Grace Chappell, *Knowing What to Do: Imagination, Virtue, and Platonism in Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford U, 2018), 12, emphases in original. She cites Benjamin Franklin's method from a letter to Joseph Priestley of 19 September 1772 (in *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, edited by Albert Henry Smyth [London: Macmillan, 1905], volume 3, 437–438).

¹¹ See Timothy [Sophie-Grace] Chappell, *Ethics and Experience: Life beyond Moral Theory* (London: Routledge, 2009), 184–185.

¹² Chappell, *Knowing What to Do*, 14.

Chappell appreciates the breadth in Ignatius' account that recognises different times of decision and raises questions about ultimate ends, about God's glory, about the whole of life and its purpose, and that advises prayer for guidance and confirmation. Knowing what to do is not a matter of applying a simple calculus, but for important decisions with serious alternative courses of action requires a complex process.

It is interesting that this reflection focuses on knowing what to do, how to live one's life, the cognitive dimension of discernment, and not on the decision as such. And with the focus on knowing, the argument made is that there is no hard-and-fast method that delivers a right answer. In contrast to the utilitarians of various hues who attempt to develop and propose such a method—analogueous to what might be thought possible with cost-benefit analysis in economic or social-policy planning—there is no single method available in the moral life. Accordingly, there are no criteria available to select definitively between options.

There is no single method available in the moral life

Criteria

What about the 'greater Glory of God', or the 'magis', or 'the more universal good'? Are these not criteria for selection between options? After all, eminent commentators present them precisely as criteria for the choice of missions. Joseph Veale uses the term *criterion* in the title of his paper on the topic. The 35th Jesuit General Congregation links the themes of *magis* and the more universal good as criteria for the discerning of mission (n.22). The term is a standard part of the commentaries on the part of the *Constitutions* concerned with the choice of missions by the superior of the Society (VII.2).¹³ Brian O'Leary also uses it liberally in commenting on these passages of the *Constitutions*. He reports that Ignatius offers 'detailed criteria for making the most fruitful decision regarding the sending (missioning) of a Jesuit', but stresses the multifariousness of criteria: 'Not all these criteria are of equal weight or always applicable. One on its own is never sufficient.'¹⁴

With this question, everything hinges on what is meant by a criterion. In the 'decline' of decision-making sketched by Chappell, focus on specific

¹³ For instance, Geger formulates it thus: 'A.M.D.G. is a specific criterion for making decisions in the service of God. We can phrase it like this: "When discerning between two or more good options, all else being equal, choose that which serves the more universal good, i.e., that which makes the widest impact".' (Geger, 'What *Magis* Really Means and Why It Matters', 18)

¹⁴ O'Leary, 'More Universal ... More Divine', 7.

criteria has replaced a complex breadth of considerations represented by Ignatius—of the circumstances of choice, the indifference of the chooser, the orientation to God's glory, the consideration of pros and cons along with a balancing of both with regard to the various options, and prayerful petition for guidance, and finally for confirmation. Bentham's weighing of pleasure and pain, or the economic consequentialism of costs and benefits, or even the vaguer measurement of preference satisfaction, all attempt to provide a definite criterion, and success or failure as measured by this criterion is taken as directive for the decision.

I am sure that Jesuit commentators who use the term *criterion* would not wish it to be understood in utilitarian terms. They would prefer a vaguer, looser usage. But current usage of the term, even outside the boundaries of moral theorizing, is to refer to something exact. In academic affairs the criteria for the awarding of grades are made ever more precise (a distinction is awarded if a grade of 70 per cent or above is attained), criteria for admission and rejection are elaborated. Criteria are that sort of thing where failure to meet them leads to exclusion, or rejection.

The Common Good

How then are we to interpret 'the more universal good' if not as a criterion? With David Hollenbach I propose that this phrase be understood as we would understand 'the common good' today.¹⁵ The notion of common good has a very general meaning, drawing on Aristotle's claim that whoever acts, acts for some good. Taking it one step further, whoever cooperates with others in action, acts for a good in common. There are as many common goods as there are forms of cooperation.

As the city or political community (*polis*) is taken to represent the highest possible form of cooperation, so its good is taken to be the highest possible good. Aristotle calls it 'the good life'. This is beyond survival, life itself. Aristotle cannot say exactly what constitutes the good life, but he can say what it is not. The political community is '*more than* a non-aggression pact, and *more than* a mutual guarantee of rights, and *more than* the contract for the exchange of goods and services', all possible

¹⁵ See chapter two, 'The Common Good: A Heuristic Concept', in Patrick Riordan, *A Grammar of the Common Good: Speaking of Globalization* (London: Continuum, 2008); see also Patrick Riordan, *Global Ethics and Global Common Goods* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

forms of association recognised in his day.¹⁶ But what that ‘more’ is, Aristotle does not explain in detail beyond some pointers about concern for the moral formation of citizens, and lawmaking to train them in virtue and in noble actions.

In exploring the meaning of ‘more universal good’, the repeated references to what is *more* must awaken our curiosity. The dynamic of pointing to the ‘always more than’, distinctive of Aristotle’s practical philosophy, is redolent with connotations of the greater, more universal good. Franz Meures notes that the word ‘more’ occurs over 550 times in the *Constitutions*, 49 times in the chapter on mission alone.¹⁷ Meures warns against applying the term in the context of discernment, as if it were a matter of measuring something that could be counted. But to clarify what the more, better, or greater might mean, he invokes the dynamic of becoming more Christlike. This is clarified by reference to a principle suggested by Ignatius at the end of the rules for election: ‘For everyone ought to reflect that in all spiritual matters, the more one divests oneself of self-love, self-will, and self-interests, the more progress one will make’ (Exx 189).

Here is a similar dynamic to that found in Aristotle. Where, for Aristotle, the pursuit of the good life—understood in terms of noble activities—is more than the assurance of security, the guarantee of rights and the provision of goods and services, the ‘more’ for Ignatius is the love of God and God’s glory, commitment to do God’s will, and to pursue the reign of God in place of self-love, self-will and self-interest. The goal of this dynamism towards the more—whether the Ignatian greater divine glory or the Aristotelian good life—is not something



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¹⁶ Patrick Riordan, ‘Human Happiness as a Common Good: Clarifying the Issues’, in *The Practices of Happiness: Political Economy, Religion and Wellbeing*, edited by John Atherton, Elaine Graham and Ian Steedman (London: Routledge, 2011), 207–215, here 207.

¹⁷ Franz Meures, ‘The Ignatian *Constitutions* and the Gift of Discernment’, in *The Lord of Friendship: Friendship, Discernment and Mission in Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: Way Books, 2011), 133–150, at 135–136.

that is known in detail and that can be described so that measures of achievement can be identified.

The naming of the end is a heuristic, an aid to the dynamic of discovery, but not the articulation of a content definitely comprehended and fully known. Hence, it is misleading to use the term *criterion* about the prescription of the more universal good or greater glory of God. These prescriptions point to an end that is ultimately beyond the human capacity to comprehend. There is no possibility of human measuring from the standpoint of the goal. However, there may be a possibility of assessment from the other pole.

Inclusivity

While the common good in the political context is heuristic, it is possible to formulate two criteria related to the common good, based on Aristotle's own distinctions. If the purpose of the political community is to be a *common* good, then it could only be such if it does not systematically exclude any individual or any group of persons from a fair share in the good for the sake of which they cooperate. This is the first criterion, modelled on Aristotle's concern that rule be for the good of all, and not merely for the good of the rulers, whether one, few or many. And if the purpose is to be a *common good*, then it could only be such if it does not systematically exclude or denigrate any genuine dimension of the human good. This second criterion is modelled on Aristotle's evaluation of different constitutions in terms of their conceptions of human good, whether expansive or constricted.

As we have seen, Aristotle relied on the phrase translated as 'always more than' to identify the conception of the human good which would be satisfactory and comprehensive without being able to say exactly what it is. The common good, the good life in Aristotle's sense, names something which is already known, but only vaguely. In that sense it is heuristic: it names something yet to be fully discovered, but the two criteria help in the process of discovery. This process of discovery advances, not incrementally by adding more and more bits of knowledge of the end, but by excluding elements that are discovered to be unsatisfactory relative to the end.

Is the process of discovering the will of God perhaps similar to that of political thought? The history of our social life reveals it as a process of overcoming exclusions. The early Christian community had to overcome the tendencies towards exclusiveness that would have confined

Christianity as a marginal Jewish sect, and opened itself to welcoming Gentiles. Spanish scholastics at the time of the colonisation of South America had to confront the attitude that excluded native peoples from humankind and from the offer of God's grace.

Antisemitism, racism, sexism, discrimination against people of various identities, feed the agenda of contemporary public discourse. Progress is slow and difficult: it is a process of negation of negation, overcoming exclusion, but every correction and moment of learning is partial. We overcome past failings to some degree but are still far from achieving the desired goal of the common good. That remains an aspiration, a heuristic, towards which we strive. The application of the first criterion that there be no systematic exclusion of individuals or groups from a share in the good pursued together illustrates the functioning of a criterion. It permits the identification of breakdown, failure, but not the certification of achievement.

The Double Negative and Heuristics

The 'more universal good', the 'greater glory of God', are frequently spoken of as criteria for the choice of missions in the Society of Jesus. The tendency of commentators to repeat this uncritically is linked to Ignatius' specification that 'preference ought to be given to persons and places which, once benefited themselves, are a cause of extending the good to many others who are under their influence or take guidance from them' (*Constitutions* VII.2D [622]). This is frequently qualified as the 'multiplier effect', lending weight to the tendency to think in terms of counting and measurement.

Should missions be addressed to individuals or to groups? On the one hand Ignatius seems to prefer a concentration on groups but, on the other hand, some individuals can become channels to many others. Much depends on the position and character of those individuals. There is no possible measure or calculus that would enable the decision-maker in most instances to identify the better course of action. Reference to the 'more universal good' as a criterion of choice in this context is imprecise at best, and meaningless and possibly deceptive at worst.

All the factors spelt out by Ignatius that might be taken into consideration when a superior is deciding on missions and choosing men to send on them could be read by analogy with the common good and its criteria. There is the heuristic of the greater glory of God, the more universal good, but the other factors to be checked, as noted in

Constitutions VII.2D[622]—duration, purpose, place, need, fruitfulness, means available, debt of gratitude owed, multiplier effect, opposition to the Society—all point to aspects that could undermine the wisdom of the decision to be made. They do not ensure, individually or cumulatively, that the decision taken will in fact achieve the greater glory of God. Instead they reassure that the decision will not be flawed by an inappropriate narrowness of purpose, vision or trust in God. Their application is a process of negation of negation, but the double negative does not of itself produce a positive.

My conclusion is that we should cease to use the terms *criterion* and *criteria* in this sense when speaking of these thoughts from Ignatius on the choice of ministries, keeping in mind the heuristic nature of the notions of God's greater glory, and the more universal good. 'Reasons' or 'considerations' might be less distorting. Like the common good, the more universal good is a heuristic notion that guides the aspirations, desires and decisions of those who wish to serve God. There is no possible assurance that the more universal good is ever attained—it must elude the grasp of any who strive for it. At the same time, there is the possibility of discounting projects or proposals for one reason or another.

The various considerations enumerated by Ignatius allow for some confidence in dismissing some options as inappropriate, perhaps because the identified need is not so great, or the expected benefit from the investment of resources of manpower or materiel is not great, or the impact beyond the immediate beneficiaries is minimal, or for similar reasons. We can be more assured about the rejection of proposals intended to serve the greater glory of God, or the more universal good, than about the delineation or attainability of those ends themselves.

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SENT INTO THE WORLD

Ignatian Mission and the Lay Vocation Today

Gemma Simmonds

A Spirituality Without Walls

THERE IS A STRUCTURAL ODDITY at the heart of the Ignatian tradition that has never been satisfactorily resolved and perhaps should not be. The *Spiritual Exercises* were written before the Society of Jesus existed, tested on lay people as much as on clergy, and addressed—in Ignatius' own annotation—'any means of preparing and disposing our soul' (Exx 1) for encounter with God and discernment of vocation. The *Constitutions*, composed in the last fifteen years of Ignatius' life, were written for a very different purpose: the governance of a clerical religious order operating under papal obedience. These are not parallel documents. They do not address the same audience, presuppose the same conditions, or generate the same kind of Christian life. Yet the history of Ignatian spirituality has repeatedly produced the temptation to treat the *Spiritual Exercises* as a pipeline into the *Constitutions*—as formation for a mode of life that resembles, however imperfectly, the life of a Jesuit.

The lay Ignatian tradition at its best resists this temptation. What the Exercises offer is not a junior version of the Jesuit vocation but something theologically distinct: a formation of the whole person for encounter with God in the full texture of his or her actual life, and for the apostolic action that such encounter generates. Jerónimo Nadal's insistence that the Society's vocation was to find God not in the choir or the cloister but in the world as contemplatives in action, with the world as its house, applies with particular force to lay people for whom the world is not a missionary deployment but a permanent condition. The lay Ignatian is not a Jesuit manqué. They are the people for whom the *Spiritual Exercises* were, in a real sense, originally written.

This distinction matters with some urgency at the present moment, when the Ignatian tradition faces a set of challenges and opportunities

that the framework of Jesuit institutional ministry is, by itself, inadequate to address. The thinning of the Society in Britain—fewer novices, ageing communities, the consolidation of apostolic works—makes the dependence on lay partnership not merely desirable but structurally necessary. But necessity is a poor theological argument. The case for a robust and theologically serious lay Ignatian vocation rests not on the Society's need for assistance but on the charism itself: on the fact that the Exercises generate a form of apostolic life that is, in principle, available to everyone who makes them seriously, and that the world they are sent into is one that ordained Jesuits, however gifted, cannot reach exclusively by themselves.

What the Exercises Actually Offer

The structure and content of the Exercises need no rehearsing in this publication, but it is worth dwelling on the specific capacities that a serious engagement with the Exercises develops, capacities that turn out to have a quite precise purchase on the cultural and ecclesial situation of our current time in the global north, at least.

The Rules for the Discernment of Spirits are perhaps the most undervalued element of the Exercises in popular Ignatian culture, which tends to foreground the imaginative contemplations and the election while treating the rules for discernment as technical apparatus for the retreat director. This is a mistake with consequences. The rules for discernment, particularly those of the Second Week, addressed to people of genuine spiritual seriousness, offer a remarkably sophisticated account of how the soul is moved: how consolation and desolation operate; how the enemy of human nature works through apparently good impulses; how the 'angel of darkness' presents itself as an angel of light and is to be tested by examining where a chain of thoughts, feelings and impulses ultimately leads. These are not merely intra-psychic observations. They describe the dynamics of any situation in which human beings are being pulled in different directions by movements that feel compelling, but whose origins and destinations may lead to damaging results.

The application to the present cultural moment is not forced. Public life across the Western world is currently characterized by a polarisation in which the capacity for genuine discernment has been almost entirely replaced by reactive identification with tribal positions. Cancel culture, as its critics rightly observe, operates through a logic of



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consolation and desolation that Ignatius would have recognised immediately: the warm glow of solidarity with the in-group, the cold shame visited on those who deviate from it, the way in which what begins as a genuine moral concern is captured by a spirit of condemnation that forecloses the very conversation it claims to advance. Partisan polemics of left and right alike exhibit what the Second Week rules identify as the characteristic strategy of the evil spirit with those making progress: the gradual, apparently reasonable movement from a genuine insight towards a conclusion that, examined carefully, produces darkness, division and the closing off of relationships rather than their repair.

Persons formed in the rules for discernment have a tool for navigating this landscape that is simply not available to those who have not been so formed. They have learnt to ask of any strong movement of feeling—whether of outrage, righteousness, contempt or enthusiasm—where it is coming from and where it leads. They have learnt that the strength of a feeling is not evidence of its spiritual validity. They have learnt to sit with complexity and resist the pressure towards premature resolution that tribal culture constantly exerts. They have learnt, in short, the discipline of not being swept away, which is not the same as detachment or disengagement, but is rather the condition of genuine engagement: the freedom to remain present to a person or a situation without needing to resolve it in ways that serve one's own need for certainty.

Ignatius' observation in the Second Week rules that the evil spirit works differently on those making genuine spiritual progress than on those still mired in sin has a particular relevance here. It is not the obviously destructive impulse but the apparently righteous one, the one

that presents itself as justice, as truth-telling, and as the necessary defence of the vulnerable that most requires examination. The person who has never made the Exercises may be forgiven for mistaking the energy of moral outrage for the movement of the Spirit. The person who has made them seriously has been trained to notice that consolation without prior cause requires particular scrutiny, and that a movement which begins in genuine moral concern and ends in the dehumanisation of the opponent has, somewhere along the way, changed its master.

This is a form of apostolic competence that the Exercises develop and which the Church, in its formal ministry, rarely names or deliberately cultivates. That it can be offered by lay people trained in Ignatian accompaniment, whether in spiritual direction, in the facilitation of discernment processes or in the patient one-to-one conversation that the Exercises prescribe, is not incidental. It is the point. The cultural moment calls for people who can accompany others across difference without either collapsing into false agreement or hardening into hostile opposition. The Exercises form exactly these people, and they do so regardless of the director's denomination, political affiliation or institutional membership.

The Ecumenical Fact

This last point opens into what is perhaps the most significant and least adequately theorized dimension of Ignatian spirituality in the contemporary scene: its ecumenical reach. The Exercises are practised, and Ignatian spiritual direction sought, by Christians of virtually every tradition—Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Reformed, Quaker and others—in numbers that no formal ecumenical initiative has come close to replicating. This is not a recent development: the work of Gerard W. Hughes, whose *God of Surprises* reached an audience far beyond the Roman Catholic Church, and of the many retreat houses and director training programmes that have consistently welcomed non-Catholic participants, has created over several decades a *de facto* ecumenical community of Ignatian practice whose significance has not been proportionately acknowledged.

The Jesuit-sponsored but ecumenically open centres across the world, along with lay-led programmes such as the Retreat in Daily Life offered by CLC communities and independent groups of trained directors, have generated a constituency of non-Catholic Christians for whom Ignatian practice is simply part of their spiritual life: not a Catholic

thing they have borrowed, but a resource of the whole Church that happens to have been systematised by a sixteenth-century Spaniard.

The ecclesiological implications of this fact are sharpening as the pastoral landscape changes. Across most of the mainstream Christian denominations in the West, the parish or congregation as the primary locus of spiritual formation is under structural pressure from two directions simultaneously: declining clergy numbers mean that regular access to a priest, minister or pastor is increasingly difficult to secure, while the de-localisation of daily life and the dissolution of geographically bounded communities in favour of networks defined by interest, profession and affinity rather than neighbourhood mean that the territorial parish is, for many people, no longer the natural centre of their Christian belonging even where it remains physically accessible.

The Church of England, which has responded to this pressure with a combination of benefice mergers, the deployment of lay readers and fresh expressions of Church, is discovering what Catholic dioceses undergoing the same process have found: that the pastoral relationship between minister and people cannot be maintained at a level that sustains serious spiritual formation when one person is responsible for several thousand souls across half a dozen communities. The question of where people are to find the core of their spiritual life, and the community that sustains it, is genuinely open in a way it has not been for centuries.

The Exercises and the networks they generate offer one answer to this question that is striking precisely because it is not geographically bounded. The relationship between a directee and a spiritual director does not depend on proximity to a particular building or membership of a particular congregation. The community of Ignatian practice: directors, CLC groups, retreat-house networks and the broader constituency of those formed in the Exercises, constitutes a form of spiritual belonging that is relational and apostolic rather than territorial and institutional. For the Anglican in a benefice too large for the vicar to offer more than occasional contact, for the Methodist in a circuit whose minister serves six congregations, for the Catholic in a parish that has lost its resident priest, the Ignatian network of accompaniment offers something that their denominational structures, however much they may wish otherwise, are currently unable to provide.

***A form of
spiritual
belonging that
is relational
and apostolic***

To name this clearly is not to propose Ignatian spirituality as a substitute for the sacramental and ecclesial life of the Church, an ecclesial docetism that evaporates the institutional Church into a network of spiritual friendship. It is to observe that the Exercises have always generated community as a by-product of apostolic formation, and that this community has historically proven able to sustain Christian life in conditions where institutional structures are absent or inaccessible. The recusant experience in Elizabethan England—in which the Jesuit mission depended entirely on lay networks and the sacramental life of the Roman Catholic community was maintained through the initiative and courage of laypeople in whose houses Mass was said and whose children were educated in the faith at considerable personal risk—is not merely a historical curiosity. It is a demonstration that Ignatian formation produces exactly the kind of lay apostle capable of sustaining a Christian community when institutional resources fail.

Women, Ministry and the Exercises

There is one dimension of this argument that deserves to be stated with more directness than it usually receives in Ignatian circles. The Roman Catholic Church's restriction of ordained ministry to men forecloses, for Catholic women, access to the most publicly recognised and institutionally supported forms of apostolic service. Spiritual direction in the Ignatian tradition is not one of them. The giving of the Exercises, the accompaniment of people in retreat, the formation of directors, the leadership of Ignatian communities—none of these requires ordination, and all of them constitute genuine apostolic ministry in the fullest theological sense: the work of bringing people into transformative encounter with God and accompanying them in the discernment of their response.

This is not a consolation prize. The ministry of spiritual accompaniment is, as any serious reading of the Exercises makes clear, among the most demanding and consequential forms of apostolic work available within the tradition. Ignatius' own annotations make explicit that the director's role is to allow God to work directly on the retreatant, to stay out of the way of that work rather than to substitute for it, and that this requires of the director a quality of spiritual freedom, theological formation and personal discipline that is in no respect less rigorous than what is required for ordained ministry, and in some

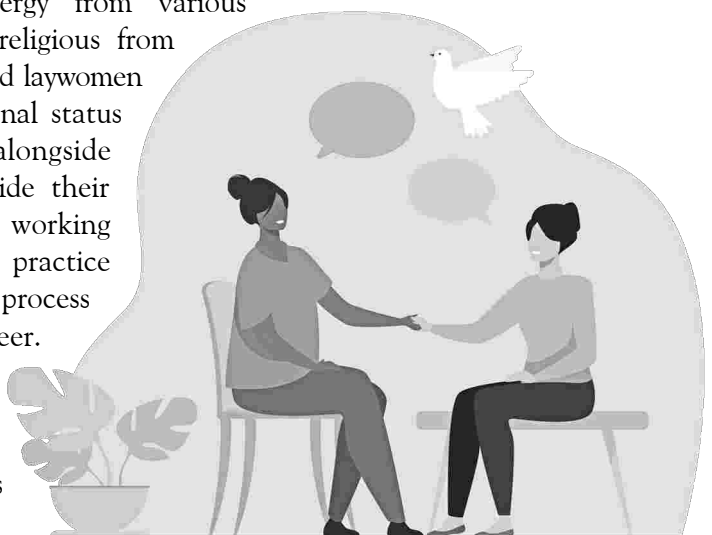
respects more so. The director who gives the Exercises badly causes harm; the director who gives them well accompanies a transformation that is, in the directee's own experience, among the most significant events of their Christian life.

Women have been doing this work in the Ignatian tradition for centuries, and doing it with a distinction that the tradition has not always been willing to name clearly. The trained directors who lead retreats at the many smaller retreat houses and Exercises-in-daily-life programmes across the country include a significant proportion of women religious and laywomen from various Christian traditions. Their ministry is, in the practical experience of those they accompany, simply indistinguishable from the best of what ordained ministry offers in its contemplative and formative dimensions. The Exercises create a field of mission for Catholic women that is not merely tolerated by the tradition but is positively demanded by it: the need for trained directors vastly exceeds the supply, and the quality of accompaniment is determined by formation and charism, not by sex or ordination.

The broader point is structural. At a moment when the question of women's ministry is generating significant conflict in several Christian traditions, the Ignatian tradition offers a practical demonstration that women exercising genuine apostolic authority in the accompaniment of souls is not a theological novelty but an established practice with a serious and growing constituency. The training programmes for spiritual directors that have developed worldwide have consistently formed women directors whose competence is recognised across denominational boundaries. Women clergy from various

denominations, women religious from multiple congregations, and laywomen with no formal institutional status practise this ministry alongside one another and alongside their male counterparts, in a working ecumenism of apostolic practice that no formal dialogue process has managed to engineer.

This does not resolve the canonical questions that are raised by the Roman Catholic Church's



restriction of ordination. It does suggest that the anxiety about those questions, wherever it is felt, might productively be examined through the lens of the rules for discernment: where does the resistance lead, and what does it produce in the Church, and in the women whose vocations it constrains?

Negotiating the Secular Age

Charles Taylor's account of the secular age as a condition in which belief has become one option among many, a background hum of immanence against which transcendence must be actively sought rather than simply received, describes with some precision the environment in which the Ignatian lay mission is currently conducted.¹ The response this environment calls for is not, however, the one it most readily receives from Roman Catholic institutions: a defensive consolidation of the existing community of the already-formed, or a programme of apologetics aimed at reversing the tide of secularisation. The Ignatian response, properly understood, is more like what a good director does in a retreat: it meets people where they actually are and takes their experience seriously as the arena in which God is encountered. It accompanies them towards a recognition that the desire they are already carrying—for meaning, for depth and for a way of living that is not simply the management of preferences—is not a desire that the secular age can satisfy.

***An
encounter
with a God
who makes
demands***

The extraordinary growth of interest in silence, contemplative practice and what the culture calls mindfulness represents a genuine spiritual hunger that the Ignatian tradition is unusually well placed to meet, but only if it is willing to be clear about what distinguishes it from the broader wellness market. The distinction is not superficial. Ignatian practice is not self-improvement. The Examen is not a gratitude journal. Discernment is not decision-making optimisation. What the Exercises offer is an encounter with a God who makes demands, who interrupts retreatants' preferred narrative about themselves, who calls them to a freedom they did not know they lacked and an apostolic engagement they did not know they wanted. James Hanvey has put the risk precisely: the Ignatian tradition has a remarkable capacity to engage with the whole

¹ See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard U, 2007).

of human reality, but it needs always to be rooted in God, otherwise it becomes secularised anthropology, a set of useful practices detached from the theological ground that gives them their particular character and power.²

The clerical abuse crisis, which has done more damage to the credibility of the Roman Catholic Church than any development of the past fifty years, is directly relevant here. What the crisis revealed was not only the criminal behaviour of individual clergy but the structural consequences of a Church in which power was too heavily concentrated in clerical hands and lay voices were too easily disregarded. A spirituality built around the rigorous examination of one's actual motivations, the regular subjection of one's judgments to the scrutiny of a director and a community, and the cultivation of freedom from the need for status and approval is, in principle, precisely the kind of formation that should generate resistance to the conditions in which abuse flourishes. That it did not prevent abuse within Jesuit institutions is a matter of public record and institutional shame that the Society has acknowledged, including at General Congregation 36.³ The deeper response the crisis demands is not, however, primarily procedural. It is ecclesiological: the renewal of a genuinely lay-led apostolate in which clericalism—the deference to the clerical persona which enabled abusers to operate with impunity—has no purchase, because laypeople formed in Ignatian discernment have learnt to trust their own experience of God rather than to surrender it to institutional authority.

The Jesuits' Universal Apostolic Preferences of 2019–2029 show the way to God through the Exercises and discernment; walking with the excluded; accompanying young people; and collaborating in the care of our common home. They represent the Society's own attempt to name what a genuinely apostolic response to the present moment looks like. They are admirable as a map. The question for the lay Ignatian community worldwide is whether they function as an aspiration or as a genuine programme of action.

The Ignatian lay community in the so-called developed world is disproportionately white, educated and professionally secure. Walking

² James Hanvey, 'Ignatius of Loyola: Theology as a Way of Living', *Thinking Faith* (30 July 2010), at https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20100730_1.htm.

³ See 'Building a Culture of Safeguarding in the Society of Jesus', at <https://www.jesuits.global/2025/10/23/building-a-culture-of-safeguarding-in-the-society-of-jesus/>, accessed 8 June 2026.

with the excluded—with migrants and asylum seekers, with those whom contemporary immigration systems are designed to break, or with the economically and socially marginalised—requires a willingness to let the Universal Apostolic Preferences interrogate the community's own comfortable assumptions rather than simply to affirm them. The Jesuit Refugee Service UK, which accompanies asylum seekers and refugees through a system of deliberate hostility with a patience and solidarity that draws explicitly on Ignatian formation, offers one model of what this looks like in practice. It is a more demanding model than most Christian communities have yet fully embraced.

The Unfinished Deliberation

In the spring of 1539, in Rome, the first companions gathered to deliberate about their future. The record of the *Deliberatio primorum Patrum* shows a group of men reasoning together about whether to bind themselves to one another and to a common obedience, or to remain available, individually, for whatever mission presented itself. They chose community and obedience. But what is striking about the *Deliberatio*, read now, is less the conclusion than the method: a sustained communal discernment in which each person's experience of consolation and desolation in prayer was brought to bear on a practical question of the highest consequence, and in which no decision was reached until the movement of the Spirit had been tested, repeatedly and from multiple angles, against the criteria that the Exercises had taught them to apply. It is a method used by Pope Francis when he urged a synodal process on the Church as a whole.

That method is available to any community formed in the Exercises. It does not require Jesuit governance or clerical authority. It requires people who have learnt, through sustained practice, to distinguish the movements of the Spirit from the movements of their own need, and who are willing to subject those movements to communal testing. The Ignatian lay community across the world today has, in principle, exactly this capacity. Whether it has the courage to use it on the questions that actually press—on the Church's response to the abuse crisis, on the inclusion of the marginalised, on the exercise of women's ministry, on the engagement with a post-Christian culture that is spiritually hungry and institutionally suspicious—is the deliberation that remains unfinished.

The Exercises do not promise that this deliberation will be comfortable. The Second Week contemplations on the Two Standards,

the Three Classes of Persons and the Three Degrees of Humility are not invitations to affirmation. They are invitations to a freedom that most people, most of the time, actively resist: the freedom to hold nothing back, to seek not the consoling but the true, to follow where the Spirit leads rather than where preference and habit and institutional loyalty direct. Ignatius designed a process that begins in the acknowledgement of sin and limitation and moves, through encounter with the person of Jesus, towards an election, a committed, discerned choice about how one is called to live. That process is as available now as it was at Manresa. The world it sends people into is, in its essentials, the same world: one in which the desire for God is everywhere present and everywhere obscured, and in which the person who has learnt to find God in all things is not a spiritual virtuoso but a missionary, sent.

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THE MOVEMENT OF THE SPIRIT IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

Igniting Migrant Communities

Laurien Nyiribakwe and Isaac Mutelo

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC significantly reshaped how individuals relate and connect. For many people, especially within diaspora and isolated communities, it highlighted the essential role that digital media play in nurturing spiritual engagement and growth. Platforms such as Zoom and YouTube Live, whose use increased during the pandemic period, have become crucial channels for faith, supporting the Church's mission of building authentic relationships in the contemporary world. Inspired by Pope Francis's call to 'communicating hope and trust in our time' and Pope Leo XIV's vision of 'networks of relationships, of love, of gratuitous sharing'. I shall explore how these virtual spaces sustain cultural identity and counteract the spiritual isolation that often accompanies displacement.¹

For the dispersed faithful, particularly those living away from their native land, virtual communities sustain cultural identity and mitigate what Pope Francis called the 'spiritual desertification' of secular Western societies.² This raises an important theological and pastoral question: to what extent can digitally mediated encounters sustain authentic Christian communion in the absence of physical presence? I argue that that digital spaces not merely act as supplementary tools for the Church, but have become authentic sites of actual spiritual encounter, cultural preservation and missionary activity, especially for migrant and diasporic communities.

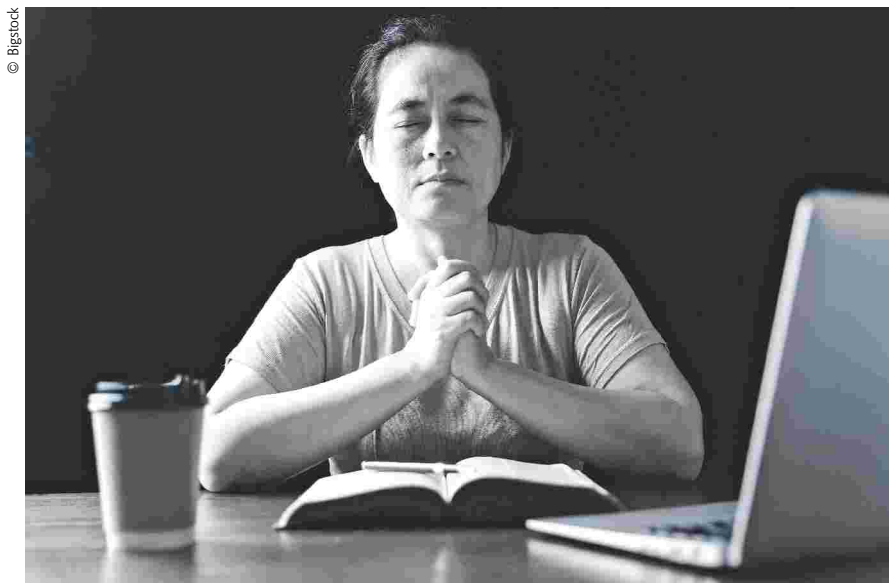
¹ See Pope Francis, 'Communicating Hope and Trust in Our Time', message for the 51st World Communications Day, 24 January 2017; also Mario Knezović, Iko Skoko and Davorka Topić Stipić, 'Pope Francis' Messages for World Communication Day', *Southeastern European Journal of Communication*, 2/2 (2020), 51; Leo XIV, greeting of the Holy Father to influencers and digital missionaries, 29 July 2025, n.3.

² Pope Francis, address to the World Communion of Reformed Churches, 10 June 2016.

The Church's Call to Digital Mission

Digital technology has become an important aspect of the Church in the contemporary world. In situations of isolation, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or when migrants are alone in a foreign country, virtual Masses, adoration and bible studies can help to maintain a sense of community across physical distances. The Church's engagement with digital spaces resonates in various papal statements. Pope Francis consistently framed digital communication as a significant pastoral responsibility, urging believers to serve as communicators of hope who bring Christ's presence into digital environments.

This approach reframes digital communication not as a neutral tool, but as a space requiring intentional pastoral discernment, ethical responsibility and spiritual depth. Pope Francis envisioned communication that transforms participants into 'fellow travelers' marked by attentive listening and accompaniment in times of struggle.³ Pope Leo XIV has significantly advanced this vision. In a recent address delivered via live YouTube link to over 16,000 people at the 2025 US National Catholic Youth Conference, he epitomized a thoughtful and balanced approach to technology. He affirmed that technology, 'lets us stay connected with people who are far away' and 'gives us amazing tools for prayer', while



³ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, nn.8, 48, 64.

emphasizing that it must never supplant the unique grace of in-person relationships and sacramental presence.⁴

The Pope highlighted the use of technology in the service of faith rather than allowing faith to serve technology. His broader mission is to ‘go and mend the nets’ and knit ‘networks of relationships, of love’ that alleviate loneliness and foster authentic online encounters, always seeking ‘the “suffering flesh of Christ” in every brother and sister you encounter online’.⁵ Thus, the digital mission is not simply about visibility, because it includes presence—an incarnational presence that seeks encounter, accompaniment and transformation within communities.

Digital Evangelization as a Missionary Frontier

In 2025 the Roman Catholic Church held a jubilee event for digital missionaries and influencers. The event, organized by the dicastery for evangelization and the dicastery for communication, brought almost 1,000 Catholic digital missionaries and influencers from all over the world to Rome.⁶ It responded to a request from Pope Francis during the Synod on Synodality (2021–2024), which stressed the need to share the Good News online, so no one is left out. This shows how the Church wants to reach people on the edges of today’s society.

Such a development signals an important ecclesiological shift; that is, the recognition of the digital world not merely as a medium, but as a ‘place’ of mission with its own cultures, languages and pastoral demands. Digital missionaries share the joy of the gospel through social media, video sites, blogs and apps, expressing their Christian faith in the online world. Digital evangelism involves many ways for people to teach and spread the gospel message and conduct prayer sessions using digital media.

Digital Spaces as Spiritual Spaces

For globally dispersed communities, the digital mission addresses an intense need for connection and identity. The experiences of Africans and Asians in the diaspora are particularly indicative. According to Es’kia Mphahlele, displacement creates an experience of lack of cultural

⁴ Leo XIV, ‘Pope Leo XIV’s Digital Meeting with American Youth during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC)’, 21 November 2025, video and text available at <https://www.ncregister.com/news/pope-leo-speaks-to-youth-ewtn-digital-encounter>.

⁵ Leo XIV, greeting of the Holy Father to influencers and digital missionaries, nn. 3, 2.

⁶ ‘The Digital World Needs Hope’, *L’Osservatore Romano* (8 September 2025); and see <https://www.digitalismissio.org>.

and spiritual identity in a new environment: 'We are ... exiles, who abandoned our traditional shrines'.⁷ He recalls the poet Kofi Awoonor:

And the exiled souls gather on the beach ...
Should they return home
And face the fences the termites had eaten
And see the dunghill that has mounted on their
birthplace?⁸

Today technology plays a critical role in counteracting such loss, enabling communities to pray in their native languages and celebrate cultural occasions, thereby sustaining their identity. In this context, digital platforms function not merely as communication tools but as essential spaces of rerooting, where displaced persons reconstruct the sense of meaning, belonging and spiritual stability.

Models of digital ministry are exemplified by initiatives such as The Rosary Team in the United States, a volunteer network that prays the rosary with residents of care facilities for the elderly three times weekly. When in-person visits are not feasible, volunteers pray 'over the phone or video', ensuring that housebound elderly—many from diaspora backgrounds—retain a vital connection to communal prayer in their native languages and experience the support of the wider Church.⁹

The work of Yoseph Dau and Yofince Abatan examines how Catholic youth in the parish of Santa Maria Assumpta, Kupang, Indonesia, use digital media in their religious practices:

The findings highlight how young Catholics perceive online platforms as natural extensions of devotion, while parish leaders stress the importance of safeguarding sacramental integrity and communal bonds. Rather than replacing tradition, digital practices reframe faith through hybrid forms that blend accessibility, creativity, and community participation.¹⁰

Their study offers insights for the Roman Catholic Church in engaging with young people's use of technology, not to replace the traditional

⁷ Es'kia Mphahlele, 'Africa in Exile', *Daedalus*, 111/2 (Spring 1982), 29–48, here 38.

⁸ Kofi Awoonor, 'Exiles', in *Night of My Blood* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 23.

⁹ John Touhey, 'These Volunteers Found a Way to Bring Mary to the Elderly', *Aleteia* (24 October 2023), at <https://aleteia.org/2023/10/24/the-rosary-team-prays-for-peace-with-elder-care-residents/>. See *The Rosary Team* at <https://therosaryteam.org>. Both accessed 16 June 2026.

¹⁰ Yoseph Lodowik Deki Dau and Yofince Abatan, 'Negotiating Faith in Hybrid Spaces: Digital Catholic Practices among Youth in Eastern Indonesia', *International Journal of Current Science Research and Review*, 8/8 (2025), 4399–4408, here 4399.

way of praying, but as an extension of their devotion to sustain community bonds across significant distances.

Similarly, the Shalom International Online Prayer Group, a charismatic Catholic community founded in Brazil, generally offers weekly online prayer sessions, including *lectio divina*, bible study and praise. It is designed to help people worldwide connect and pray together, providing a 'virtual yet real' experience of community and spiritual formation. On its testimony page, Carmela, a member from Canada, notes:

I look forward to Sunday mornings because I begin my day and week with the Shalom International Online Prayer Group. I like being able to pray with and befriend Catholics from all over the world. We can talk about our lives and our struggles. The music is just lovely. We have very meaningful talks and are blessed to have amazing guest speakers. The Bible study helped me develop a routine and grow in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. My latest challenge is to remember the birthdays of everyone in the group.¹¹

Divine Retreat Centre UK (DRC UK) is another initiative, this time originating from Kerala in India, under the direction of the Vincentian Congregation. Their website states:

Since our inauguration in 2014, hundreds of thousands of people have walked through our doors and experienced the touch of Jesus. These physical doors closed in 2019 as COVID began, but God opened the virtual doors to online ministry and allowed millions to walk through. As well as our in-person and online services, DRC UK also carries out outreach retreats, social work, fundraising events, and charity work.¹²

Online prayer groups offer a significant connection for believers, fostering a sense of community and shared faith across geographical distances. In his guide to setting up such a group, Richard John notes that these virtual gatherings provide consistent spiritual support and a platform for believers to pray for one another, strengthening their personal faith journeys and the broader Christian community.¹³ Virtual

¹¹ 'Shalom International Online Prayer Group: Spreading the Charisma Shalom around the World', *comShalom* (14 May 2020), at <https://comshalom.org/en/shalom-international-online-prayer-group-spreading-the-charisma-shalom-around-the-world/>, accessed 16 June 2026.

¹² 'About Us', *Divine Retreat Centre UK*, at <https://www.divineuk.org/about-us/>, accessed 16 June 2026.

¹³ Richard John, 'Online Intercessory Prayer Groups: A Guide to Virtual Faith Communities', *Living Words* (11 June 2022), at <https://livingwords.in/blogs/catholicism/online-intercessory-prayer-groups>, accessed 16 June 2026.

communities represent an important missionary expression of the universal Church, thereby contributing to a synodal vision that extends beyond physical boundaries. As the Final Document of the Synod on Synodality testifies: 'The internet, constituted as a web of connections, offers new opportunities to better live the synodal dimension of the Church'.¹⁴

Knitting Tradition into the Digital Nets

Within these virtual environments, popular piety not only persists but also adapts in innovative ways. Such adaptation invites critical reflection on the nature of participation, that is, whether digital engagement fosters deeper communal belonging or risks creating a more individualised and passive form of devotion. As Paul Soukup writes:

At their best, these technologies open a way to greater union; at their worst, they foster an individualism and the projection of a false unity. The combination of the affordances of ecclesiological traditions and the affordances of technological possibility can correct the limitations of each: where the technology may foster individualism, the ecclesiology counters with community.¹⁵

The practice of praying the rosary through Zoom virtual meetings is an example. Rather than merely replicating traditional forms, the digital medium is integrated: the Zoom chat serves as a present-day 'prayer petition sheet' inspiring a dynamic, scrolling indication of the community's joys and worries. This approach brings participants into what Philip Butler called a 'zoomiverse': 'a fringe digital ecclesiastic space due to its ability to bring people together around conversations and the desire to share time/digital space together'.¹⁶

Technological tools such as mobile applications also offer guided prayers, and there are several audio-guided meditations accessible online and through apps, as well as interactive prayer walls which allow believers to view and submit prayer requests in real time. Apps such as *Amen* and *Hallow* offer guided prayers and meditations; *Pray as You Go* provides

¹⁴ 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission. Final Document', 25 November 2024, n.113, available at https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf.

¹⁵ Paul A. Soukup, 'A Practical Challenge to Ecclesiology and Self-Understanding of the Christian Churches', in *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church: Theological Reflections on a New Normal*, edited by Heidi A. Campbell and John Dyer (London: SCM, 2022), 33–44, here 40.

¹⁶ Philip Butler, 'Beyond the Live and Zoomiverse: Recognizing Opportunities for Spiritual Connection outside Live Preaching/Church', in *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church*, 155–166, here 159.

10–15-minute prayer sessions each day, combining music, scripture and reflections; while *Universalis* delivers the daily Liturgy of the Hours. The information on the *Pray as You Go* app notes: ‘We are here to support your daily journey, inner journey and lifelong journey with God Our aim is to help you to: become more aware of God’s presence in your life listen to and reflect on God’s word.’¹⁷

Similarly, the *Click to Pray* platform, an official app of the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network, continues to connect thousands of believers globally to pray for the Pope’s monthly intentions.¹⁸ It includes a prayer wall where users can share requests and pray for others. Believers can follow the daily readings and the Liturgy of the Hours on their smartphones using *iBreviary*, while *Laudate* provides easy access to the Bible and Catechism.¹⁹ These examples show how digital technology has revolutionised Catholic prayer with ‘on-the-go’ devotion and connecting the faithful to global prayer networks.

Digital practices do not simply replicate tradition, but reconfigure it, generating new forms of communal expression shaped by technological mediation. Such innovation is consistent with pre-existing cultural liturgical traditions, such as the Black Catholic movement represented by Fr Clarence Rivers.²⁰ Digital spaces extend the work of cultural affirmation, enabling the ‘wondrous gift of diversity’ described by Sr Thea Bowman to be shared with the universal Church.²¹ The United



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¹⁷ ‘Pray As You Go—Daily Prayer’, at <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=pl.foxcode.prayasyougo> and <https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/pray-as-you-go-daily-prayer/id865934048>.

¹⁸ See <https://clicktopray.org>.

¹⁹ See <https://www.ibreviary.com/m2/breviario.php>; https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.aycka.apps.MassReadings&hl=en_GB; <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/laudate-1-catholic-app/id499428207>.

²⁰ See Clarence Joseph Rivers, ‘Thank God We Ain’t What We Was: The State of the Liturgy in the Black Catholic Community’ (1986), in *Black Catholic Studies Reader: History and Theology*, edited by David I. Endres (Washington, DC: Catholic U. of America, 2021), 133–140.

²¹ Thea Bowman, *We Are Beloved: 30 Days with Thea Bowman*, edited by Karianna Frey (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 2021), 35. Bowman continues, praying: ‘While we all look, sound, and worship differently, your love for humanity is a story that extends beyond human limitations and understanding’.

States bishops' vision that 'the presence of brothers and sisters from different cultures should be celebrated as a gift' is thereby realised in the online context.²²

Migrants as Missionaries: Digital Accompaniment

The global migration crisis can be seen as a significant spiritual challenge. Fabio Baggio, the Vatican's under secretary for migrants and refugees, has written of a 'growing political exploitation of the fear of the other' and 'regrettable episodes of racism and xenophobia that seemed to be past history'. In his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis declared that any mindset or behaviour among Christians that regards migrants as 'less worthy, less important, less human is unacceptable, since it sets certain political preferences above deep convictions of our faith' (n.39). For him, migrants are 'missionaries of hope'.²³

Leo XIV quotes this expression in a reflection on the Church's longstanding social teaching, going beyond traditional understandings of mission as geographically bounded to present it as a dynamic and reciprocal exchange shaped by movement, displacement and encounter.

In a special way, Catholic migrants and refugees can become missionaries of hope in the countries that welcome them, forging new paths of faith where the message of Jesus Christ has not yet arrived or initiating interreligious dialogue based on everyday life and the search for common values. With their spiritual enthusiasm and vitality, they can help revitalise ecclesial communities that have become rigid and weighed down, where spiritual desertification is advancing at an alarming rate.²⁴

Migrants become evangelizers, sharing their stories of resilience as a powerful witness, revitalising host communities that may be turning secular, particularly in the West.

Yet, this mission is frequently undertaken in profound isolation. Here, in some cases, digital communities emerge not as optional supplements but as essential structures of accompaniment that mediate

²² 'Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope. A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States', n.43, available at <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/strangers-no-longer-together-on-the-journey-of-hope>, accessed 16 June 2026..

²³ Pope Francis, message for World Mission Day 2021, 6 January 2021.

²⁴ Pope Leo XIV, message for the 111th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 4–5 October 2025.

presence, care and solidarity regardless of the barrier of distance. Beyond simple online prayer, they enable isolated communities and individuals to embody practical solidarity, transforming their isolation in the open arms and heart of a merciful Church through shared information and networks of care.²⁵ 'In the Church their diversity is to be grounded in a profound unity. Through the members of the Church, solitary migrations are to end in the embrace of solidarity.'²⁶

A digitally connected Church that embraces the physically displaced represents a contemporary expression of the preferential option for the poor—a cornerstone of the liberation theology championed by Jon Sobrino and powerfully reiterated by Pope Francis.²⁷ Pope Francis explicitly called the Church to 'reach out to all the peripheries', including 'the digital highway ... a street teeming with people who are often hurting, men and women looking for salvation or hope'.²⁸ This pastoral mandate extends liberation theology's foundational commitment to prioritising the most vulnerable; as a study group of the Synod on Synodality affirmed, digital engagement is 'a way of living out the Church's social mission, and a new dimension of the preferential option for the poor'.²⁹

Through the strategic use of digital tools, the Church can create networks of accompaniment that seamlessly traverse both virtual and physical boundaries. Understanding digital culture as a 'network of networks' that reflects 'unity in diversity', the Church is called to make its online presence a place of 'significant connection' and communion, so that even the most geographically and socially distant are served within a community that transcends all borders.³⁰

²⁵ Border Bishops and Bishops Responsible for Ministry with Migrants in North America, Central America and the Caribbean, 'Pastoral Letter to the People of God, the Laity, Pastoral Ministers, Consecrated Women and Men, Priests, Bishops and All People of Good Will', nn. 43–46, available at <https://www.humandevlopment.va/content/dam/sviluppoumano/news/2025-news/03-marzo/el-paso-card-baggio/carta-pastoral-ENG.pdf>.

²⁶ National Conference of Catholic Bishops and United States Catholic Conference, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), available at <https://www.usccb.org/committees/pastoral-care-migrants-refugees-travelers/welcoming-stranger-among-us-unity-diversity>, accessed 16 June 2026.

²⁷ See Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008); Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, nn. 186, 187.

²⁸ Pope Francis, 'Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter', message for the 48th World Communications Day, 1 June 2014.

²⁹ For a Synodal Church: Study Group 3, *The Mission in the Digital Environment. Final Report*, 3, available at https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/process/implementation/10workinggroups/final-reports/sg3/SG-3_ENG_Final-Report.pdf.

³⁰ Study Group 3, *Mission in the Digital Environment*, 5; Antonio Spadaro, *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet* (New York: Fordham U, 2014), 43.

The Digital Parish

The experience of digital ministry has constituted a significant period of collective discernment. It has prompted the Church to consider whether a community united by faith, hope and love can be limited by physical distance. Evidence from papal dialogues to administrative local parish assemblies, and to devotional groups indicates that it cannot. This insight invites a reimagining of ecclesial presence, where communion is not confined by physical proximity but is sustained through networks and platforms of faith, interaction and shared spiritual experience and practice.

Without replacing the traditional parish, the digital parish should not today be regarded as a lesser church; rather, it represents a distinct expression and an extension of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. In our swiftly changing world it reflects what the Jesuit superior general Peter-Hans Kolvenbach called ‘creative fidelity in mission’, which ‘presses us to be continually inventive, incessantly on the move, for there is always more service to pursue’.³¹ It does not diminish the centrality of sacramental life, but rather situates digital engagement as complementary. This extends the Church’s pastoral reach while maintaining its incarnational core.

Within this perspective, the dialogue between technology and the service of faith embodies the principle of being a ‘contemplative in action’—a phrase employed by one of St Ignatius’ first companions, Jerónimo Nadal—which entails seeking intimacy with God not through withdrawal but in all areas of life.³² Today that includes digital environments. This approach requires a ‘gaze transformed by charity’ which recognises Christ in the suffering neighbour and attempts not only to alleviate suffering but also to address underlying social conditions.³³

According to Pope Francis,

What are needed are new pathways of self-expression and participation in society. Education serves these by making it possible for each human being to shape his or her own future. Here too we see the importance of the principle of subsidiarity, which is inseparable from the principle of solidarity.³⁴

³¹ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, ‘Creative Fidelity in Mission’, *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* (CIS), 95 (2000), 25–40, here 31.

³² See MHSJ MN 4, 651.

³³ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, n. 186,

³⁴ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, n. 187,

Strategic initiatives by the dicastery for communication, such as the 'Faith Communication in the Digital World' programme for young people working in digital media, integrate digital and in-person experiences, uniting devotion and action in service to a Church that is authentically synodal and missionary.³⁵

Digital communities have become a crucial expression of the universal Church's synodal vision, extending its embrace to all, regardless of geophysical boundaries. This vision calls for commitment to the 'Church within and without walls', a community that is both digital and incarnated by in-person encounters. In particular, it remains essential fully to embody the call to solidarity with migrants and isolated groups. Here digital community can function as a sacramental of accompaniment, serving as a sacred sign that opens individuals to grace. For dispersed migrants, it provides crucial nourishment in different ways, supporting cultural and spiritual identity and guarding against alienation. And in welcoming the stranger, whether physically present or encountered online, the Church welcomes Christ Himself.

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³⁵ See <https://www.comunicazione.va/en/progetti/progetto-faith-communication.html>, accessed 26 June 2026.

ENTERING INTO PEOPLE'S LIVES

Ignatian Mission

Marion Morgan

I WONDER HOW I DARE begin to write about Ignatian mission when my words will be read by people who have given their lives to following Christ in the way of Ignatius and have studied it so profoundly. But I am one of the countless laypeople who have been inspired by St Ignatius and who have found deep healing and meaning and purpose in life through the experience of Ignatian retreats. So I shall share some of what it means for me and how it gives a sure foundation and guidance to a life which is inevitably lived in the middle of a secular world, often at the front line—in the company of those who desperately need to turn to Christ.

Lay people frequently have to live in two worlds at the same time, each having its own rules and perceptions, each having its own consolations and sufferings. This is where Ignatius excels: his vision embraces both dimensions at once. The Principle and Foundation sets the overall scene, and includes the cosmic, timeless awesomeness of God as well as the blessed life of a human being with all its limitations, and the world in which we actually live and love and grow and act.

When, at the beginning of the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are looking down at the world and considering the possibilities for redemption, they are looking at the actual state of creation—in time—and the human world—as it is—with all its gifts and achievements and unimaginable sins. They are considering mission. And as Michael Ivens stresses in *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, it is a Trinitarian mission: ‘the exercitant contemplates the Trinity as transcendent, majestic, “above” the world; but also as the God of the world, the God who in Christ enters the world’.¹

¹ Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary. A Handbook for Retreat Directors* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), 93.

God's gaze and purpose embrace every aspect of our living: our hearts, soul, mind, intellect and actions. God's gaze extends to the end of the universe, and beyond, but also to the smallest creature of creation, and everything in between. God is not vengeful; but God is very thorough. If God can count every hair of our head and notice when a sparrow falls to the ground, then there is no doubt that God wants us to be perfect. But God is prepared to wait and go at our own pace. It is often we who get impatient and want to rush the process. God is not just looking on but actively engaged in the decision and the action. God does not stand on the outside and simply judge what is going on; God is integral to the whole plan. And how does the plan evolve? By God, with the consent of Mary, entering into the whole of creation with the purpose of changing it from within, and redeeming it from its wrong choices and sin.

Maybe this is the key to the Ignatian understanding of mission. We, too, enter into people's lives. We learn to understand where they are coming from, and gently take it from there. This first means exercising a great respect for every person. It means engaging with that person's thinking, learning of his or her journey so far, gently introducing different perspectives along the way if appropriate. It means keeping to a certain extent up to date with the thinking and actions of the world around us so we can engage in informed discussion. Dialogue is paramount.

There are, of course, other ways of evangelizing. We have the great preachers and evangelists who proclaim God's goodness, God's plan of salvation, the future of the damned, the truths of moral life, the glories of heaven. They inspire—and convert—many. But that is not normally the way of the people with whom we may engage in our daily lives. Ignatian mission is not all about bombarding people with doctrine or even the Bible. It is about listening to them, finding common ground, and gently leading them onwards.

Everyday Evangelization

If we look at the scripture records of Jesus' mission it is a string of individual encounters with ordinary people. Of course there are large sections of teaching as well, but the stories present teaching in a very direct way. Healing miracles, forgiveness of sins, loving actions—think of Jesus' insistence on seeing Jairus' daughter in spite of being told there was no point because she had died—all point to a new way of living and a different set of values.

The imaginative contemplations of the Exercises bring this immediacy and relevance to our existing circumstances sharply to the foreground. We move from abstract thought into everyday reality. Meditating imaginatively on the storm at sea (Exx 279) draws totally on our present circumstances. How rough is our sea at the moment? What was possibly an unnoticed aspect of our own life is suddenly brought into sharp focus. Our actual life events and happenings are as important in our thinking and prayer and pondering as the holy truths we contemplate on other occasions. Once again Ignatius has bridged the gap between the things of God, the eternal, and our real-life experience. We are not leaving the things of this world in order to contemplate the things of the next: we are bringing our whole selves and life to our encounter with Truth.

Of course, wordless contemplation has its place. It gives perspective to the whole of life. But Christ's incarnation, His coming right into our human lives, must always be an underlying consideration, if not a starting point. Jesus noticed things and events and reacted to them. He felt sadness over Jerusalem; he was irritated that the fig tree was barren; he rejoiced and praised God at the beauty and variety of the flowers of the field. He noticed the widow's small offering. He praised the great faith of the centurion. He used his fully human nature and behaved as a mature, rational human being, with human emotions.

Ignatius takes our ordinary life and circumstances seriously, as Jesus did. Ignatius takes the arrangement of your room seriously: the amount of light which is appropriate, your own position in prayer. Every detail is important. So even when we are just starting to engage with someone who has expressed an interest in the things of God, we should take

***Real mission
and conversion
get to the very
roots of a person***

note of the person's reactions and preferences with only minor comments until we see the whole picture clearly. Real mission and conversion get to the very roots of a person and also extend to the social life around him or her. This takes time: months, years or even a lifetime. It is not a one-off decision. It means saying 'Yes' to the promptings of the Spirit with consideration and care throughout our life ... until we may, at last, truly see the presence of God working in all things, including our once-wretched selves.

Ongoing Conversion

Of course, we cannot be effective in any sort of mission unless we are in the process of ongoing conversion ourselves. Effective mission is the work of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The closer we are to Christ and

the more attentive to the urgings of the Spirit, the more fruitful we are enabled to be.

This may take many forms—think of Philip, who was translated to the desert to convert the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–39). We may one day be prompted by the sunny weather to go for a walk without noticing anything out of the ordinary. But in the providential will of God, we find ourselves engaging in a significant conversation with a stranger doing the same thing. We may ask, ‘How did this happen?’ but in our hearts we know the answer. We may never know the outcome of these encounters in this life.

Many encounters with new people happen through a chance conversation. Someone will start talking to you and, after a time, he or she will ask you about your own life. Just this morning, a woman was telling me about her childhood and that she had stopped going to church when she was fourteen. It was after a session with the community choir that I belong to, based at the local city farm. She had asked me if I sing much elsewhere and I simply said that I sing with the church choir. It moved on from there. I mentioned cheerfully that, at the age of 84, like me, one does start thinking about death and what comes next and whether or not it is a good idea to start preparing for it. She certainly listened. She was in her fifties: maybe it will start her thinking. She asked me if I was a Catholic and which church I went to. What did we sing? I mentioned that we now sing some parts in Latin and she asked me to sing something. I sang *Agnus Dei*—‘Oh I know that! I have heard it!’ she exclaimed delightedly. We had found some more common ground.

In order to assist in our availability for such encounters, Ignatius’ emphasis on detachment is immensely important. We may need to re-evaluate our existing, ongoing commitments. Some are, of course, non-negotiable: marriage and family obligations, our own health and energy reserves, strong commitments already made. But, on the other hand, we may find ourselves more flexible than we imagine. Do we really need to go to every meeting of an organization or social group that we have joined? Could we miss one in order to help someone in urgent need—mental, physical or spiritual? Do we actually find ourselves too booked up with regular commitments to allow the Spirit a free hand? Are there any commitments or responsibilities which can be handed over to others?

This is a process familiar to those of us who are ageing. If adjustments are made prayerfully and decisions enacted with courage and the help of the Lord, then we may find ourselves still fruitful, but in ways for



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which there had previously been neither time nor energy. Conversely there will be things we cannot do any more. Many of us are no longer able to go on retreats: we cannot travel to them; we cannot afford them; we do not have the energy for them. But there are services available to us online which can be very helpful. Just chatting with friends over coffee or tea can be a great source of nourishment if we spend some of the time talking about spiritual matters. If we are attentive and even imaginative there are many ways of fulfilling our spiritual needs. This is the beauty of Ignatian spirituality: there are no limits to its scope. It includes all aspects of our personality, including our changing limitations, health and all normal enjoyments of creation. At any stage of life we are, we can still praise reverence and serve our Lord God!

For younger people, guidance in discernment is crucial for their happiness in the future, as they choose the path ahead. Here Ignatius is an expert. Once again, his advice in the *Spiritual Exercises* is both practical and mystical. We lay Ignatians have no permanent structure to follow throughout our lives. In some ways, we make our structure up as we go along, according to many changes of circumstances. But the principles remain the same. Ignatius offers concrete ways of discerning the right path, using all our human faculties: our prudent judgment, our deep reactions, our abilities to investigate possibilities. He not only gives us visions and reasons for our being here: he also gives us practical methods for living wisely. When we are ‘converted’, the whole being can be engaged: body, mind, soul and heart—in the words of the *Suscipe*, ‘all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will’ (Exx 234).

Missionary Thinking

In the late eighteenth century, a group of Flemish weavers wanted to come to Bristol to work but insisted that they had to be able to attend Mass, which was at that time completely unavailable in Britain. Bristol Corporation, practical as ever, allowed them their wish and so it was that a Fr John Scudamore SJ came over and celebrated a regular Mass for them in an old warehouse, close to what is now the bus station.

The mission grew and a small church, dedicated to St Joseph, was built in Trenchard Street in 1790, at the expense of the Jesuits with some private donations. This is now owned by a housing association, but the curved wall of the apse still remains and the presbytery across the small garden stands as before. Meanwhile a substantial worship building on the waterfront, used for a few years by the Irvingites, became vacant and was bought as a larger Catholic church. It was consecrated as St Mary-on-the-Quay in 1844, the first Roman Catholic parish in Bristol since the Reformation. In time the congregation of St Joseph's joined them and the earlier building became part of the parish school. There were many ups and downs and twists of fate. (A parishioner, Kenneth Hankins, published a full account of the history in 1993 entitled *In My Father's House*. Copies are still available from the church.) But, in 1997, the Jesuits left.

After a few years being run by the diocesan priests, we are now fortunate to be staffed by priests from the Society of the Divine Word, another large missionary order who came here in 2004. And missionary thinking is what is needed! All the buses now stop in the city centre. There are five major hospitals on our doorstep (the eye hospital, the dental hospital, the oncology centre, the children's hospital and Bristol Royal Infirmary). We are also very near Bristol University. The church is open every day with a Mass at lunchtime, and many people call in for quiet prayer, a break from the bustle outside, or comfort.

Like many churches in our area, we are very multicultural and have a vibrant community with well-attended Sunday Masses and social and teaching groups for all ages. All this sprang from the very small initiative by the Jesuits in the late 1700s and the work of Fr Scudamore (1696–1778). The seed he planted is still growing and flourishing. Maybe the greatest advantage of St Mary's is the opportunity to engage with individuals, of all ages and backgrounds, who come seeking help. That is how I arrived. I had come to Bristol knowing no-one (like so many foreign students now); St Mary-on-the-Quay had a good youth club so I went along to try it out. That is how it all started.

An elderly priest came to sit with me and asked me about myself. 'I am odd', I said. 'I like people like Gerard Manley Hopkins' (this was in 1969, before he became so widely known). 'Do you know he was a Jesuit?', he answered. No, I didn't, and a year later I was received as a Catholic. It was the beginning of a healing experience and a lifetime of being able to serve the Lord.

Parish Work

Parish ministry in some ways appears to be the poor relation in Jesuit activity, in comparison with the Society's work in education, justice or social action, but it is intensely valuable. It can mean long hours of patient one-to-one engagement, accepted with deep gratitude and a desire to repay with a lifetime of service. Although we understand the reasons behind the closure of so many Jesuit parishes, very many people are sad that there are no longer priests to staff them. They are such a vital way of meeting people, including non-Catholics, those in distress, those needing deep healing. Parish work is not as dramatic as some other initiatives, but it holds countless unseen possibilities.

When I came to Bristol, at the age of 25, I had only ever once spoken to a Catholic priest, and that was a short interview connected with my job. I don't think I had ever spoken to a religious, male or female. I am not aware that I had any Catholic friends. Today is so very different. Two-thirds of those enrolling for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) in our local parish say they have come because they researched on the internet and felt the Roman Catholic Church was the best option for them. Many of the RCIA intake say their interest in the Church came through exploring the internet. I now help teach with the RCIA group and am pleased to recommend online sites such as *Pray as you Go*, *Prego* and *Thinking Faith*.

They come from all over the world: India, Nepal, China, Vietnam and Africa as well as all over the UK. Many are university students who mix with people of other religions in their classes. Some are drawn to a more contemplative life or maybe another spirituality. But for those who are just looking for an approach to faith, Ignatian teaching is an excellent way in. It respects the paths of knowledge they have already chosen and works on the principle that God is in all things. It can be tailored to the individual, as well as to the programme of teaching.

Providentially, by the grace of the Spirit, laypeople are now increasingly involved in working with other laypeople through

one-to-one encounters and engagements. Training is offered in dioceses and there are many secular support groups for people with specific problems—for example, the loss of a loved one—where we can often offer particular insights which are relevant and helpful to the whole group. And we can all learn where other people are coming from and accept help from them also. We are learning to cooperate and intermix with others, and learning to think our way to accepting Truth, as well as giving our adherence to familiar doctrines.

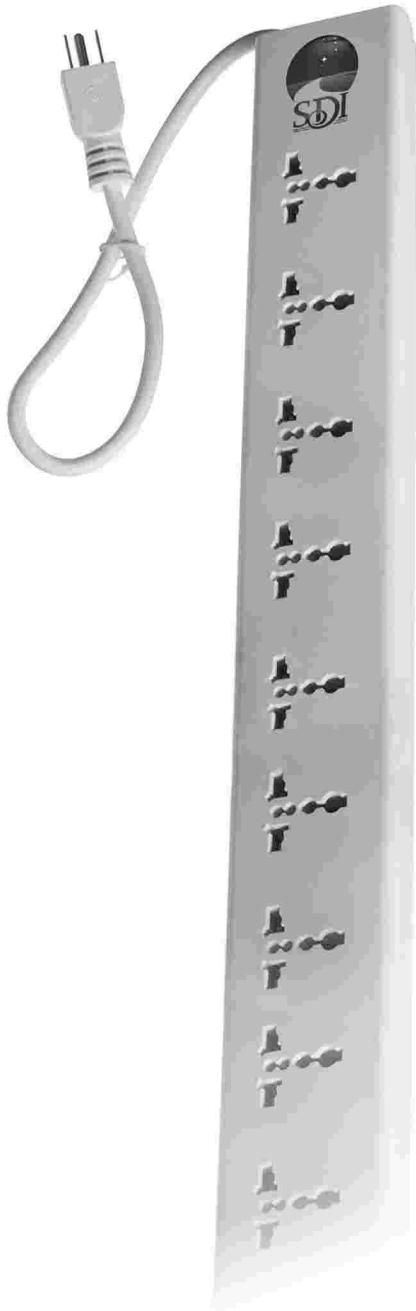
There are many laypeople who directly encounter evil, and its companions: suffering and retribution. We can all see evidence of violence, wrongdoing, injustice all around us, as well as the beauty of creation. Even though Ignatius' language is from a much earlier century, his advice is valid. But we cannot counter this on our own. If we do come across someone in the depths, we need the help, strength, power and experience of the priesthood and the sacraments. We need the community of the Church to encourage and protect the victim, and those who care for him or her. We need the close presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit to show us what to do.

But we also need all hands at the pump. This is, of course, what the synodal pathway is about. With more and more educated or trained lay people sharing the load and spreading the good news, mission in our own country has at last a possibility of blooming. And the activities of all those who have encountered Ignatian spirituality should most certainly help, be they ordained or lay. What is our message to the world? If the core of the Ignatian mission lies in the Principle and Foundation, where do we start? I suggest:

1. by listening to the person or persons with whom we wish to engage;
2. by the example of love for God and others;
3. by others seeing the good we may do and glorifying the Father in heaven.

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THE MISSION OF CREATION IN THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

James Hanvey

Collaborating, with Gospel depth, for the protection and renewal of God's creation¹

IN THE PRESENT ecological emergency a renewed attention is needed to the theology and spirituality of creation. Although there is great richness in the Christian tradition, especially spiritually, the challenge for theology is to get beyond the now rather sterile debates between creationism and evolution, and beyond a version of science which reduces the whole ecosphere to an 'object' over which humans strive for instrumental mastery. In the latter, religion has also played its part. In the light of our scientific knowledge, not only of the natural world but also of the specific ecologies of other animals, we need a theology of creation that is more complete and that furnishes humanity with a deeper understanding of its vocation to the whole ecosphere.

There is a particular need to develop an ecological ethics that goes beyond necessity to a recalibration of our place in the natural world and a reordering of our relationships aside from economics, politics and exploitation for human benefit at the expense of other systems of life. Even more than this, however, and prior to it (or at least conjointly with it), we need to set aside our prejudices and come to a more expansive epistemology and ontology that appreciate the spiritual nature of all life forms and their interconnectedness: that the life of the cosmos exists within a dynamic transcendence immanent to all things and all degrees of being. This means that nothing is purely for itself, and nothing is sufficient in itself. This is implicit in the very nature of being created.

In exploring and testing the validity of this understanding, ecology forms a useful and urgent site of cooperation between religions, and

A longer version of this article may be found at <https://dimensions.faith/the-mission-of-creation-in-the-spiritual-exercises/>.

¹ Society of Jesus, fourth Universal Apostolic Preference, at <https://www.jesuits.global/uap/introduction/>, accessed 8 June 2026.

especially between believers and non-believers. It is remarkable how many ecological movements recognise the need to root their positions in spirituality (theist or non-theist), which can bring about and sustain the change in personal, political, economic and cultural systems. Despite President Trump's claims that climate change is a 'con job' and green energy is a 'scam', people recognise the vested interests of an exploitive capitalism that is largely self-serving.²

Although the recovery of a Christian theology of creation has brought many new and pertinent insights for developing an integral ecology, most fail to start from the reality of the resurrection's restoration of creation and the human place within it. The resurrection is not only a radical alternative to our own present understanding, especially the limits of that understanding; it also discloses a new reality within time and matter that is not alien to them but nonetheless closed to us. As the starting point for a theology of creation, the resurrection requires a wholly new approach to ontology and temporality. It requires us to inhabit creation in a transformed way and be aware of the new potentialities for life and creativity that it brings. Obviously, such a theology requires a much more substantial treatment than is possible here, but I want to suggest that one resource for a renewed theology of creation lies in the *Spiritual Exercises*, especially in its presentation of the resurrection and the *Contemplatio ad amorem*.

Creator and Lord

We are not going to find a rapturous hymn of praise like St Francis's *Laudato si'* in the writings of St Ignatius. That does not mean that Ignatius is not aware of creation. One of the popular hallmarks of Ignatian spirituality, the rather overworked mantra of 'finding God in all things', certainly suggests that he does have an appreciation of the natural world and God's presence in it.³

One of the most common expressions for God found in Ignatius' writings is 'Creator and Lord'. He is remarkably consistent in his way of speaking and referring to God, and his expression is always grounded in the experience that it also invokes. Naming God this way is not rhetorical, nor does it reflect a formal theological statement. Rather, it

² President Trump's speech to UN, 23 September 2025, at <https://www.rev.com/transcripts/trump-speaks-at-un>.

³ In the *Autobiography*, Ignatius records how creation, especially the stars and night skies, is a source of joy and consolation for him (n. 11).

describes and creates a relational space of encounter with God as immanent as well as transcendent: it presupposes the whole process of the Exercises. So, when it occurs in Ignatius' writings, whether in formal public texts such as the *Constitutions* or routine correspondence, it has a performative and evocative purpose.

For the Exercises, the experience of God the Creator and God (Jesus Christ) the Lord and saviour are inseparable, and they are united in the cross (Exx 53). To know and love God is to do so under both aspects and to understand their unity as christologically and pneumatologically shaped. The experience of 'Creator and Lord' effectively locates us before a God who is active in our world and in our existence. It serves to order our relationship to creation as well as situate our self-understanding and purpose. It contains a vision of our place in the natural world and our responsibilities to it, which is deeply woven into the *Spiritual Exercises* and Ignatius' other writings. Our object here is first to offer a sketch of this vision and, second, to make some suggestions for its relevance to our current ecological discussions and urgent concerns.

The Salvific Work of Creation

God is the primary cause and end of all creation; He is that from which all beings flow and that to which they return. The being of all things is directed towards God as their end.⁴

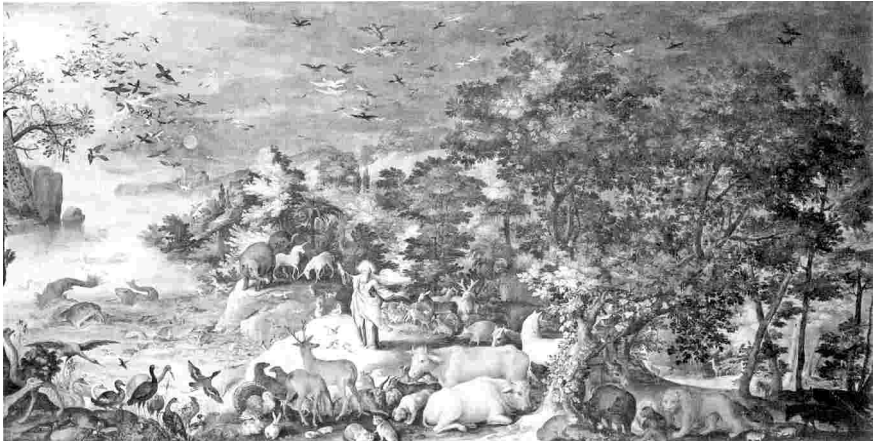
The Principle and Foundation

The Principle and Foundation (Exx 23) not only establishes the whole purpose of our lives as 'to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord', but also places us in a relationship with all the things that are created to help us attain our end. Although the Principle and Foundation is presented almost as a syllogism, within it is contained the whole existential drama of our dynamic freedom, our place before God and within creation. It is the drama of salvation itself in which we are enlisted. The Principle and Foundation proposes both an ordering of the will in freedom and an ordering of the understanding by which all things are known through God, their creator and redeemer. This does not lessen but enhance their uniqueness and value, for now they are known within the natural and graced relationships by which they are created, sustained, and given life and the hope of glory.

⁴ Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation* (New York: Oxford U, 2019), 222.

At first, it may appear that we are being encouraged to have a rather instrumental approach to creation. The desire to make ourselves ‘indifferent’ to all created things and to ‘use’ them in so far as they help us to our end may support this reading. However creation is presented as the gift of the Creator to help us to attain our salvation. Instrumentalising it would run into two dangers: either dishonouring the gift by making it work to our own purpose and not that for which God has created it, or making it the source of our salvation itself, endowing it with a power that it cannot have. Both scenarios would also exclude the capacity of creation to enable the incarnation, to which it is intrinsically ordered. We rob creation of its glory by appropriating it to the service of our own will in a ‘perverse imitation of God’, as Augustine perceived.⁵ When this is the case, creation itself is prevented from participating in salvation; it becomes ‘subjected to futility’—a futility which we have imposed upon it (Romans 8:20–22). Whether as instrument or idol, we distort creation and prevent it from attaining its own end, which is to bear witness to the Creator and Lord.

The Principle and Foundation remind us that we too are ‘created’ and, therefore, part of creation itself. Indeed, we can already hear an anticipation of our particular mission: not only to strive for our own salvation in Christ but also to work with Him for the salvation of all created things. This ‘mission’ turns on our freedom—our ‘indifference’.



Landscape with the Creation of the Animals, by Jan Brueghel the Elder, early seventeenth century

⁵ St Augustine, *Enarrationes in psalmos*, 70.2.6.

What is envisaged is a liberated desire for God that puts all our relations in their proper order. This is not the autonomy of the sovereign subject who owes nothing to anyone or anything but him- or herself—a subject who stands over creation, whose fundamental relation is one of instrumentalisation and utility.

The freedom that the Principle and Foundation asks of the human subject is that of a service—ultimately the ‘praise and reverence’ of the Divine Majesty—in which the human person realises the graced plenitude of his or her own existence. The proper ‘use’ of created things is the grace that allows them to help us towards our end and also to achieve theirs. This reciprocity is the hallmark of Ignatius; it requires first that we appreciate all created things, seeing in them the life that God has given them, the purpose for which God has made them and our redeemed (converted) relationship to them.

God's Presence in Creatures

This way of seeing, or understanding, is a significant transformation, which can be detected in the difference between the General Examen (Exx 32–43), which forms part of the First Week, and the *Contemplatio ad amorem* (Exx 230–237) in the Fourth Week. The structure of the General Examen is traditional: we are asked to prepare for confession under the categories of thoughts, words and deeds. Under words, we are asked to consider how we might offend God by swearing or blaspheming (Exx 38). Swearing by a creature or by the Creator becomes a misuse of the former (idolatry) and a dishonouring of the latter. However, ‘those who are perfect’ can swear by the creature without causing offence because they grasp that God is present in all things by ‘essence, presence and power’ (Exx 39) and, therefore, they are actually honouring the Creator.

The threefold mode of God's presence in creatures is a well-established position in medieval scholasticism.⁶ What is interesting for us is how Ignatius understands that reverence is due to the creature because of the Divine presence in it. For those who have a pure desire and love of God, then, the creature too is re-perceived and valued. Here we are already looking forward to the fruits of the whole Spiritual Exercises in the *Contemplatio*. In the journey between the First Week and the *Contemplatio*, we come to experience God's salvific presence in all things. Creation can no longer be treated independently of God's redeeming

⁶ See St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1, q. 8, a. 3.

activity, of which it is a part, and the grace in which it shares. Now we can truly find God in all things because we have come to find or know them in God. Creation has been restored to its own grace and not distorted into an idol.

Conversion and Redemption

Even within their preliminary considerations, the Exercises do not ask us to stand outside creation; they profoundly relocate us in communion with it. In so far as our relationship with God is healed to enable the 'praise, reverence, and service' of God alone, creation, too, is honoured, healed and served. It is loved in the right way, freed from our own exploitative rapaciousness, the depth of which becomes vividly apparent in the First Week—and which must surely have an ecological dimension—before we come to 'respect and reverence' (Exx 39).⁷ This is not a disinterested neutrality but an attentive respect and care that liberates creation from our wounding distortions and misuses.

Another important dimension which emerges from this is the active participation of our freedom in God's salvific labouring and working (Exx 236) in creation and in history. Effectively, this is the capacity we have, by virtue of our redeemed and converted freedom (towards God), to bring good out of suffering. God gifts humanity with a unique freedom because it is only in this freedom that the person can love and return love, and therefore realise the *imago trinitatis* which each one carries.

The ground of this is our *imitatio Christi*, and it is given in the third mode of humility and the contemplation on the incarnation in the Second Week of the Exercises, as well as in the Third Week. In this way, the Exercises open up a new resource in the debates about gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God in creation. Viewed from the Ignatian perspective, the problems presented for a theodicy cannot be answered independently of the crucified and risen Christ, and the immanent redeeming and sanctifying mission of the Holy Spirit, who restores, renews and directs our freedom to participate in the mission of the Son.

The two obvious texts of the Exercises in which these dimensions surface may be found in the First Week and in the *Contemplatio* and, as we

⁷ The '*acatamiento*' or '*reverencia y acatamiento*' that occurs here (Exx 39) is an important expression for Ignatius. It not only indicates a certain reverential disposition and disponability before the Divine Majesty, but it also carries a sense of freedom (affective)—*acatamiento amoroso* (Diary, 4 April 1544)—and readiness to serve (note its repeated use in the Spiritual Diary). My suggestion here is that it also extends to the way in which we are open to creation (see also Exx 39, 75, 114).

have seen, they are anticipated in the Principle and Foundation. These two locations mark out for us the whole journey of our conversion into the service of Christ in his mission of redemption and the establishment of the Kingdom. These texts have a deep continuity, and they are quite remarkable for the place they give to creation and our role within it. As we explore these themes and how they unfold through the dynamics of the Weeks, we will see their increasing connectedness.

Creation in the First Week: Entangled in Sin but Witness to the Divine Mercy

‘This is an exclamation of wonder and surging emotion, uttered as I reflect on all creatures and wonder how they have allowed me to live and have preserved me in life.’ Exx 60 invites us to the overwhelming, liberating encounter with God’s mercy that frees us from the captivity and debilitating illusions of sin—our various attempts to live in alienation from God and creation. The grace of this freedom, which is the gift of the crucified Christ, begins to heal our will and understanding, which sin wounds and distorts. It is also our ‘exodus’ from entanglement in the history that sin generates and our entry into the great pilgrimage of salvation history.

***The
overwhelming,
liberating
encounter with
God’s mercy***

Whether through our actions, our cultivated ignorance or our complacent minimising of sin (personal and structural) and its effects, we become complicit in that sin. Our new life or conversion involves the profound experiential realisation that we cannot liberate ourselves. If sin has made us deaf and dumb, then before the crucified Christ we are given power to speak and proclaim the wonders of God’s mercy. The ‘surging cry of wonder’ before the crucified Christ bears witness to our recognition of what God has done and the grace we have received.

Already, we discover that we are announcing the gospel of salvation. Already, grace frees us to begin realising the purpose for which we have been created: to praise and extol God and to experience our creator and redeemer as one. It is not just the experience of a seminal moment; it is the initiation of a process that will continue throughout our whole lives. The knowledge that will continue to unfold in us an ever-deepening gratitude to God for the redeeming act of Christ’s sacrificial love ‘for me’.

This ‘for me’ (*por me*) is not the expression of egocentrism, but the in-breaking of a new understanding of the enormity of the work of God’s love and its cost beside my unworthiness and smallness (Exx 59).



Christ on the Cross, by Federico Barocci, 1604

A dynamic of reciprocity and comparison runs throughout the Exercises. It schools us affectively in our understanding and in appreciating the immensity of the Divine Majesty—the luminous abyss of Divine Love revealed in the self-gift of the cross, the salvific fount of life—as well as in the astonished gratitude and humility that we should receive such an inestimable gift.

The understanding that we have here has several dimensions: it is not only the humility of knowing we are created, but also the knowledge that we are redeemed sinners. This is a graced knowing that is also experience, a ‘saving knowledge’

inscribed now in our very sense of self. Such knowledge is not accessible from any other source apart from grace.⁸ It builds the habitus of gratitude into our whole way of being and acting, conscious that all is gift-grace. This is transformative for us, and it reshapes all our relationships.

Coming to terms with the history of sin and our part in it is to develop a new understanding of who we are before God and within creation. If we do not have this, we will not appreciate the salvific mission of creation itself. We will also fail to see that we now have a new reciprocity with creation to express our own mission of care and gratitude, so that all can participate in Christ’s salvific mission to God’s glory (2 Corinthians 3 following). If the whole community of creation (natural and sanctified) is working for me, then I enter into this community by sharing in its work, for ‘love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words’ (Exx 230).

⁸ It is important to attend to the ‘deep grammar’ of these exercises. They are grounded in the mystery of the incarnation as a salvific act that exposes both the true nature of my sin and the healing nature of God’s gracious love. Ignatius does not separate them. To do so would continue the distortion that sin itself brings, either by making our sin and guilt seem so great that they are beyond God’s mercy, thereby denying God’s omnipotence, or by only seeing the immensity of Divine love and using it to obscure or hide the gravity of the sin. Paradoxically, this diminishes our understanding of the nature and depth of the Divine love (Exx 53, 58, 59).

When all is bathed in gratitude, then our actions change. We cannot manipulate or instrumentalise what we have received, whether it be people or nature; we can only give thanks and serve. We have begun to enter into the *koinonia*—the fellowship—of life, which is already the advent of the Kingdom. The scales fall from our eyes; we are being ‘renewed’ (Romans 12:8); we begin to see anew what has always been there: the grace of God in the faithfulness of creation to its own gracious purpose. Through the Exercises, we come to see that we do not make ourselves; we receive ourselves in and through our call and mission.⁹ This experienced truth is central to discernment: the exercise of our freedom in choosing what best serves Christ’s mission of salvific love.

The Mission of Creation

At this point, we can begin to appreciate what is unique in the Ignatian understanding of creation: the particular soteriological work of creation and its participation in God’s salvific purpose. Creation also has its mission. What unfolds between Exx 60 of the First Week, and the *Contemplatio* is the ‘integral ecology’ of the economy of grace, in which the life-giving communion of all this is redeemed. For Ignatius, this is never a static reality but the way in which the whole *communio* of creation, angels and saints participate in the work of preservation, salvation and sanctification. It is as if we can see into the heart of things and find that not only is God active in all things, but all things have their mission—they, too, are working and labouring ‘for me’.

The litany of the verbs in Exx 60 is instructive; they constitute the ways in which creation is founded on God’s providential care and covenantal purpose even for those who would destroy it and refuse its communion: ‘allowed me to live ... preserved me in life ... borne with me, protected me, and prayed for me ... interceded and prayed for me’.¹⁰ In this intense and compressed paragraph, we have Ignatius’ version of the Franciscan canticle, but it is not just about how all creatures praise their Creator for the gift of their being; it is also about how, in being, they perform their mission of manifesting and making real God’s saving

⁹ This is the action of a graced process that begins with our conversion, but it is also a christological principle as it presents the dynamic of Christ’s person who, in the incarnation, reveals Himself in the mission He receives from the Father in the Holy Spirit, who bears witness to His sonship.

¹⁰ It is useful to notice here the transposition from being in exile (‘cast out to live among brute beasts’ [Exx 47]) and a source of corruption to being restored to the communion of creation that has preserved one’s life.

hesed, or loving kindness. In this sense, creation is a genuine home for us, who have made ourselves prodigals, 'and it remains a source of possibility and hope.

**Creation
itself has
always been
ordered to the
incarnation**

At some level, we may now begin to see how creation itself has always been ordered to the incarnation, although we can only grasp it proleptically from the full event of the incarnation (the totality of Christ's life, death and resurrection). Creation, too, lives now in the hope of the resurrection. What Ignatius captures here is the grace of creation's fidelity to us and to its mission. This is why creation, covenant, incarnation and resurrection have an inner unity. It also bars the way to a simplistic nature romanticism or to pantheism, for creation refuses to be made an end in itself. As the Ignatian mediation sees so clearly, it is in its very character as 'gift' that creation discloses its being—its fidelity, its 'being thereness' or 'givenness'—and therefore creation always transcends itself. We mistake this 'givenness' if we simply take its availability and permanence for granted. When we do this, we devalue and misuse it.

The danger of a naïve belief that creation is somehow innocent must also be avoided. We need to recognise that creation itself is still in action; it brings with it extraordinary and indiscriminate violence and destruction that seem to be built into 'natural forces'. Gratuitous acts of violence—those which are not 'adaptive', or orientated towards reproduction and survival—have also been observed in the higher primates. It would be a mistake to impose human moral systems and judgments upon such acts; nevertheless, they should alert us to the systems of disordered relations that are deeply and unaccountably embedded in our universe. A mature eco-theology must take this into account.¹¹

Discerning Freedom in Creation

If science teaches us that our world is governed by certain laws, that does not mean that the whole *communio* of the created order is determined. We constantly see multiple forms of adaptation at play in nature; we recognise that such change is not always a 'blind' response but can reasonably be recognised as some form of learning. We also see

¹¹ This opens the question of 'evil' and creation, especially God's good creation. It is clear from Exx 45 that Ignatius sees all the orders of creation (spiritual and material as well as human) as entangled in the mystery of sin. However, as Exx 60 also indicates, the primary experience is of the continuing graciousness of the created order in the face of human alienation and disorder.

that—certainly among primates—there is the capacity for choice, and, even in the most basic and simple sense, this must imply some measure of ‘freedom’.

While humans stand firmly within the laws and processes that determine the material and natural world, they display a unique capacity for choice predicated upon a radical freedom that allows them to be conscious and intentional agents. God bestows a freedom on human beings that gives them a unique agency and spiritual intelligence.¹² All our social and cultural systems and products depend upon this capacity for freedom. This is especially true of the moral order. The Judaeo-Christian traditions resist any determinism that would rob the human person of freedom and responsibility. If our chief end is to love and serve God (as the Principle and Foundation asserts), then love can only be realised in freedom. If God creates us in love for love, then God must also create the human subject to be free.¹³ The concepts of fate and destiny have no place before God, who is radically undetermined by anything other than the divine nature.

For Ignatius we are called to be actors, which means that we are endowed with the freedom to choose as well as the imagination and intellect to make our choices effective. In this respect, we are also creative agents within creation. It is part of our unique power to understand creation and to help to shape its future for good or for bad. If we have understood our place in creation well, then our ‘care’ of creation is also a soteriological act: it is to respect the status of creation as God’s gift and cooperate in its mission. As the Exercises understand God to be labouring and working (Exx 236) in creation for its lasting good, so must we labour and work for it as well. Our conversion to the world is also our vocation to serve and seek its healing and sanctification.

The Ignatian vision places upon us a spiritual and moral responsibility to use creation well. This overrides the simple anthropocentrism that prioritises the human good over all other goods. The grace of conversion,

¹² This does not mean that other life forms do not possess their own ‘intelligence’, which expresses itself not only in adaptation but also in and through complex relations with their species and environment. Any treatment of the biosphere must liberate itself from the prejudices of its anthropocentrism if it is to appreciate the multiple forms in which all life exhibits what we might call ‘intelligence’ and different modalities of responses to the world.

¹³ Karl Barth makes this freedom part of the definition of God: ‘God is the one who loves in freedom’. This constitutive act of the Divine sovereignty is realised not only in the act of creation *ex nihilo* but in the incarnation which is completed in Christ’s suffering, death, resurrection and exaltation. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, volume 2, *The Doctrine of God*, translated by G. W. Bromiley (London: T. and T. Clark, 2009), nn.28–30.

which relocates us within the *koinonia* of creation, requires us to seek the good of all things. It entails the recognition that the whole of creation is called to redemption; and its flourishing, in all its dimensions and relations, is for God's greater glory. So although we are called to use created things, this is far from a licence to impose our unrestricted desire on them, accountable only to itself and its own needs. The 'use' must always attend to what serves the good of all created things. The good of each exists only in the communion of the good that includes all. Even when goods may prove to be incompatible, the good of the other cannot be dismissed. Our agency is tested by the measure in which we are free to put the good of the other first.

Contemporary Western culture's obsession with what it calls freedom involves an obsession with the power to impose our will and declare self-determination. This turns the exercise of freedom into a type of tyranny that ultimately destroys the very relationships it needs to realise itself. From the Ignatian perspective, the gift of a healed and restored freedom is about the realisation of the self—but through the loving service of God, neighbour and the gift of creation.

Hence, the grace of conversion is not only the restoration of relations destroyed or damaged by sin, but also the restoration of our very capacity for relationality, which is essential to our identity. Freedom cannot be exercised in a vacuum; it is inherently relational, and there is no way to the self which is not through relationship to and with the 'other'. For the Spiritual Exercises the ultimate 'other' is the Triune God, who is the ground of all created relations.

Freedom that has love as its end will always entail responsibility for the other, and that will have a temporal dimension. Not only does it encompass the present, but it also makes provision for the future. Since discernment is an exercise of our freedom and judgment, it will possess an eschatological orientation in hope and faith towards the certainty of Christ's promise fulfilled. In so far as the redeemed person is restored to the communion of creation, then his or her choices are made within this eschatological horizon. In fact, Christian freedom will always be exercised in this way, for it knows that it must ultimately be accountable not just to the present, but to past and future generations as well, and ultimately to God.¹⁴

¹⁴ This is the other dimension of *communio* that we experience in the living community of the Church, but it is also present in the *communio* of Exx 60. We should also note that the participation in

For this very reason, true freedom is realised in the capacity to change, to repent and to learn. It is one of the greatest challenges to our freedom and the source of our hope that God has endowed all creation with the capacity to adapt and to change, not only in order to repair what has been lost but also to continue the grace of living and flourishing deeply in the knowledge of God as Creator and Lord. The exercise of this redeemed freedom, therefore, will seek to be a choice for the good of the whole community of creation and against the destruction or the degradation of that good.

Conversion is at the heart of the Exercises. It is translated into the election and the processes of discernment that continue to shape our life and actions. Conversion is also at the centre of Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'*. Transformation of systems, structures and practices is urgently needed to create and sustain an integral ecology. This requires a new epistemology and relational ontology. In this way, the choices and actions of a discerning freedom will bring consolation—life, creativity and restoration of the good—for it participates in the work or mission of the Risen Christ (Exx 224).

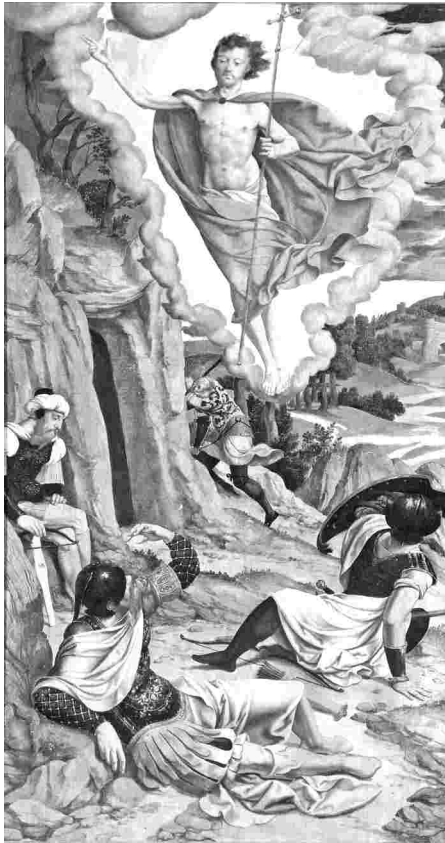
Recovering the Fourth Week

Given the relative brevity of the Fourth Week in the Spiritual Exercises and its concluding position, there has been a tendency, in practice and in commentary, to underplay its weight and significance. The whole possibility of Christian life and faith hangs on the resurrection. It is the presupposition and possibility of all the Weeks that precede it. The Fourth Week, with its important transformational encounter with the Risen Christ, is critical for the mission that the exercitant receives.

There can be no entering into the *Contemplatio* that does not pass through the Fourth Week. The habitual dispositions of the *Contemplatio* flow from the gratitude and the restored freedom to love grounded in the election to companionship which we now have with the Risen Christ—a Christ who is always encountered in mission under the power of the Holy Spirit. In key exercises we have been prepared for this encounter: the eyes of our understanding have been purified by each of the preceding Weeks, and our senses have been attuned to recognising the Lord.

It is one of the significant features of many theologies of creation that they start from the presuppositions of a secular world rather than the resurrection of Christ. Yet, given its implications for how we understand the 'laws' of our world, the resurrection cannot be treated as a mere appendix to the Christian doctrine of creation.¹⁵ To this extent, it presents us with new epistemological, ontological and ethical realities.

The resurrection is disorientating for our understanding and experience. Not only was it a liminal experience for the first witnesses, but it also continues to be liminal for all Christians. The resurrection



The Resurrection, by Bartholomaeus Bruyn the Elder, 1530–1540

of Christ is of a totally different order from that of Lazarus. The risen Christ still retains his bodily integrity, but it is clearly no longer subject to decay or death. The world we now live in and thought we knew is utterly changed while remaining strangely familiar. The resurrection of Christ does not abolish matter, time, space and their properties, but it is not bound by them in the way we thought it was. The closest analogy that we might have is the way in which Newtonian physics, relativity and quantum all describe our world and operate within it, but not in the same way or at the same level.

In his Gifford Lectures, N. T. Wright seeks to reframe natural theology from within the reshaping by the resurrection of our understanding between God and the world:

¹⁵ For a more extended account of the resurrection as integral to creation, see James Hanvey, 'Laudato si' and the Renewal of Theologies of Creation', *Heythrop Journal*, 59/6 (2018), 1022–1035; also, Thorwald Lorenzen, *Resurrection and Discipleship: Interpretive Models, Biblical Reflections, Theological Consequences*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), especially chapter 12.

Jesus' resurrection, by unveiling the creator's healing and transformative love for the whole of creation, opens up space and time for a new holistic mode of knowing, which includes historical knowledge of the real world framing it within the loving gratitude which answers the creator's sovereign love.¹⁶

Wright argues that the resurrection takes us into an 'epistemology of love', which is a fuller way of knowing than the epistemologies within which our cultures have been accustomed to operating. It is a graced knowing, a knowing from within God's knowing. It is also an active loving, hence the epistemology of love is 'a whole-person activity'; it is a relational action which entails the community; it has a spiritual dimension. It is not concerned with mastery and power but rather a redemption of power itself transposed into gratitude and service—it is concerned with seeking the good of the other.¹⁷

Wright's insights into the transformative grace of the resurrection could well stand as an analysis of the *Contemplatio*, especially as he brings out the vocational dimensions that it entails:

In this sort of knowing one is fully involved with the drama of the reality which is known, in this case the person of the crucified Jesus himself. It involves humility, recognising that all knowing involves us small short-sighted creatures engaging with a wide and complicated world, and gratitude, recognising that the resurrection is above all the genuine foretaste of that new creation which, like the original creation only so much more, is the fruit of the Creator's self-giving love. Instead of trying to grasp it or master it, we are grateful for it, and turn that loving gratitude into vocation, the image-bearing vocation once more.¹⁸

From the experience of the Fourth Week the reality of the risen Christ and the healing grace that He bestows is confirmed. We do not leave it behind but step from it into a world with this new understanding and agency. Whatever the final election the exercitant has made, no one leaves the Fourth Week without being an apostle of the Risen Lord, empowered for mission.

¹⁶ N. T. Wright, *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology* (London: SPCK, 2019), 205. And see Lorenzen, *Resurrection and Discipleship*, chapter 9, 'The Dialectic of Christian Knowing'.

¹⁷ Wright, *History and Eschatology*, 208, 210–212.

¹⁸ Wright, *History and Eschatology*, 211. See also the signs of ecological conversion outlined in *Laudaro si*, nn.220–221: gratitude; loving awareness of our connectedness and universal communion; the recognition that all things in their own way carry the divine image; the recognition and practice of a 'sublime fraternity with all creation'.

We cannot enter into the Fourth Week or appropriate Christ the consoler if we do not also appropriate the gift of the Holy Spirit, the unsurpassable witness of Christ's resurrection and exaltation. In his gift of peace, the risen Christ pronounces an eschatological blessing for the whole of creation. We come to recognise that the 'shalom' of the risen Christ is the 'shalom' of His Kingdom, now present, active and secured within human and cosmic time. It reorders our relations to all created things and constitutes the mission, ethical and spiritual, that we must now restore and cherish God's first gift.

In the event of the risen Christ, creation itself is liberated and called into glory.¹⁹ The relationship between creature and Creator is not changed but realised, in all its dimensions. The finitude of created things is no longer determined by the horizon of death and decay but by the creative plenitude of new life whose ontology is now the inexhaustible cruciform love of God's own Triune life. In the bodily resurrection of Christ, matter is redeemed, confirmed and sanctified. We come to understand that we cannot be redeemed without it. Creation is our home—not our place of exile.

The Unity of the Exercises in the Contemplatio

The *Contemplatio* realises the liminality of the grace of the Risen Christ, salvifically active in all created things. As such, it becomes our habitual way of encountering God, and, to this extent, it is an experiential eschatology. From the perspective of the *Contemplatio*, the inner unity and immanent dynamic of the four Weeks in relation to each other are now grasped in terms of our understanding and experience, but especially with the affective intelligence of the love that now comes to its own fullness in the *Contemplatio*. The unity of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ in the contemplation on the incarnation at the beginning of the Second Week has deepened and been confirmed in the Fourth Week. Likewise the redemptive reality of the cross (integral to the christology of the Exercises) present from the First Week and in the contemplation on the nativity of the Second Week comes to its fullness, not only in the Third and Fourth Weeks but also in the *Contemplatio*, for it is now understood in terms of the dynamic of Love itself which becomes the new logic of the Christian life and mission.

¹⁹ See Lorenzen, *Resurrection and Discipleship*, especially 284–294.

Just as we recognise the risen Christ by his wounds, so we now see that the cross is integral to the whole of creation.²⁰ The *Contemplatio* refuses to allow us the false consolation of an ecological romanticism. When we are invited to ‘consider how God labors and works for me in all the creatures on the face of the earth’, we are located in the active recollection of the cross. Given the preceding Weeks, we cannot now understand this ‘labouring and working’ purely in terms of God’s act of continuing creation.

It is God’s continuing work of redemption of which we are made agents as companions and apostles of Christ; we are called into the particular Ignatian form of the *imitatio Christi* flowing from our own experience of the depths of the Divine mercy (Ephesians 2:4–5). Creation is secured within the new time of the Kingdom although, like us and with us, it must continue until the Parousia. We can now begin to hear that creation, too, has its own Magnificat in which we are called to participate (Romans 8:18–23). The *Contemplatio* locates us in a sacramental vision of reality, the *communio* of a redeemed creation. It confirms and empowers us in our vocation to be the ministers of Christ’s grace to all created things.

And as ‘Love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words’, it requires us to establish concrete ethical structures, governed by love, that protect creation and support its flourishing. It will stand in the truth of Christ and Spirit, in which it now participates, and resist all the self-interested, self-absolving denials of the ecological crisis. It will move us to adopt lifestyles and attitudes that better cherish the gift of the other. It will entail a new asceticism which refuses exploitation and instrumentalisation, and recognises that nature has rights: a way of enshrining the good of the other, which is more than pragmatic protectionism.

Restored and available to us through the resurrection of Christ, the wonder and the gratitude that creation elicits in us now become our self-gift, the act in which love is realised in responsibility and service which decentre the self; it is an *imitatio Christi*.²¹ The *Suscipe* (Exx 234) not only is an offering which flows from the Spirit-filled heart overflowing in love; it also expresses our ontological freedom and

²⁰ See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2018), especially books V and VI.

²¹ See Exx 230.1; also Hanvey, ‘*Laudato si*’ and the Renewal of Theologies of Creation’.

security for which the whole of creation longs, no longer *usque ad mortem*, but now already drawing from the gift of eternal life. Here, too, we hear echoes of St Francis. Complete self-offering is the point at which 'poverty' becomes the condition of our being, not as lack or threat but as grace. Loving God makes us wonderfully poor, for, possessing God, we no longer need to possess anything.

This is the poverty to which the creature comes with complete trust and thanksgiving before the Creator, as the Son before the Father. In the self-giving *kenosis* of 'all that we have and possess', we enter into an absolute dependence that surrenders to God's sovereignty in love. It flows from the new epistemology and relationality of our converted existence, as well as a recognition of the destructiveness of our current economic and technological systems which subjugate human as well as natural life.²²

In a new and vibrant way, spiritually as well as ethically, the culmination of the Exercises in the *Contemplatio* confirms the universal destination of goods, 'the first principle of the ethical and social order'.²³ It dilates our lives in a gratitude that seeks expression in self-giving service; it opens us to experience the constant creative *kenosis* and *Suscipe* of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, that mark the presence of the Kingdom of God. It incorporates us into the chorus of life in praise of 'our Creator and Lord', 'for the Spirit of the Lord fills the whole earth' (Wisdom, 1:7).

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²² *Laudato si'*, nn. 206–208.

²³ John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, n.19. Spirituality is necessary for the creation of an integral ecology, especially as it allows us to appreciate and learn from other cultures that have not excluded or purely objectified the natural world. See *Laudato si'*, n. 216. Also Leo XIV, *Magnifica humanitas*, n. 65 following.