

“Brian O’Leary conceived his book as a journey to discover the ‘landscape’ of Ignatian spirituality—its origin in Ignatius’ experience and context and its current experience in a very different context. The ‘landscape’ most readers think familiar, in this writer’s hands turns out to be full of rich surprises. *God Ever Greater* is a book to hold on to.”

—Joseph A. Tetlow, SJ
Director of Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House
Lake Dallas, Texas

“Like Ignatius, O’Leary ‘begins’ where we are, and then progressively helps us to move more deeply so that we can both better understand and respond more generously to a God who is always greater.”

—James T. Bretzke, SJ
Professor of Theology
John Carroll University

God Ever Greater

Exploring Ignatian Spirituality

Brian O'Leary, SJ



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Contents

References vii

Prologue ix

Part One

Towards an Understanding of Ignatian Spirituality

1. What is Spirituality? 3
2. Ignatius: Life and Legacy 16
3. *Acta Patris Ignatii*: The Autobiography 32
4. Mystical Gifts 46
5. Discernment in the Tradition 61
6. Personal and Corporate 77

Part Two

Towards a Personal Response to Ignatian Spirituality

1. Ignatius the Pilgrim 95
2. Learning from Daydreams 99
3. Three Things I Pray 104
4. Light and Darkness 108
5. Freedom for Discernment 113
6. To the Greater Glory 117
7. The Call to Interiority 122

References

The three most quoted works in this book are the Bible and two texts that go back to Ignatius himself, the *Spiritual Exercises* and the so-called *Autobiography*. For the sake of consistency I have used the following translations throughout.

Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. London: HarperCollins (1997).

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The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. A translation and commentary by George E. Ganss, SJ, Chicago: Loyola University Press (1992).

A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola. A translation and commentary by Joseph N. Tylenda, SJ, San Francisco: Ignatius Press (2001; revised edition).

Quotations from the *Exercises* and *Autobiography* (including its two prefaces) will be given the paragraph numbers that are now in universal use, e.g. [12].

Prologue

Children love to explore. Whether it be a forest, a beach, a cave or an attic the cry of ‘Let’s explore!’ signals the beginning of an adventure. They are in search of knowledge, certainly, but above all they seek the tingling sensation of entering the unknown and the excitement of discovery. Adults too can have this thirst for exploration. Indeed, without it, civilisations would ossify.

The lifespan of Ignatius Loyola coincides with the period of exploration that opened up the Americas, as well as parts of Africa and Asia, to European sailors, soldiers, traders and missionaries. This was the start of a slow learning curve for Europeans, as they were forced over time to re-evaluate their place in the world. They could no longer automatically presume that they constituted the centre of the world, or believe that their cultures were normative. Of course it took centuries for Eurocentric thinking to die out completely – or almost completely. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century explorations brought wealth in abundance pouring into Europe from these newly discovered regions, but they also brought art, music, philosophy and religious beliefs. Life in Europe, and in the wider world, could never be the same again. This was all because of the innate human instinct or passion for exploration.

My use of the word ‘exploring’ in the subtitle of this book is meant to awaken the reader’s own personal urge to explore. Might it even elicit a like sense of anticipation? A tingling of excitement? Here the object of exploration is not a continent, or a remote wilderness, or a new trade route or the mysteries of outer space.

In this book I will be travelling through, observing, noting, attempting to discover the 'landscape' of Ignatian spirituality. This is the journey on which I invite you to accompany me.

Some readers may have visited here before, liked what they saw, and now want to return. They sense that there is more to see, more to learn, and further enrichment to be had. For others, Ignatian spirituality may be virgin territory, unexplored and therefore somewhat mysterious and even vaguely intimidating. I hope to guide beginners as well as the more experienced through this landscape, without the former being left behind, or the latter feeling that they should really have made this journey on their own. So let's explore.

A secondary reason for my use of the word 'exploring' is that I am not attempting a total coverage, still less a systematic presentation of Ignatian spirituality. The landscape is much too vast for a project of that kind. In fact, considering the extensive library of writings on Ignatian spirituality, no author has succeeded in presenting it in its totality. So I shall be offering something more manageable, approaching the subject from different angles and different starting points, and exploring the terrain that I encounter. And like the famous explorers of Ignatius's lifetime, I would hope to end my investigations with further unanswered questions swirling around in my readers' minds, questions to mull over, maybe even to bring to prayer. A final word of wisdom from T. S. Eliot:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.¹

Structure and Content

The book has two parts. The first and longer part is explanatory and discursive. It makes use of history, including the writings of

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding' (from *Four Quartets*). London: Faber and Faber (ninth impression, 1976).

Ignatius and other early Jesuits, and theology, insofar as it is relevant to the task. These chapters are meant to lead to an understanding of the matters being presented. They will not use academic language, however, and whenever technical words cannot be avoided, they will be explained in clear terms. The aim is comprehension, not obfuscation!

Part I

Chapter 1 is, in many ways, foundational for what is to follow. Instead of beginning with Ignatius or with specifically Ignatian topics, I raise the question, ‘What is spirituality?’ A vagueness about the answer is widespread and can lead people astray. It is better to make sure that we grasp the meaning of the noun, ‘spirituality’, before examining the adjective, ‘Ignatian’.

Chapter 2 introduces the life of Ignatius, presented here in outline. Ignatian spirituality was not based on some pre-existing theory but grew out of the lived experiences of this man, who was rooted in a particular historical and cultural context. We also need some familiarity with Ignatius’s personality and how this developed over a lifetime. During his conversion, Ignatius came to realise that all was gift from God, and he later recognised that God was calling him to share what he had received with others. To do this, the chief means he chose – or, more correctly, was given – were the Spiritual Exercises. These became his legacy to us and it is fitting that we introduce them here.

Chapter 3 continues to reflect on Ignatius’s life, but now as viewed through the lens of his so-called *Autobiography*. This book is frequently put into the hands of those enquiring about Ignatian spirituality, and with good reason. It is regarded as a helpful introduction and is easy reading. A second or third perusing of the text, however, will show that it is actually quite an enigmatic little book that needs to be scrutinised carefully. Some background to its composition can be helpful in enabling the reader to profit from it.

Chapter 4 explores Ignatian mysticism. In current studies of Ignatius, this is one of the areas that is receiving the most attention.

On a popular level also, it is his mystical gifts which most attract contemporary men and women to Ignatius and his legacy. Surprisingly, this is a new development as, for the first four hundred years after his death, his mystical gifts were either downplayed or ignored completely. But in today's cultural climate, where there is almost a cult of mysticism, often defined rather loosely, it is not surprising that interest in Ignatius's mysticism is strong.

Chapter 5 opens up the area of discernment. For many the term discernment is almost synonymous with Ignatian spirituality. Despite that perception, however, both the theory and practice of discernment have a much longer history in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Some knowledge of this tradition will help us to see how Ignatius learned from those who went before him, and ask what he may have contributed to expand that tradition. I will suggest that he was indeed innovative in showing how the discernment of spirits could be used in the context of decision-making.

Chapter 6 enters another section of the landscape that has only lately received much attention. I refer to the corporate dimension of Ignatian spirituality. Far from being individualistic, as many have claimed, Ignatian spirituality has always had a corporate dimension. Without it, the Society of Jesus – better known as the Jesuits – could not have come to exist. But it was not recognised until recently how the spirituality of the Society, as articulated in its *Constitutions*, could be applicable to lay religious groups or even secular organisations. Much work has now been done showing that this is, in fact, possible. I will not explore this development in detail but will concentrate on a document called 'The Deliberation of the First Fathers'. This describes how Ignatius and his early companions reached their decision to become a religious order. It has become a template for any process of group decision-making in the Ignatian tradition.

Part II

The second part of this book was originally a series of articles in the monthly magazine *The Sacred Heart Messenger*, published in Dublin by Messenger Publications. Here they are reworked and expanded a little. These articles take up some of the themes from Part I, but in a simpler and more experiential way. These short pieces are meant to be read slowly, preferably one at a time, and pondered over. One might call them meditations. They aim less at leading the reader to understanding, as in Part I, and more at awakening a personal response. They suggest how Ignatian spirituality can deepen and enrich the reader's relationship with the 'God Who is Ever Greater'.

Some readers, especially if they regard themselves as beginners, might do well to reverse the usual sequence in reading a book. This would involve engaging with Part II before starting Part I. Another possibility would be to intermingle articles from Part II with the chapters of Part I. Whatever helps most is good!

chapter four

Mystical Gifts

Fresh from his initial conversion at Loyola, Ignatius spent eleven months in Manresa (1522-23). He was on his way to the Holy Land as a pilgrim and initially intended to spend no more than a couple of days in the town, but something held him there, and his stay turned out to be transformative in his life. From his *Acta* we can distinguish three different phases of contrasting experiences:

April to May were days of light, during which he was gifted with peace and joy. This was a kind of honeymoon period, often associated with the immediate aftermath of a conversion. In his innocence he thought that it would last forever!

May to the end of July were days of darkness, during which he struggled with doubts and other kinds of desolation, culminating in a devastating battle with scruples. These were so severe that he even considered suicide. He was certainly being brought down to earth.

August to mid-February were days of glory, during which God gifted him with a series of mystical experiences. These were so profound that he would often refer back to them in later life, especially at times of serious decision-making.

Mysticism, which is nearly impossible to define, has something to do with the experience of God. But can God be experienced? Some readers may have been brought up to answer 'no' to this question. God is pure spirit, invisible, intangible, and so forth. God

is Wholly Other, like nothing we have experienced or can experience on the human level. We come to know him only by faith, which is a kind of darkness, a kind of 'unknowing'. And yet . . . there have always been Christians who claim to have had an experience of God, to have come to know him personally, even to have an intimate relationship with him. Such men and women can even tell us something of what God is like, or at least what he is like for them. They may only be able to convey this in stumbling, halting words, or in obscure metaphors or symbols, or through the medium of art. But we sense that these people are pointing to a God they know, who is real for them, whom they have experienced in their lives. This is not necessarily the vocation of the few, of an elite. The call to be a mystic, at least in a broad sense, is as inclusive as the universal call to holiness.

Peak Experiences

There are, of course, different levels on which people experience God, as well as a range of intensities. Using Abraham Maslow's term, some may have 'peak experiences' of God from time to time. Ignatius was gifted with many such mystical encounters that were beyond the ordinary. The *Acta* records that during his time in Manresa he had a series of five such experiences. He introduces them by saying:

During this period God was dealing with him in the same way a schoolteacher deals with a child while instructing him. This was because either he was thick and dull of brain, or because of the firm will that God himself had implanted in him to serve him – but he clearly recognised and has always recognised that it was in this way that God dealt with him. Furthermore, if he were to doubt this, he would think he was offending the Divine Majesty [AIP 27].

So it is with great assurance and conviction that he gives an account of the revelations that he had received those many years

earlier. He describes them as an understanding of the Trinity; of how God created the world; and of how Christ is present in the Eucharist. These were followed by a vision of the humanity of Christ, and a vision of Our Lady. It is not necessary to see them as occurring in this precise order, though there may be a certain prioritising in the list on the basis of their effect on him – then and later. Especially significant is his giving first place to his experience of the Trinity.

One day, as he was saying the Hours of Our Lady on the monastery's steps, his understanding was raised on high, so as to see the Most Holy Trinity under the aspect of three keys on a musical instrument, and as a result he shed many tears and sobbed so strongly that he could not control himself . . . This experience remained with him for the rest of his life so that whenever he prayed to the Most Holy Trinity he felt great devotion [AIP 28].

Having described the five mystical gifts, Ignatius ends by stating:

These things he saw at that time fortified him and gave such great support to his faith that many times he thought to himself: if there were no scriptures to teach us these matters of faith, he would still resolve to die for them on the basis of what he had seen [AIP 29].

We need not be discouraged when we read of the extraordinary experiences of mystics such as Ignatius. God treats every person, just as he treated him, 'in the same way a schoolteacher deals with a child'. Like any good teacher God adapts his instruction to our unique personality, our capacity and our needs. Besides, not all experiences of God need be 'peak experiences'. For large parts of his own life Ignatius was undoubtedly 'off-peak'. Maybe we will be that way all of the time! Nevertheless, as we move through life, attentive to God in prayer, and serving him through our relationships and daily activities, God is gradually revealing to us also something of what Ignatius learned at Manresa.

Quietly, almost secretly, God discloses within us the mystery of the Trinity (God is a community), of creation (God made all things good), of the Eucharist (God shares his life with us), of Christ's humanity (Jesus is like us in all things except sin), and of Our Lady (given to us on Calvary as our mother). This is not some abstract theological thinking but a self-revelation by God that invites us into a deeper relationship with him. Listening, paying attention, accepting this invitation, responding with the gift of ourselves – this is to experience God, to become a mystic in everyday life.

Cardoner

The five experiences of Ignatius that we have been considering were surpassed in depth and impact by another, known as the 'great enlightenment'. It took place on the banks of the river Cardoner that flows through Manresa and is best described in the words of the *Acta*:

He was once on his way, out of devotion, to a church a little more than a mile from Manresa, which I think was called Saint Paul. The road followed the path of the river and he was taken up with his devotions; he sat down for a while facing the river flowing far below him. As he sat there the eyes of his understanding were opened and, though he saw no vision, he understood and perceived many things, numerous spiritual things as well as matters touching on faith and learning, and this was with an elucidation so bright that all these things seemed new to him. He cannot expound in detail what he then understood, for they were many things, but he can state that he received such a lucidity in understanding that during the course of his entire life – now having passed his sixty-second year – if he were to gather all the helps he received from God and everything he knew, and add them together, he does not think they would add up to all that he received on that one occasion [AIP 30].

While the Cardoner experience is the greatest enlightenment received by Ignatius from God, the content of this enlightenment

is difficult to determine. He speaks of being given to understand 'numerous spiritual things as well as matters touching on faith and learning'. But what were they? He does not specify. Probably – though by no means certainly – he was not being taught *new* truths but was seeing familiar ones in a more penetrating light, so that they '*seemed* new to him'. And since he recalls the Cardoner experience immediately after his description of the five earlier visions, it is at least conceivable that he received *inter alia* a still deeper understanding of the Trinity, Creation, Eucharist, the humanity of Christ and Our Lady. But this is speculation.

However, there is one surprising aspect to the Cardoner experience that merits special attention. It concerns the mention of 'matters touching on faith and learning'. Rare, if not unique, is the inclusion of learning in the subject-matter of a mystical experience. The Spanish word *letras* that Ignatius uses makes it clear that he is referring to secular learning. Its inclusion indicates, or at least suggests, that he was enabled to grasp the interrelatedness or interconnectedness of all truth, bringing together matters of the spirit, of faith and of secular learning. Nadal wrote that at the Cardoner Ignatius saw 'the guiding principles and causes of all things'. He was given to understand how all things – secular as well as sacred, earthly as well as heavenly, natural as well as supernatural – have their starting point and end point in the one creator God.

This interpretation of the Cardoner experience helps us to understand, even if obscurely, how it bore fruit in Ignatius as the gift of discernment. We are told by his contemporaries that Cardoner became for him the touchstone in all his future decision-making. It was a beacon that shone its light on all the complexities that he faced, especially in times of crisis. There will be more on discernment in the next chapter.

Christian Humanism

Grasping the interrelatedness of truth also allowed Ignatius to elaborate a spirituality that may broadly be termed humanistic.

The words ‘humanism’ and ‘humanistic’, while frequently applied to Ignatian spirituality today, are somewhat problematical. Ignatius was certainly not a humanist in the modern sense, where the term has become almost synonymous with atheistic secular humanism. But neither was he a humanist in *any* way that would place the human person rather than God at the centre of the universe. Ignatius’s world-view was intuitively theocentric, or God-centred, and this was reinforced at the Cardoner.

For Ignatius, God is the ultimate reference-point for all of reality. He is ‘God Ever Greater’, which is the title I have chosen for this book. So I use the word humanist of Ignatius with a certain caution. It is simply meant to indicate his appreciation, even reverence, for the whole of creation – he would be an enthusiastic environmentalist today! – and his valuing of the human person with all the associated gifts, talents and creativity. It also suggests his conviction that we must cultivate the human as well as worship the divine. It is not difficult to see how all this would later lead Ignatius and his order into the apostolate of education. Scholarship, research and the teaching of secular subjects were to be embraced as a tribute to God who made such an astonishing world, and with the conviction that the truth we seek in any particular area will always be a mirror of the one truth.

While Ignatius was certainly drawn into the mystery of the divine, his Cardoner experience simultaneously plunged him more deeply into the mystery of the human. From then on his thinking always sought to bring together these two polarities – the divine and the human – all to the greater glory of God.

La Storta

We now move from the year 1522 in Spain to 1537 in Italy. To understand better the vision of La Storta we need to put it in the context of the preceding months, and especially of the early companions’ priestly ordination on 24 June 1537. After this had taken place in Venice they dispersed throughout the Veneto region and it fell to Ignatius, Pierre Favre and Diego Laynez to go to Vicenza.

For forty days they devoted themselves to prayer, penance and begging for alms, living the while in extreme poverty. When that phase was over and they had been joined by Jean Codure (1508-1541), all four engaged in public preaching in the city's squares. It is noteworthy that, unlike his companions, Ignatius had postponed celebrating his first Mass, most likely in the increasingly forlorn hope that he could do so in the Holy Land. The *Acta* records:

During the period that he was in Vicenza, he received many spiritual visions and many rather ordinary consolations (it was just the opposite when he was in Paris), but especially when he began to prepare for his ordination in Venice and when he was getting ready to celebrate Mass. Also during his journeys he enjoyed great supernatural visitations of the kind that he used to have when he was in Manresa [AIP 95].

Note how the relative aridity of Ignatius's prayer during his years of study in Paris is now replaced by more intense spiritual experiences such as he had enjoyed in Manresa. Keeping this in mind, we come to the description of the La Storta vision:

After he had been ordained a priest, he decided to wait another year before celebrating Mass, preparing himself and praying to our Lady to place him with her Son. One day, a few miles before reaching Rome, while praying in a church, he felt a great change in his soul and so clearly did he see God the Father place him with Christ, his Son, that he had no doubts that God the Father did place him with his Son [AIP 96].

As so often in the *Acta* Ignatius gives the bare details of his experience without any embellishment. But from Favre and Laynez, who were with him, we learn that, as soon as Ignatius entered the small wayside chapel – it was not actually a church – he felt a sudden change come over him.

He sees God the Father, together with Jesus who is carrying his cross. Both Father and Son are looking on him with great kindness,

and he hears the Father say to the Son, 'I wish you to take this man as your servant'. Jesus then turns and addresses the kneeling pilgrim saying, 'I wish you to be our servant'. Then he hears the Father add, 'I will be favourable to you in Rome'. Whether this promise is to mean success or failure, the fulfilling of his dreams or dreadful persecution, Ignatius is uncertain. But whatever is to happen, he trusts completely that the Lord will be with him. The desire of Ignatius 'to be placed with the Son' echoes the colloquy, or conversational prayer, at the end of the Meditation on Two Standards in the *Spiritual Exercises*. There, the exercitant asks in turn of Mary, the Son and the Father to be

. . . received under his (Christ's) standard; and first, in the most perfect spiritual poverty; and also, if his Divine Majesty should be served and if he should wish to choose me for it, to no less a degree of actual poverty; and second, in bearing reproaches and injuries, that through them I may imitate him more [147].

On the journey from the north of Italy to Rome, Ignatius is praying for this grace by turning especially to Mary, his intercessor and mother. 'To be placed with the Son' or 'received under his standard' – the phrases are interchangeable – has been a long-standing desire of Ignatius ever since his conversion. Now he is making his petition as a *priest*, however, longing to be placed with the Son so as to share more fully in *his* priesthood. This is why it is so significant that the Christ he sees at La Storta is carrying his cross. He is on his way to Calvary to complete his self-offering to the Father as the High Priest of all creation. Ignatius, now a priest himself, wants to be there with the self-emptying Christ, wants to be one with him. And this is precisely where the Father places him. La Storta is, to a large extent, a manifestation of a priestly spirituality.

Unlike any of his earlier mystical experiences, Ignatius immediately interprets the La Storta vision as intended, not only for himself, but also for all the first companions. This is curious because a mystical experience is always uniquely personal. Besides,

only two of these companions are physically present with him in the chapel. It is almost as if Ignatius sees himself as carrying all nine companions in his heart, so that they participate in whatever he is experiencing; or as if this group of friends were already constituted as a 'body', something that did not formally occur until the following year. What is certain is that the other companions too, all recently ordained, are about to offer themselves to the Pope for priestly service anywhere in the world. In Ignatius's mind this would not be happening if they, like himself, had not been placed with Christ carrying his cross. The La Storta vision can be said to reveal the deeper mystique of their companionship which was embedded in their relationship with Christ. It points to the corporate dimension of their calling and of the mission they are soon to receive from the Pope. We will have more to say on this theme.

Spiritual Diary

From the beginning of his conversion Ignatius had formed the habit of keeping what we might call a spiritual diary or journal. We have seen how the *Spiritual Exercises* grew out of this habit during his stay in Manresa. Throughout his last sixteen years in Rome, he continued to keep a record of his experiences in prayer and his reflections on them. Only part of this later diary has survived, but it helps to enrich our understanding of his mystical gifts. The background is important so we need to describe it here.

In 1541 the composition of constitutions for the recently approved Society of Jesus was entrusted by the early companions to Ignatius and Jean Codure. The latter, however, died within a few months and Ignatius was left alone with the task. The period 1541-1544 turned out to be a time of rapid expansion of the Society. Besides the administrative work involved in governance, Ignatius was engaged in many apostolic projects in Rome itself. All the while he was suffering from serious ill-health. He had little time or energy to give to writing constitutions.

However, in 1544 there was some easing of work pressures as the Society settled into a period of consolidation. Ignatius took up the composition of constitutions more actively and began to examine the kind of poverty most appropriate for the Society. The central issue was whether a fixed income should be allowed for the sacristies of churches attached to professed houses. He himself had been party to a decision taken by the early companions in 1541 that allowed such an income, but now he had second thoughts and was leaning towards excluding it. So he began a discernment process of forty days which lasted from 2 February until 12 March 1544. What we know as the *Spiritual Diary* dates from this period.¹³

The text, consisting of two fascicules or copybooks, has been helpfully named 'a discernment log-book' by Joseph Munitiz. In it Ignatius, as usual, recorded his inner experiences during prayer. Writing it was an aid to his discernment, just as anyone facing a serious decision today would be helped by making similar notes. Some familiarity with the *Spiritual Exercises*, especially the decision-making process [SE 175-188], is almost essential in order to understand the *Diary's* contents, in particular those in the first copybook.¹⁴ Ignatius also realised that some prayer experiences promised to be of more lasting value and meaning for himself personally, beyond the context of this particular discernment. He noted such passages by encircling them in the manuscript. Later he copied them on to two separate pieces of paper, which have also happily survived.

13. 'The Spiritual Diary' in *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings*, translated with introduction by Joseph A. Munitiz, SJ, and Philip Endean, SJ. London: Penguin Classics (2005). All quotations from the *Diary* will be taken from this translation.

14. Recommended: Timothy M. Gallagher, OMV, *Discerning the Will of God: An Ignatian Guide to Christian Decision Making*. Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company (2010).

Let us turn first to the election, or decision-making process. The answer to the question that Ignatius was posing to himself concerning poverty was not given to him in a self-authenticating illumination, described as a First-Time experience in the *Spiritual Exercises* [175]. So he had to find another approach. He began by composing a separate document, which is likewise extant, noting the pros and cons, as he saw them, of what he was now proposing. He kept these lists by his side during his prayer over this whole period, and there are several references to them in the text of the *Diary* itself. He had clearly opted to use 'the first way of making a good and correct choice' in the Third Time, as outlined in the *Spiritual Exercises* [SE 177-183]. In this way of decision-making, reasoning plays the lead role. But again, this method failed to produce a result with which he could be at peace. So he eventually turned for enlightenment to his experience of consolations and desolations, where affectivity comes more to the fore. In the terminology of the *Exercises*, this is called the Second Time for making a good and sound election [SE 176].¹⁵

The very difficulties met by Ignatius in this discernment on poverty are part of its value for us. He experienced much uncertainty even about the approach he should take, in discovering the most helpful methodology.¹⁶ His accompanying mystical experiences did not save him from the messiness and confusion that most people know as a feature of discernment. It must be added that few would be as obsessive about getting confirmation of the decision, as unwilling or unable to bring the discernment to a close as Ignatius is here. In this we would do well to ignore his example. However, he got there in the end.

15. There will be more on these Three Times in the next chapter.

16. There is a curious parallel with the *Deliberation of the First Fathers* in 1539 when they too had to change their method of discernment in mid-stream, as it were.

The Trinity

While the influence of the *Spiritual Exercises* pervades the *Spiritual Diary*, there are new elements in the later mysticism of Ignatius, or at least new emphases. In spite of his vision of the Trinity at Manresa, and what he says about its lasting impression on him, there is little prominence given to the Trinity *as such* in the *Exercises*. The one real exception is the contemplation on the Incarnation [101-109]. Here the image of the Three Persons gazing down on the world and its inhabitants is not only gripping, but it supplies the frame of reference within which the mystery being contemplated unfolds. The striking presence of the Trinity, and its active concern for the world, are essential in releasing the dynamism of this exercise and, through it, that of the entire Second Week. Apart from the Incarnation, however, we are generally left in the *Exercises* with a more implicit, or hidden, presence of the Trinity. This presence is implied in *any* contemplation of Christ, whose relationship with the Father is integral to his identity and who has received an outpouring of the Holy Spirit at his baptism (as Mary had done at his conception).

Similarly, in the Contemplation to Attain Love [230-237], the Trinity can be inferred in a number of ways, most of all from the pervasive theme of mutuality, since the Trinity is a community of mutual love.

This reticence, if such it is, about specifying the Trinity in the *Exercises* is replaced in the *Diary* by a full-blown Trinitarian mysticism. The enlightenments that Ignatius receives vary considerably. He sometimes sees one Person of the Trinity without the others; or the Son and Spirit within the Father; or he may experience the Trinitarian essence without any distinction of persons. As a characteristic example we might consider the final lines he wrote in the first copybook, after finishing his discernment on poverty:

When I said grace after the meal, the Being of the Father partly disclosed itself, also the Being of the Blessed Trinity, while I felt

a spiritual impulse moving to devotion and tears, such as I had not felt or seen all day, although I had often sought for it. Today's great visitations had no particular or distinct Person for their object, but in general, the Giver of graces [SD 12 March].

Here, one of the persons, the Father, is made present to him, if only partly, but also the Trinity in itself ('the Being of the Blessed Trinity'). This latter he identifies as 'the Giver of graces'. Joseph Munitiz elegantly explains the connection of this phrase with the Contemplation to Attain Love in the *Exercises*:

In the *Diary*, an endearing phrase to refer to God is that of 'Giver of graces'; in the Contemplation [to Attain Love], a rough intimation of the treasures these words enclose is imparted. The gift is the Giver himself, a Giver who is both present and dynamic in the gift, a Giver who is infinite in the number and variety of his gifts, to such an extent that no gift is not the Giver himself. Here, in this notion of 'giving', of 'communication', which for Ignatius is the quintessence of love, is to be found the seed, hidden and expectant, of the trinitarian revelations.¹⁷

Christ

The centrality of Christ in the *Exercises*, replaced now by that of the Trinity, in no way excludes any reference to Christ. In this entry Ignatius is still deeply moved as he reaffirms his desire to follow Christ:

While preparing the altar and vesting, the name of Jesus was shown me: I felt great love, confirmation and an increased resolve to follow him. I wept and sobbed. Throughout Mass, very great devotion and many tears so that quite often I lost the

17. *Inigo: Discernment Log-Book. The Spiritual Diary of Saint Ignatius Loyola*, edited and translated by Joseph A. Munitiz, SJ. London: Inigo Enterprises (1987), 13.

power of speech; all the devotion and feelings had Jesus as their object [SD 24 Feb].

Notice that Ignatius does not deliberately choose to contemplate Jesus but that ‘the name of Jesus was shown’ him. This way of recording his experience is common in the *Diary*. It points to the mystical element in his spirituality at that time. Ignatius is more passive than active, maybe totally passive. If Ignatius is not the active one, however, then who is? One entry in the *Diary* has Ignatius attributing such a revelation of Christ to an intervention of the Trinity:

It seemed in some way to be from the Blessed Trinity that Jesus was shown or felt, and I remembered the time when the Father put me with the Son [SD 23 Feb].

In the *Exercises* the movement is through Jesus in his humanity to the Father, and so into the life of the Trinity. Here the movement is reversed. It begins from the Trinity, and then continues through Jesus into the mind and heart of Ignatius.

Holy Spirit

We might also note how in the *Diary* some of the most remarkable visions are of the Third Person. The absence of the Holy Spirit from the pages of the *Exercises* has often been commented on and variously explained. In the *Exercises*, we find a mere five references to the Spirit in the Mysteries of the Life of Christ, where they could hardly be omitted without expurgating the Gospels, and one in the Rules for Thinking with the Church [SE 365]. In contrast, consider the language in the following passage and try imagining what it is attempting to capture:

A little later I made a colloquy with the Holy Spirit, in preparation for saying his mass; I experienced the same devotion and tears, and seemed to see or feel him in a dense clarity or in the colour of burning flame – a way quite strange to me – all of which confirmed me in my election [SD 11 Feb].

Phrases such as 'a dense clarity' or 'the colour of burning flame' occur frequently in the mystical tradition, but are rare and unexpected in Ignatius. His prose is more usually unadorned and even phlegmatic.

There is an evident dissimilarity, as well as a similarity, between the spirituality of the *Exercises* and that of the *Diary*. Some may prefer to speak of continuity and discontinuity. It is not a totally new spirituality that emerges in the *Diary*, but one that has evolved considerably from that of the *Exercises* and the Manresa experiences that underpinned them. Peak experiences have become more frequent, if not the norm. The unitive dimension of prayer is predominant. Taking everything into account, the *Spiritual Diary* offers the strongest evidence for regarding Ignatius as one of the great Christian mystics.

chapter three

Three Things I Pray

The seventies' hit musical *Godspell* presented the story of Jesus in an upbeat, contemporary idiom. This resonated with a whole generation, many of whom, although nominally Christian, had drifted away from organised religion. One of the show's best-loved songs was the infectious 'Day by Day'. Not many people know that this song was based on a prayer by a medieval English bishop, St Richard of Chichester (1197-1253). In its original and fuller form it reads:

Thanks be to you, my Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
O most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
follow you more nearly,
day by day. Amen.

As audiences at *Godspell* swayed to the rhythm and sang along with the music, they were often being drawn into a spiritual experience. They were getting in touch with some of their deepest desires. As they expressed in words and music their, perhaps unconscious, yearning for a close relationship with Jesus – 'Three things I pray' – the religious dimension of their lives was being revived, stirred into new life.

Was Ignatius familiar with this prayer of Richard of Chichester? We do not know. But whether he was or not, he certainly came close to duplicating its final lines in the *Spiritual Exercises*. In introducing the kind of prayer that we know today as gospel, or Ignatian, contemplation, he writes, ‘The third prelude will be to ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for an interior knowledge of Our Lord, who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely’ [SE 104]. The wording is more sober, and it lacks the rhyme and rhythm of Richard’s prayer or the *Godspel* song, but the ‘three things I pray’ are essentially the same: to know, to love and to follow Christ. Moreover, Ignatius has added a clarifying word of great importance, the adjective ‘interior’, to describe the knowledge of Christ that is desired. We will need to return to this.

Ignatius’s approach to gospel contemplation is a version of *lectio divina*, the venerable monastic way of prayer that has spread well beyond monastic circles in our day. What is characteristic of the Ignatian approach, however, is the stress on the use of the imagination. He suggests an imaginative entering into a gospel scene or event – what the tradition calls a ‘mystery’ – in Christ’s life, so that we become totally immersed in it. We gaze at the persons, listen to what they are saying, observe what they are doing. We speak with Jesus or with some other person or persons in the scene about what is happening and what reactions this is evoking in us. We might even ‘take part’ in the scene, for example, having our feet washed by Jesus at the Last Supper, or helping to place the body of Jesus in the tomb. We can do this either by remaining ourselves, or by imaginatively becoming one of the gospel characters, for example Peter or Mary of Magdala, or by imaginatively becoming an ‘extra’, for example, another blind beggar in a scene of healing. There is no one way of becoming part of a gospel event; whatever way works for us is best.

All of this is aimed at inserting ourselves deeply into the ‘mystery’ we are contemplating. It is a way of ensuring that the knowledge of Christ that we are asking for will be truly ‘interior’. What

then is meant by interior knowledge? We might explain what we mean by contrasting such interior, or intimate, knowledge of a person with a knowledge that is objective, intellectual, scholarly or clinical. We are touching here on the difference between *knowing* a person and *knowing about* a person. The latter can be attained through gathering facts and processing information. It is the result of research and study. In gospel contemplation, however, we are seeking the kind of knowledge that a wife may have of her husband, or a father of his child, or a lover of her beloved.

Such knowledge only comes from two people being together over a period of time, perhaps many years, interacting with each other, sharing life's experiences, loving each other. Accordingly, in gospel contemplation we remain present to Jesus as he is born, grows, relates, works, travels, teaches, rejoices, suffers, and so forth. We want to get inside his experience, not just to know the external details of his life. We desire *to know him from the inside out*. Such intimate knowledge of another person can never be forced but is always pure gift. Hence we need to keep asking Jesus to be gracious and to reveal himself. "Come", my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me' (Ps 27:8-9). Living with this desire, we develop a contemplative attitude towards Christ. We are willing to wait patiently, allowing him to reveal himself as he really is, and not as we might want him to be.

Ignatius had first learned about this kind of prayer from Ludolph of Saxony's *Life of Christ*, which he had read during his convalescence in Loyola. In the preface to this work the author writes about entering gospel scenes or events:

Hear and see these things being narrated, as though you were hearing with your own ears and seeing with your own eyes, for these things are most sweet to him who thinks on them with desire, and even more so to him who tastes them. And though many of these are narrated as past events, you must meditate them all as though they were happening in the present moment, because in this way you will certainly taste a greater sweetness.

Read then of what has been done as though they were happening now. Bring before your eyes past actions as though they were present. Then you will feel how full of wisdom and delight they are.

All relationships that have any depth involve mutuality. As we desire that Jesus reveal himself to us, so too we reveal ourselves to Jesus. We share with him our own lives, our struggles and successes, the darkness of our doubts and the brightness of our hopes. We allow him to get to know us, to have an interior knowledge of us, at the same time as we receive an interior knowledge of him. Our human need *to be known* by the other - or the divine Other - lies very deeply within us. It complements our desire to know the other, or the divine Other. This mutuality brings a wholeness to the loving relationship that we long for with God in Christ. As Ignatius wrote towards the end of the *Spiritual Exercises*:

Love consists in a mutual communication between the two persons. That is, the one who loves gives and communicates to the beloved what he or she has, or a part of what the person has or can have; and the beloved in return does the same to the lover . . . Each shares with the other [SE 231].

Prayer Suggestion

I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord . . . I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

(Phil 3:8, 10-11)

chapter seven

The Call to Interiority

One of the most inspiring spiritual writers of recent times was the Jesuit, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, who died in 2012. A respected scripture scholar, he served for more than twenty years as Archbishop of Milan. He then retired to a life of prayer and study in Jerusalem. During his retirement he wrote an article in the course of which he asked what message St Ignatius might have for the third millennium. This seems a good question to pose in the final chapter of this book as well. The core of Martini's answer is as follows:

I think there is one especially salient message Ignatius can give us: the great value of interiority. I mean by this everything that has to do with the sphere of the heart, of deep intentionality, of decisions made from within.

Interiority is precisely the word that I too would use. Self-knowledge, purifying the heart, the inner journey, finding one's centre, the still point – these and other similar ideas and images have constantly appeared in the Christian spiritual tradition. They echo but go beyond the older Greek philosophical teaching attributed to Socrates, 'The unreflected life is not worth living'. In the Christian experience all of this is linked with prayer – not just saying prayers but praying unceasingly, really becoming people of prayer. One might even paraphrase Socrates and say, 'The prayerless life is not worth living'.

The argument for interiority today is not simply that it has been a continuous part of the Christian spiritual tradition. It is also that interiority is the antidote to much that is insidiously destructive in our contemporary society. The secularisation of culture, the frantic pace of life, the pressures of competition, the seductiveness of consumerism, the mind-controlling influence of both social and mass media, the intrusiveness of advertising – these and other influences mould our way of living. Busyness replaces reflectiveness, anxiety replaces contentment, and the craving for instant gratification replaces thoughtful attention to long-term goals. Even the quality of our most precious relationships is frequently put at risk. We are drawn to live superficially, on the surface of things, losing touch with our deeper and more authentic selves.

We may not individually have succumbed to all these dangers, yet few would deny experiencing a struggle to ‘live out of our centre’ and to act in accordance with our highest ideals and deepest desires. These desires may even remain hidden or buried, lost from consciousness. ‘What do you *really* want?’ is often a surprisingly difficult question for people to answer spontaneously and with conviction.

We may also be deceived by the apparent good. Take the example of hyper-activism. Some people go from one good deed to another, always on the move, always involved in some activity. They never pause and reflect; they never put time aside simply to be by themselves, enjoying the beauties of God’s creation, or the uplifting sounds of great music, or the pleasures of reading a well-written book. Their activity has become compulsive. It is no longer freely chosen. They would not know what to do if they stopped. In fact they are terrified of being still, and maybe even more of silence. Solitude would be a kind of hell!

Ignatius was convinced that good people are not likely to be deceived or led astray by blatant or gross temptations. Instead they have to be lured by a suggestion that either *appears* to be good, or really *is* good but not appropriate at this particular time. He writes in the *Spiritual Exercises*:

It is characteristic of the evil angel, who takes on the appearance of an angel of light, to enter by going along the same way as the devout soul, and then to exit by his own way with success for himself. That is, he brings good and holy thoughts attractive to such an upright soul and then strives little by little to get his own way, by enticing the soul over to his own hidden deceits and evil intentions [SE 332].

This quotation from the 'Rules for Discernment' addresses a situation where the temptation itself, and the best ways of dealing with it, are both extremely subtle. The underlying presupposition is clear, however. We recognise the temptation for what it is, we discover what is really happening, *only if we are exercising interiority*. Without self-awareness, and a sensitivity to how God and the evil spirit are working in us, we will be deceived. In our example, we will be drawn into a compulsive activism because it *seems* to be good – unless we can reflect, enter our inner space where God speaks, and learn what God really wants of us at this time. It may be to act, or it may be not to act. But in either case prayerful reflectiveness will lead to a genuinely free decision on our part.

The practice that Ignatius proposes to help us grow in interiority is the Consciousness Examen. An older generation knew this as the Examination of Conscience, where we looked back on the day – or some other period of time – and sought to discover where and how we had sinned and offended God. This led to an expression of sorrow or regret, followed by a purpose of amendment. This exercise served many people well. However, a closer look at what is found in the *Spiritual Exercises* reveals a more expansive approach. The shift from the word 'conscience' to 'consciousness' is the key that allows us to see the difference.

Conscience is the moral sense that we possess that enables us to distinguish right from wrong. The Examination of Conscience tended to focus on sin and the occasions of sin, on failure to obey the law of God, and on our need to be forgiven. This is not left aside in the Consciousness Examen but it becomes part of some-

thing bigger and more positive. Focusing on consciousness opens up the many ways in which we can become sensitive to the presence or absence of God in our lives. As we allow the day – or whatever period of time we are ‘examining’ – to pass before our inner eyes, we try to become aware of the situations, the events, the people where we found God, and those other situations, events and people where it was difficult to find him. We can pause in thanksgiving when God’s presence was palpable, and pause in sorrow when we missed, ignored or did not appreciate that presence.

In activating our conscience, we mainly make use of our powers of reasoning, enlightened by faith. Consciousness, however, allows us to explore the whole area of affectivity, our inner world of feelings and emotions, including the world of our imagination. We learn to notice our changing moods and other subjective movements, the images that surface – whether they attract or repel us – and to take this inner world seriously. In time we discover how rich this world is and, through discernment, how God is present and active in the mix.

The examination of conscience has a slightly different emphasis. Since it deals primarily with sin and the occasions of sin, most attention is given to actions that are freely carried out. Consciousness, on the other hand, includes a range of spontaneous, ‘non-free’ movements, emotional reactions over which we have no control. This is part of the messiness of life. But God is as much in this swirling, unpredictable mingling of spontaneities as in our most rational thinking. Once we recognise this, we are on the way to discerning and interpreting how God is leading us and guiding our lives. The whole adventure begins when we answer the call to interiority.

Prayer Suggestion

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

(Ez 36:26-27)