

Durán and William Kluback (*The Classics of Western Spirituality*; London: SPCK, 1984; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984). Quotations from the text are taken from this translation with minor alterations (based on my own translation of the original) where necessary for ease of comprehension.

<sup>3</sup> *The names of Christ*, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> For the poetry see: *The unknown light: the poems of Fray Luis de León*, trans. Willis Barnstone (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> *The names of Christ*, p. 88.

<sup>6</sup> Parker, John: *Walk the Lakes*, Bartholomew Map and Guide (Edinburgh: Bartholomew, 1983), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *The names of Christ*, p. 224.

<sup>8</sup> *The names of Christ*, pp. 52–53.

<sup>9</sup> *The names of Christ*, p. 81.

(vol. 28, no. 4, October 1988)

## St Ignatius of Loyola and Spiritual Direction

*Philip Sheldrake SJ*

A contemporary writer has suggested that the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius of Loyola are 'the foundation for the development of a whole school of spiritual direction'.<sup>1</sup> I would suggest, however, that we must be very careful about uncritically removing certain items from the text of the Exercises in order to construct a model for spiritual direction in the widest sense. It is true that the Exercises have produced generations of spiritual directors. Such people are not limited to members of St Ignatius's religious order, the Society of Jesus, nor indeed to members of the Roman Catholic Church. However, it must be borne in mind that much that appears in the Exercises or in the early collections of notes on giving them (called the 'directories') refers to the very specific context of a retreat.

Having said this, it remains true that the basis for spiritual direction in the Ignatian tradition must be, first of all, the observations and practical notes contained in the *Spiritual Exercises*,<sup>2</sup> and in the early 'directories'.<sup>3</sup> These notes are disparate comments on specific points rather than an organic body of definitive guidance for spiritual directors.

In writing this article I have confined myself to the ideas of St Ignatius and other early sources rather than discussed the subsequent history of Ignatian spiritual direction. For this reason I have not considered the 1599 'official' directory as a resource.<sup>4</sup> It must always be remembered that 'the Exercises are essentially a point of departure'.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore important to link the basics of direction in the Exercises with what Ignatius has to say in his letters and in the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus if we are to arrive at a more rounded picture.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, I would suggest that Ignatius's vision was that the *Spiritual Exercises* and the spirituality which came from it could only be transmitted in a vital way from person to person, for he saw the Exercises as an *experience* rather than a collection of spiritual maxims. Thus Ignatius sought to form people who would *live* the Exercises until their minds were simply reflections of its spirit. If this is the case it may be argued, perhaps, that it is futile to attempt to present a systematic approach to giving the Exercises or to spiritual direction in general. I have not attempted to do this. What follows is no more than a collection of notes on a few important aspects of direction in general (rather than in the retreat experience): the nature of the relationship between director and the one directed; the focus or content of spiritual direction; and finally, some reflections on Ignatius's teaching on prayer.

Although Ignatius never used the words 'director' or 'directee', and although much of the traditional language of spiritual guidance can give a very false impression, I have reluctantly continued to use such words in this article for the sake of brevity and because they are still commonplace.

### *The relationship of director with directee*

A number of contemporary writers have described the primary aim of Ignatius as helping an individual to true inner freedom.<sup>7</sup> Certainly he himself describes the Exercises as 'every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments . . .' (Exx 1). Again, in the preamble to the text proper he describes the purpose of the Exercises as 'the conquest of self and the regulation of one's life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment' (Exx 21). Spiritual direction, therefore, is to be a context for this vital freedom to grow.

Without any doubt this desire for the inner freedom of an individual colours the way in which Ignatius envisages the relationship with a director. The absolute foundation, the 'presupposition' without which the relationship cannot function properly, is mutual trust (Exx 22).<sup>8</sup> In his 'presupposi-

tion' Ignatius draws attention to the very real danger of categorizing, judging or misinterpreting people. Prejudice is out of place. One should always put a good interpretation on what is said. Confrontation is to be avoided: if a person seems to be wrong one should first clarify whether one has understood correctly and if correction seems necessary it should be gentle. In other words, a director needs to become aware of his or her own inner reactions.

The person being directed will only arrive at the openness about inner feelings that Ignatius sees as vital for spiritual direction if there is real trust. If a person appears to have no such feelings or 'spiritual experiences' the director is instructed to ask questions (Exx 6). For it is only if there is a faithful and honest account of thoughts, feelings, experiences and disturbances that a director can 'propose some spiritual exercises in accordance with the degree of progress made and suited and adapted' to the needs of the individual (Exx 17). Ignatius points out in his Rules for discernment that there is often a real temptation not to be honest with a director when difficulties arise. This must be resisted (Exx 326).

Openness in direction is also mentioned by Ignatius in the *Jesuit Constitutions*. In dialogue with the superior, Jesuits should keep nothing hidden, whether interior or exterior, 'in order that the superior might better direct them along the path of perfection' (*Const* 551). From the very beginning, novices should open themselves in confidence to superiors or to their spiritual guide in order to receive 'counsel and aid in everything' (*Const* 263).

The importance that Ignatius attached to spiritual guidance is underlined by the fact that all Jesuits were asked to give a full account of themselves at least once a year (*Const* 97). This was seen as being of 'great or even extraordinary importance' (*Const* 91). It was presupposed that every Jesuit, from novice to professed, had someone to whom they went for spiritual guidance. In the case of novices this was either the novice-master or 'whomever the superior appoints as being more fit for this charge' (*Const* 264). Rectors of communities had the duty to appoint someone to superintend spiritual matters for young Jesuit students (*Const* 431). The Jesuit superior himself also had the role and authority of a 'spiritual father' and could

advise on the prayer life of individual Jesuits (*Const* 341, 583). Professed Jesuits could deal either with the superior or with a regular confessor on such matters (*Const* 584). Ignatius often uses the word 'obedience' in reference to the attitude of Jesuits to their superior or confessor in spiritual matters. There is a sense, too, in which this also applies in spiritual direction in general, for the relationship cannot function if a person continually refuses to follow advice or suggestions. 'Obviously anyone who refuses to obey the director and wants to follow his own judgement should not continue to make the exercises.'<sup>9</sup>

A director should always remember that the fundamental relationship is that between God and the person coming for direction. So the director is to allow 'the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature directly with his Creator and Lord' (Exx 15). Directors must be careful not to impose their own ideas but should entrust directees to God 'that he should not permit that for the sins of one who gives the exercises any soul should be ensnared'.<sup>10</sup> The editor of Ignatius's autobiography, da Camara, records in his own diary that 'the Father [Ignatius] said to me that there can be no greater mistake, in his view in things of the Spirit, than to want to mould others to one's own image'.<sup>11</sup> As a modern experienced director has suggested, to stand off and to be patient and objective in direction is a very difficult role to maintain. It is easy to become either too close (over-identification) or to become too impatient.<sup>12</sup>

Because the role of a director is secondary and supportive of the fundamental relationship with God, he or she should be a balance without 'leaning to one side or the other' (Exx 15) and should be extremely careful not to put undue pressure on someone to undertake any course of action (Exx 14).<sup>13</sup> This does not mean that the director's role is negligible because it is not a matter of being merely a passive sponge! It is perfectly valid, humbly and sensitively, to help a person to follow what best serves God.<sup>14</sup> This search for what is 'better' in a relationship with God is a frequent reference point in the Exercises and is at the centre of spiritual direction in general as well.

The human guide must avoid seeking, unconsciously perhaps, to do what is God's work. Direction is not primarily

a classroom and should not be over didactic (Exx 2).<sup>15</sup> Interviews should not be too frequent for there is a danger of creating over-dependence by seeing a directee too often.<sup>16</sup> The emphasis, too, should be less on intellectual input or talking 'learnedly about God' than on guiding people towards self-discovery and the meaning of their own experiences.<sup>17</sup> For as Ignatius succinctly comments, 'it is not much knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul but the intimate understanding and relish of the truth' (Exx 2). In other words the director's task is to help the individual 'to articulate, clarify and distinguish what is occurring within him'.<sup>18</sup>

Ignatius's comments about brevity of explanation also imply that what people discover for themselves has a deeper effect. If a person is prone to fluctuations of feelings (what Ignatius terms 'consolation' and 'desolation') and finds this confusing, the director is to explain the various rules for discernment (Exx 8). In other words, people must be helped to discern for themselves instead of relying merely on the director. Ignatius clearly wanted the development of self-awareness in people. 'Our Father wanted us, in all our activities, as far as possible, to be free, at ease in ourselves, and obedient to the light given particularly to each one.'<sup>19</sup> The discipline of reporting to a director is itself an education in discerning for oneself, for what is reported is already sifted and assessed as important. The *Constitutions* indicate that Ignatius anticipated that spiritually mature people would be able to function to a great extent on their own, but even those at an earlier stage were to be trusted to some degree with the conduct of their own spiritual lives. In his remarks on penance in the Exercises, Ignatius suggests that people should experiment for themselves 'for he [God] often grants each one the grace to understand what is suitable for him' (Exx 89).<sup>20</sup>

A director should not seek unnecessary information for while openness is vital, the privacy of each must be respected (Exx 17). The focus should be on the present and most especially on inner experiences or feelings for direction is essentially a response to these (Exx 6, 17).<sup>21</sup> Yet it is also true that 'the particular inner movements . . . only take on meaning for direction against the background of the personal, spiritual and relational structures of his concrete life and experience'.<sup>22</sup>

So Ignatius would not have objected to a director seeking to know the directee reasonably well. It has been argued that his concern was more with the director's *motivation* in seeking information.<sup>23</sup>

In the end, the aim of any information is to help the director to speak helpfully to a particular person's needs and to adapt what is said to the right level or stage of growth. Generalizations, spiritual maxims or universal rules for the spiritual life are not part of Ignatius's method. In a letter to Francis Borgia in 1548, Ignatius strongly affirms the need for flexibility. Sometimes a person needs penance or a certain kind of prayer, at others he or she needs something different. Likewise progress necessarily makes methods which were once useful no longer so.<sup>24</sup>

This attitude of flexible response by the director is reinforced by some of the observations in the Exercises that allow for adaptation of material (Exx 4, 18, 19, 20). Likewise, in the *Constitutions* Ignatius returns to the same theme in his treatment of prayer. Those who do not seem to be advancing by one method should be guided by the superior towards some alternative. Spiritual directors should always keep in view the 'circumstances of persons, times and places' (e.g. *Const* 343).

Ignatius is clear that a director should be neither too firm nor too lenient. If a person is suffering distractions or dryness it may help to suggest more prayer (Exx 13).<sup>25</sup> In the Exercises the director should always encourage perseverance in prayer particularly if there is a temptation to give up or to cut corners (Exx 12). Yet the director must also be sensitive to weakness. When someone is in difficulty or suffering from temptation or desolation the director is to be gentle and kind and always encouraging, thus offering the necessary hope 'to prepare and dispose him for coming consolation' (Exx 7). One of the early directories adds that a director should not press 'melancholic types'. 'Rather be careful to keep them open.'<sup>26</sup>

### *Focus of direction*

St Ignatius affirms both that prayer and life should be integrated and yet that the primary focus of spiritual direction is

'religious experience' and a person's relationship with God. In his own practice, Ignatius's aim was always 'to discover the concrete will of God and to bring it to completion'.<sup>27</sup> He was primarily concerned 'with leading those entrusted to him to a spiritual experience. . . . The person should receive an inner sense for the workings of God's grace.'<sup>28</sup>

Thus the introductory notes in the Exercises fix the attention both of the director and of the directee firmly on prayer. That being said, should spiritual direction limit itself purely to prayer? Certainly spiritual direction outside a 'closed retreat' (whether ordinary direction or the 'Exercises in daily life') will not be detached 'from all friends and acquaintances and from all worldly cares' (Exx 20). Quite the contrary! However, even within the Exercises, there is implicit reference to the fact that 'religious experience' is not to be limited to the time of explicit prayer. For example the general examen of conscience presents a way of reflecting on what happens in daily life (Exx 43).<sup>29</sup> Likewise the 'Contemplation to attain the love of God' at the close of the Exercises offers a form of prayer that focuses explicitly on the ways in which prayer acts in the world and in daily life (Exx 230–237).

The Exercises clearly assume that certain fundamental attitudes that lie behind what happens in prayer will also be an important focus in direction. The most important is generosity which enables a person to offer self to God. Obviously generosity will never be total and will appear as an issue at various times in direction (Exx 5). One of the early directories also mentions another attitude—the gradual purification of motives in prayer so that one does not seek consolation or anything else for its own sake.<sup>30</sup> A most important attitude is to centre on the 'here and now' rather than on an unhealthy and introspective stirring around in the past. This is one interpretation of an aspect of the introductory notes that is suggested by a modern commentator (Exx 17).<sup>31</sup>

As we have seen, Ignatius's emphasis in prayer is very much on the 'affective' and on inner feelings. It is not so much ideas that matter as 'the intimate understanding and relish of the truth' (Exx 2). A modern commentator has suggested that Ignatius learned from his own process of conversion that the alternation of 'affective experiences' or inner reactions was the

main criterion for determining how God is leading a person. It is this awareness of the significance of such experiences that led Ignatius to affirm strongly that God must be allowed to deal freely with the individual and that the director should question carefully about them.<sup>32</sup>

Because Ignatius believed that there was an intimate link between prayer and externals such as environment, preparation, place and posture, he suggests that a director should ask about such things, especially if prayer is dry or distracted. The details of these 'externals' are to be found in what are called the 'additional directions' (Exx 73–90). Equally, Ignatius, in line with his philosophy that the physical is important in prayer, has a number of remarks about diet (Exx 210–217). This insight that the whole of life, including food, should be in proper order to aid inner growth finds an echo in other traditions—not least in such non-Christian ones as yoga or Zen where diet is part and parcel of the way to enlightenment.

Much the same motivation (that the body and external environment play a part in spiritual growth) lies behind Ignatius's concern that austerities or penance should also be in proper order. The director is exhorted to keep an eye on this while at the same time allowing the individual to experiment freely (Exx 82–90). Certainly no penances must be imposed. The aim is not in any sense a rejection of the body as a hindrance but the search for a proper balance in living. In a letter to Borgia, Ignatius emphasizes that in the end inner gifts are to be preferred to outward austerities. The body is not to be abused. 'We should love the body in so far as it is obedient and helpful to the soul, since the soul with the body's help and service is better disposed for the service and praise of our Creator and Lord.'<sup>33</sup> In another letter to a Spanish nun he exhorts her to take great care of the body, to take proper nourishment, recreation and adequate sleep.<sup>34</sup>

In all these matters moderation is the key. 'If one fails to observe this moderation, he will find that good is turned to evil and virtue to vice.'<sup>35</sup> And so a director is to keep a careful eye on this danger.<sup>36</sup> For the same reason Ignatius exhorts Jesuits to follow the superior's judgement in order to avoid vanity.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, a central focus of spiritual direction is the develop-

ment of discernment, particularly that which is appropriate to different stages of spiritual growth (Exx 8, 10, 14).<sup>38</sup> The one who comes for direction needs it even to establish what should be mentioned in dialogue with the director as we have already seen. A director can help by showing the directee how to make a brief period of reflection after prayer and how to keep notes on this (Exx 77).<sup>39</sup> The main body of Ignatius's teaching on discernment, however, is contained in the Rules which appear in the Exercises and which the director should explain as appropriate to the directee (Exx 313–336). There is no room to discuss these in such a brief article and in any case there are several good commentaries available in English.<sup>40</sup> The Rules help both director and directee to understand the significance of inner feelings or reactions—in other words how to sift experience in order to distinguish the true and helpful from the false and misleading.

It is clear that Ignatius did not see his teaching on discernment as limited either to a closed retreat or to an early stage in spiritual growth. He felt it helpful to discuss it (especially the nature of consolation, desolation and scruples) in his dealings even with people who had made considerable progress.<sup>41</sup> There do remain serious questions about the practical validity of the Rules in the later stages of growth in prayer. The great analyst of mysticism, Poulain, implies that at least the teaching on consolation and desolation remain useful.<sup>42</sup> Ignatius himself recognizes a difference between what were traditionally called the purgative and illuminative ways (Exx 10). The strong oscillation of feelings is associated with the First Week (or earlier stage in the spiritual journey). As commitment deepens, Ignatius suggests that deceptive good or the 'enemy' posing as an angel of light will be more significant. The dangers become those of false humility or spiritual élitism.<sup>43</sup> The greater subtlety of the remarks in the Rules for the Second Week seem to me to indicate that movement or interior feelings will be much less obvious. If so, this indicates a need to be very careful in the application of Ignatius's remarks (Exx 17) about the director questioning the absence of such movements.



*St Ignatius and prayer*

Because a person seeking spiritual direction will as a matter of course wish to discuss prayer experiences and will hope for guidance in this area, it seems useful to look briefly at St Ignatius's teaching on prayer. It is important to allay fears that Ignatius had a narrow view of prayer or that directors in the Ignatian tradition are bound to impose particular forms of prayer on those being directed.

Obviously it is helpful to begin with some brief remarks about prayer as it is presented in the book of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The one being directed should be taught about the importance of preparation and recollection. Although the remarks on recollection (for example calling to mind the material for the day's prayer upon rising) are tailored to a closed retreat, the general principle is still valid in a wider context. The specific activity of praying needs to be rooted in some general cultivation of awareness and reflection. Likewise it is helpful, even in daily life, to prepare for prayer by deciding what one is going to do and why (cf. Exx 73–74).

Ignatius, in addition, points out the importance of place for prayer, without specifying where it should be. But he does seem to imply that it need not be a chapel or church (Exx 79). In practice it is important for each person to decide what is the best place. Wherever the 'holy ground' is, Ignatius suggests that a physical act of reverence (perhaps a profound bow) may be useful. There is considerable stress on the importance of posture. Again each person should discover the one which is most helpful and Ignatius's wide range of suggestions indicates a great freedom in this regard (Exx 76). Apart from place and posture, he also points out that the use of light or darkness should be varied as seems appropriate or helpful (Exx 79).

With regard to the length of prayer, Ignatius certainly seems to insist on the space of one hour in the context of the Exercises (Exx 12–13). However, as we shall see, he was far more flexible when it came to prayer in everyday life. The remarks in the Exercises do have some importance and that is to emphasize the need for faithfulness to what has been decided before prayer about the length. Otherwise the danger

is that one cuts corners, or gives up when times are hard. There is the possibility of important growth in perseverance.

When we turn to the structure of prayer as proposed in the Exercises it may seem that it is over-detailed and something of a strait-jacket. However, one has to bear in mind two things. Firstly, that Ignatius's great principle was flexibility and adaptation in the light of the needs of the individual. Secondly, the presentation in the Exercises is a form of shorthand for the director and there is a danger in treating it in an over-literal or 'fundamentalist' way. Throughout the various phases of the Exercises there are indeed certain constants which Ignatius clearly feels are of special value: a preparatory prayer (which amounts to a conscious act of presence to God); focusing on the 'subject matter' of the prayer (or, in other words, what I am about to do), and asking for what I desire or sense I need. The latter is not some way of twisting God's arm or limiting his freedom. It is an acknowledgment that prayer is God's action and that I need his grace. It is also an explicit acknowledgment of the needs that have already been revealed to me by God's grace and therefore indicates a kind of purposefulness in my prayer. But my desires are always in need of refinement and therefore I place what I know before God, trusting that his Spirit will act upon them and transform them if this is necessary.

Throughout the Exercises, the methods or structures of the subsequent periods of prayer vary a great deal. It is vital to keep in mind Ignatius's principle that one should remain where there is 'fruit' or benefit and not feel bound to move on (Exx 76). There is no justification for supposing that Ignatius thought of prayer as a syllabus or some set of hoops to jump through!

Contrary to popular mythology in the not so distant past, Ignatius did not promote any *one* method of prayer (even in the Exercises) and one should be extremely cautious about talking about '*the* Ignatian method'. At the very beginning of the Exercises he defines 'spiritual exercises' as '*every* method of examination of conscience, meditation, contemplation, of vocal and mental prayer...' (Exx 1). If one lists the many approaches that appear in the pages of the Exercises, it will be seen that they represent a great range of possibilities: the two

forms of 'examen' (Exx 24–26, 43); discursive meditation of the three powers of the soul (cf. for example, Exx 45–54); gospel contemplation with the use of imagination (Second to Fourth Weeks, for example Exx 110–117); the prayer of finding God in the world and in life called the 'Contemplation to attain the love of God' (Exx 230–237); the three methods of prayer (Exx 238–260) which include a measured repetition of words linked to breathing. One might also include the 'colloquy' that appears at the end of every period of prayer throughout the Exercises. Although this is presented as part both of meditation and contemplation rather than as a method on its own, it does underline that Ignatius saw familiar conversation with God as a valid aspect of prayer.

Finally, the Exercises provide evidence for the fact that Ignatius anticipates a process of simplification in prayer. The 'repetitions' throughout the Exercises are a form of simpler prayer, in which the person is invited to concentrate on less 'material'. 'We should pay attention to and dwell upon those points in which we have experienced greater consolation or desolation or greater spiritual appreciation' (Exx 62). The 'Application of the Senses' which is introduced in the Second Week as the final period of prayer in the day is once again a form of simplified prayer with more emphasis on the 'affective'. The process of simplification is further underlined by the fact that Ignatius suggests less and less material as the basis for each day's prayer as the Exercises progress.

W. H. Longridge, the Anglican translator and commentator on the Exercises, argued strongly that, both within the framework of the Exercises and elsewhere, Ignatius provided sufficiently for all types of people—even for those who are genuinely contemplative and (using traditional language) in the illuminative or unitive ways.<sup>44</sup> He pointed out that even in the earlier stages of the Exercises the 'repetitions' demand that the understanding 'be restrained' in order to give more scope to the affections. 'Repetitions should in fact be made more after the manner of affective prayer than of meditation so called.'<sup>45</sup> Longridge felt that Ignatius placed considerable importance on 'repetitions', particularly after the middle of the Second Week because 'without them our meditations would often be in danger of becoming shallow, scarcely going

beyond the intellectual exercises, and missing that interior savour of the truth which St Ignatius is so anxious that we should enjoy'.<sup>46</sup> The Application of the Senses does not proceed by reasoning at all but simply 'rests'. 'Hearing' is of the heart rather than of the understanding.<sup>47</sup> While Longridge felt that there was a distinction between 'gospel contemplation' in the Exercises and the way that contemplation is understood in the mystical tradition as a whole, he nevertheless believed that Ignatian prayer may be a preparation for what is called the 'prayer of simple regard':

Especially if we take into account what he says about repetitions and application of the senses, a soul can hardly help being led on from meditation to affective prayer, and that in increasing degrees of simplification till it arrives at last, if God so wills, at the prayer of simple regard.<sup>48</sup>

He quotes Suarez (who certainly did not belong to the purely 'ascetical' school of Jesuits) in support of his views and he seems to be in accord with much that Poulain, the writer on mysticism, says.<sup>49</sup>

Outside the context of the Exercises, there is plenty of evidence that Ignatius taught a very broad understanding of prayer and recognized a development towards simplification and contemplation. In his famous letter to the Spanish nun, Sister Teresa Rejadell, he comments for example:

Every kind of meditation in which the understanding is engaged wears the body. There are other kinds of meditation, orderly and restful, which are pleasant to the understanding and offer no difficulty to the interior faculties of the soul, and which can be made without interior expenditure of effort.<sup>50</sup>

Poulain cites this letter as an example of Ignatius pointing towards a genuinely simple form of prayer.<sup>51</sup> He also points out that the primary aim of the Exercises is not to provide a system of prayer but to free a person who wishes to be generous with God. Thus, by implication, the rather methodical approach is appropriate to the experience of the Exercises

but it is to be hoped that there a person will have learned to pray more freely.<sup>52</sup>

It is important to note that Ignatius's principle of flexibility in the light of the needs of an individual meant that his advice on prayer in his letters varied a great deal. Thus, in some cases, he was prepared to insist on a daily pattern of formal prayer, as in the case of the layman, Anthony Enriquez: 'Set aside some time each day so that the soul will not be without its nourishment and you be led to complain like him who said "my heart is withered because I forgot to eat my bread"'.<sup>53</sup> Yet in other places he accepts that different circumstances demand different remedies. To priests and students at Coimbra who were in danger of excess he commented:

The demands of your life of study do not permit you to devote much time to prayer, yet you can make up for this by desires, since the time you devote to your various exercises is a continuous prayer, seeing that you are engaged in them only for God's service.<sup>54</sup>

While the desire for prayer and contemplation is valid, for those dedicated to the apostolate, works of charity and a Christian life in the world, prayer can never be an end in itself. There should be a dialogue between contemplativity and activity. Those who resent the lack of time for prayer because of the 'distraction' of activity are advised that this 'distraction which you accept for his greater service' can be 'the equivalent of the union and recollection of uninterrupted contemplation'.<sup>55</sup> The growing ability to 'find God in all things' is in some ways better than a long time spent in formal prayer.<sup>56</sup> And in a letter to Fr Brandao concerning younger Jesuits Ignatius offers the widest possible teaching on prayer: These young Jesuits should:

Seek God's presence in all things, in their conversations, their walks, in all that they see, taste, hear, understand, in all their actions, since his divine Majesty is truly in all things by his presence, power and essence. This kind of meditation which finds God our Lord in all things is easier than raising oneself to the consideration of divine truths which are more abstract

and which demand something of an effort if we are to keep our attention on them. But this method is an excellent exercise to prepare for great visitations of our Lord, even in prayers that are rather short.<sup>57</sup>

In his *Constitutions* Ignatius's prescriptions for Jesuit prayer were equally flexible. For students he talks of one hour each day, but the hour is understood as a total rather than one continuous period. The actual form of personal prayer was not specified. In the case of the professed, Ignatius makes no detailed requirements. He presupposed that these men were spiritual by nature and sufficiently advanced to know what they required (but always in dialogue with their superior).<sup>58</sup> It was not until sometime after Ignatius's death that a daily period of one hour's continuous mental prayer was introduced. This was part of a more general tendency to narrow the understanding of Ignatian prayer. The more affective or contemplative dimension, in official circles at least, gave way to a preference for discursive meditation. The causes of the narrowing of perspective and practice were complex but a major one was the desire to bring Jesuit practice into line with what was acceptable in the new atmosphere after the Council of Trent. There was a tendency towards a kind of 'reductionism' in favour of conventional practices in other religious orders—including a more structured approach to 'times of prayer'. Equally there was a suspicion of anything that smacked of the mystical or 'inner lights' and movements of the Spirit which, it was felt, could all too easily slide into the heresy of 'illuminationism'. This narrowing of the understanding of prayer (and the Exercises in particular) naturally spilled over into the kind of instruction that Jesuit spiritual directors gave to those who sought guidance. There always remained some Jesuits, however, who continued to promote a more flexible or more contemplative approach—sometimes in the face of considerable opposition.<sup>59</sup>

### Conclusion

It now seems possible to indicate in summary the fundamental principles of spiritual direction in the mind of St Ignatius. We



have seen that the primary focus is on the particular religious experience of the person being directed. For Ignatius this means not simply the activity of prayer (although this is a vital element) but, because he has what in contemporary terms would be called a 'holistic' approach, it also involves developing an awareness of the way God is to be found in all the experiences of life. By implication too, the life of the Spirit is not to be reduced to a series of ascetical exercises common to all. Direction therefore, is essentially a response to an experience of God's presence and action as reported by the person who comes for guidance. A director cannot know in detail what he or she should say beforehand.

To respond to what a person reports and also to one's perception of that person's character and needs also means that what is offered by the director must be as fully adapted as possible. This is Ignatius's principle of flexibility—that all instruction or advice should be what helps this particular person at this particular moment. This demands a great deal of patience on the part of the director, not a little intuition or sensitivity and a non-judgmental approach. Directors should avoid any temptation to measure people against objective norms. This attitude of being 'as a balance at equilibrium' (Exx 15) led some people to accuse Ignatius of heresy because it seemed to give a dangerous prominence to the interior guidance of the Spirit in each individual and to prevent the director from correcting false doctrinal or ethical stances.<sup>60</sup> In fact, of course, Ignatius did see the possibility of correction but this should be sensitive and gentle and not dogmatic confrontation (Exx 22). The important thing for Ignatius was to help each person to grow in an inner freedom to respond to God's call and demands. For what is appropriated personally is likely to go deeper than what is imposed.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Leech, K.: *Soul friend* (London: Sheldon Press, 1979; New York: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 58.
- <sup>2</sup> References in this article are to *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*, trans. L. Puhl (Chicago, 1951), cited as Exx. While I have tried to avoid exclusive language throughout this article, all direct quotations are given in their original form.

- <sup>3</sup> The early directories appear in *Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu*, 76. In this article I have referred to an English translation, *Autograph directories of St Ignatius Loyola* in the series 'Program to adapt the Spiritual Exercises', ed. Thomas Burke (Jersey City, no date). In this there are three directories associated with St Ignatius himself which I have cited subsequently as: *Autograph*, *Tradita* and *Calveras*.
- <sup>4</sup> This also appears in *MHSJ*, 76 and in a good English translation in *The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*, ed. W. H. Longridge (London, 1930).
- <sup>5</sup> Veale, J.: 'Ignatian prayer or Jesuit spirituality', in *The Way Supplement*, 27 (Spring 1976), p. 8.
- <sup>6</sup> For Ignatius's letters I have referred in this article to the selection entitled *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. William Young (Chicago, 1959), cited as *Letters*. For the Constitutions, see *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. George Ganss (St Louis, 1970), cited as *Const.*
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. Fleming, D.: 'The Ignatian Spiritual Exercises: understanding a dynamic', in *Notes on the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola*, ed. D. Fleming (St Louis, 1981), pp. 4–5. And English, J.: *Spiritual freedom* (Guelph, 1982), *passim*.
- <sup>8</sup> Cf. Fleming, *op. cit.*, pp. 4–5.
- <sup>9</sup> *Tradita*, notes.
- <sup>10</sup> *Calveras*, 407.
- <sup>11</sup> Quoted in Veale, *op. cit.*, p. 9, n. 28.
- <sup>12</sup> English, *op. cit.*, pp. 56–68.
- <sup>13</sup> *Autograph*, 7.
- <sup>14</sup> *Autograph*, 8.
- <sup>15</sup> *Tradita*, Manner of giving Exx, 1.
- <sup>16</sup> *Calveras*, 412. Cf. also English, *op. cit.*, comments on Exx 2, pp. 56–68.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. Bernadicou, P.: 'The retreat director in the Spiritual Exercises', in Fleming, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–38.
- <sup>18</sup> Robb, P.: *The retreatant in a directed retreat*, in the series 'Program to adapt the Spiritual Exercises', p. 1.
- <sup>19</sup> Quoted in Veale, *op. cit.*, p. 9, n. 27.
- <sup>20</sup> *Tradita*, 2.
- <sup>21</sup> *Autograph*, 5. Cf. also English, *op. cit.*, on Exx 17, pp. 56–68.
- <sup>22</sup> Robb, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- <sup>23</sup> Robb, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
- <sup>24</sup> *Letters*, p. 179.
- <sup>25</sup> *Letters*, p. 179.
- <sup>26</sup> *Calveras*, 431.
- <sup>27</sup> Wulf, F.: 'Ignatius as a spiritual guide', in *Ignatius Loyola, his personality and spiritual heritage 1556–1956*, ed. F. Wulf (St Louis, 1977), p. 36.
- <sup>28</sup> Wulf, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
- <sup>29</sup> Nowadays most directors favour a broader approach to this, popularly called the 'examen of consciousness' which focuses not merely on faults but on the whole of life. Cf. Aschenbrenner, G.: 'Consciousness