

THE MYSTICISM OF IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

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Soldier Saint or Mystic?

Over the centuries since 1556, the year of his death, Ignatius has been interpreted through a variety of images. The dominant image for most of this period was that of the soldier saint. This image drew partly on Ignatius’ patrimony in the warlike minor aristocracy of the Basque country. Linked with this was his upbringing in the chivalric culture of the day that included training in the art of warfare. Then there was Pamplona and his exploits there. But the image also drew on an interpretation of the Society of Jesus as founded to engage in a spiritual warfare with Luther and the other sixteenth century Reformers. However inaccurate this may be, it stuck and was commonly accepted in both Catholic and Protestant circles.

The second dominant image is that of Ignatius the mystic. The prevalence of this image is quite recent, since the middle of the twentieth century. But dominant it certainly is today. Ignatius the mystic has replaced Ignatius the soldier saint. For reasons that are in part historically well grounded, and in part merely politically correct, references to Ignatius’ soldierly background and mentality are very rare nowadays. Everything that Ignatius said, did, or wrote is traced back instead to his mystical experiences in Manresa, at La Storta, and in Rome. Hence the strong interest that is shown in the Autobiography and the Spiritual Journal.

Theology of story¹

One of the most interesting and fruitful strands in contemporary theology and spirituality is that of story as a source or a carrier of revelation. Whether it be the story telling of so much of the Old Testament, or of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, or those later stories of women and men believers which make up so much of the Christian tradition - contemporary searchers for God find in this approach a lively, relevant and experiential way of learning about the mysterious interaction of God with his people. Stories have the capacity to illuminate and instruct, not by communicating truth in an abstract or purely rational way, but by inviting the listener to enter imaginatively into another's story, whether that other be an individual or a people. This then draws out the listener's own story through the recognition of similarities and contrasts, and the experience of resonances joyful or painful.

Spiritual autobiography

We find therefore a growing appreciation of that genre of writing that can be called 'spiritual autobiography'. This is an obvious and convenient term, yet it runs the risk of associating these writings too closely with the 'secular' autobiographies of politicians, soldiers, movie stars, etc. This can be misleading, because while secular autobiography deals with what a person has done, achieved, said, thought and felt, spiritual autobiography deals more with what God has brought about in the life of the writer or narrator. It is primarily the record of God's involvement and relationship with a human person. The centre of attention is always God rather than the narrator. Of course human actions and reactions are recorded, human freedom is acknowledged and taken seriously, but all of this is presented and interpreted in relation to the initiative of God.

Contemplation to attain the love of God

For those familiar with the Spiritual Exercises these reflections on spiritual autobiography may well evoke the Contemplation to Attain the

Love of God with which the Exercises end. There I encounter a God who showers his gifts and blessings on me, and who desires, as far as he can, to give himself to me; a God who dwells in all creatures, including me, indeed who makes a temple of me; a God who works and labours for me in all creatures and, we must add, in me for all creatures; a God who is the source of all human goodness and virtue, who in some sense shares his own goodness and virtue with me

*Ignatius chose to live
with the tension between accepting both
the validity of inner experience
and the authority of the Church*

(SpEx 234-237). In theological terms this is an immanent God, a God who is recognized and encountered within human experience. This is also the Trinitarian God of Christian belief whose immanence is manifested in the Incarnation of the Son and in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is precisely this immanence of God that makes spiritual autobiography possible.

Movement and mutuality

From his conversion onwards the element of *movement* played a central part in the spirituality of Ignatius. At Loyola he noticed how different spirits moved him and through this he learned the rudiments of discernment. When later he offered descriptive descriptions of consolation and desolation in the Spiritual Exercises (SpEx. 316, 317) the text can, according to some commentators, be best understood in terms of inner movements towards God (consolation) and inner movements away from God (desolation).

But there was outer movement also as he chose to become a pilgrim and to move from country to country in a constant search for the will and the glory of God. His movement, his journeying, his pilgrimage, was both physical and spiritual. But as Ignatius increased in spiritual sensitivity he recognized that there was another Mover at work, that God was all the time moving to meet him, inviting him to harmonize his movements with God's, to move together in a dance through life. Good dancers dance for each other and have a fluidity of movement that is continually attuned to their

partners. There is a premium on mutuality, a mutuality of attention, of purpose, and of rhythm.

Within the Autobiography itself the centrality of movement can be demonstrated by a comparison between the very first sentence in the text and a statement referring to the time when Ignatius was dictating his story:

Up to his twenty-sixth year he was a man given to worldly vanities, and having a vain and overpowering desire to gain renown, he found special delight in the exercise of arms. (Aut 1)

He made a solemn avowal, the gist of which was to inform me that his intention had been to be sincere in all that he had related...and that his devotion, that is, his ease in finding God, was always increasing, now more than ever in his entire life. At whatever time or hour he wanted to find God, he found him. (Aut 99)

The Autobiography can be interpreted as an account of how God had led Ignatius from the first state to the last, from a search for worldly renown to a search for devotion, from delight in arms to an ever-increasing ease in finding God. The partners in the dance have moved through a rhythm of increasing mutuality into a profound intimacy.

Integration

We know that Ignatius moved from a period of extreme penance to a gradual realisation of a call to apostolate. At Loyola he had admired St Francis and St Dominic and other apostolic saints of the Middle Ages whose lives he had read in the *Flos Sanctorum*. But he interpreted their lives more in terms of their great deeds that he wanted to emulate rather than being grasped by their evangelising zeal. The latter did not fully capture his imagination at the time of his conversion. It was only in the consolation of his mystical experiences at Manresa that he was able to grasp the vital link, indeed the equivalence, between the glory of God, the service of God, and the helping of other people.

From that moment onwards he was never 'just' a pilgrim, but a pilgrim who was always on the lookout for possibilities for evangelisation. His chosen method, marked by a great simplicity, was spiritual conversation, and the apex of such conversation was to become the giving of the Spiritual Exercises.² To the desire 'to save his soul' was added the desire 'to help

souls', and the two desires were never again to be considered apart. The lifestyle which Ignatius was from then on beginning to develop needed to concretise and express these desires - not one now and the other later; nor one at the expense of the other; nor even one subordinate to the other - but both together, at one and the same time, inseparably.

*Cardoner*³

After this overview of Ignatius' early development we need to look more closely at those mystical experiences in Manresa, and especially that on the banks of the Cardoner. The description that Ignatius gives of these experiences is extremely sparse. He attempts to convey some impression of each of the visions (Trinity, creation, Eucharist, Christ's humanity, and Our Lady) but in all honesty he does not succeed very well. This is sometimes attributed to his lacking a capacity to communicate imaginatively as, for instance, Teresa of Avila did so easily. But at best this is only a partial explanation. Of more significance is that the core experience in each was intellectual rather than imaginative or even affective. We need to notice the phrases he uses: 'his understanding was raised on high', 'it was granted him to understand', 'he clearly saw with his understanding'.

When it comes to the great enlightenment at the Cardoner there is even less imaginative or affective colour, and an even more direct focus on the understanding.

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. (Aut 30)

It can even be argued that Ignatius' primary purpose at this point in the Autobiography was not so much to convey **what** he had been taught as **that** he had been taught. By making this claim he is offering the reader an apologia for his subsequent choices and lifestyle.

The mystical experiences of Ignatius at Manresa cannot be fully understood in isolation but only in context. They are part of the process of Ignatius' ongoing conversion and enlightenment. They are an integral part of his story, not separate from it, not accidental to it. The text continues:

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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. (Aut 30)

This statement does not necessarily mean that his later mystical experiences, at La Storta or in Rome, were not more profound in terms of intimacy with God, but it does mean that Cardoner remained unequalled in a didactic sense. It was an essential part of the process of God's teaching him as a schoolteacher instructs a child.⁴

Myth nuanced

The early companions frequently referred to Manresa and Cardoner. From these sources we might choose just one from Nadal.

Ignatius always prized this gift (i.e. Cardoner) highly; because of it he conceived a profound modesty and humility; from it there began to shine on his countenance an indescribable spiritual light and alacrity. He was wont to refer to that one grace and light whenever he was questioned either about serious matters or about some reasons for the way of life in the Society — as though he had seen on that one occasion the inner causes and bases of all things.⁵

A myth gradually grew up around Cardoner, which held that Ignatius saw then in every detail the future form of the Society of Jesus. Nadal himself could not possibly have held this view since he was conversant with Ignatius' methodology and struggles in writing the Constitutions many years later.

A more balanced interpretation suggests that what Ignatius learned through Cardoner was a deepened understanding of discernment, which became the touchstone for all his later decision-making. In this sense he was constantly referring back to Cardoner. Before that he had noticed and wondered (as at Loyola), but did not understand. But henceforth there is in him an assurance that was not there before.

New Knowledge?

Such an interpretation, however, gives us little of a concrete nature to hang on to. This partly explains a tendency to interpret Ignatius' words in the Autobiography as indicating that he was given new knowledge, that the content of his knowledge of God and the world was increased. While the text does not exclude such a reading, neither does it demand it. We recall the exact wording:

...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. (Aut 30)

This can legitimately mean that he was given an intellectual grasp of realities, secular as well as religious, that he already knew. I suggest that this is the more probable meaning. If he had been receiving new knowledge there would be no sense in saying that 'all these things seemed new to him'. They would in fact have been new to him. But he was seeing familiar realities in a new light and with a greater profundity. Furthermore, since Ignatius speaks of his Cardoner experience immediately after his description of the five visions, it is likely that what he primarily indicating is a deeper understanding of the Trinity, creation, Eucharist, humanity of Christ, and Our Lady. These were not new facts, or new truths, but they seemed as new in the vivid intuitive grasp with which he was gifted.

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Interconnectedness

Either interpretation (i.e. that there was new content or that there was no new content) allows for the suggestion that an important part of the

experience was a grasp of the **interconnectedness** of the truths whose meaning he saw, bringing together matters of the spirit, of faith, and of secular learning. This interconnectedness might well correspond to Nadal's phrase, 'the inner causes and bases of all things'. It might also explain to some degree how the Cardoner experience could become the touchstone for future discernment and decision-making.⁶

The spanish inquisition

So far we have been reflecting on Cardoner and his other mystical experiences at Manresa from Ignatius' point of view. But we know that after his return from Jerusalem, when he began to study and to engage in lay-ministry in Barcelona, Alcalá and Salamanca, he attracted the attention

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of the Inquisition. His ministry, as we have seen, consisted mostly of spiritual conversation, sometimes with individuals, at other times with groups. Suspicions arose about the orthodoxy of what he was teaching and he was imprisoned, questioned, and his behaviour investigated. While not

found guilty of being unorthodox he never fully satisfied his interrogators who placed restrictions on his spiritual ministries. This led to his decision to move on, first from Alcalá to Salamanca, then from Salamanca to Paris.

Alumbradismo: The way of enlightenment

The Inquisition suspected that Ignatius was an *alumbrado*, an Enlightened One. We need to say a little about this movement known as *alumbradismo* since this suspicion followed Ignatius wherever he went. No individual or group ever claimed the name *alumbrado*. It originated as a term of mockery, abuse and accusation, and was used only by opponents of the movement. Much of our knowledge of the early expression of *alumbradismo* (around the 1520s) comes from an edict of faith issued by

the Inquisitor General in 1525. It contained forty-eight propositions, mainly statements attributed to members of the movement, or snatches of conversation overheard by hostile witnesses. The edict was directed against persons 'who call themselves enlightened, abandoned and perfect' (*alumbrados, dexados y perfectos*).

Many of the propositions in the edict of faith expressed contempt for the cult of the saints, the worship of images, bulls, indulgences, fasting, abstinence and the commandments of the Church. Others concerned *dejamiento*, abandonment, passive reliance on the divine will, a state in which no special form of prayer was required but which brought about a condition of perfection in which 'the love of God in a person was God'. All activity was an obstacle to the divine presence in the soul. It is wrong to ask anything of the Almighty, to think of the humanity of Christ, or, by exerting the memory, even to remember God. These convictions, especially that passive abandonment was the summit of perfection, led to a fundamentalist certitude resulting in an aggressive disdain for all tradition and authority.⁸

Ignatius an alumbrado?

The sources for the suspicion that fell on Ignatius were many. When he arrived in Alcala in 1526 he became acquainted with some prominent individuals who were later pursued by the Inquisition on charges of *alumbradismo*. He chose one of them, the Portuguese priest, Manuel de Miona, as his confessor.⁹ Besides these contacts, Ignatius soon found himself at the head of a group desiring spiritual guidance. The majority of these were women. Here too there were some who were involved, albeit marginally, with the *alumbrados*. During their meetings some of the younger women became subject of curious seizures. Some broke out in sweat and fainted, some vomited, and some writhed on the ground claiming to have visions of the devil.¹⁰ Given these phenomena the Inquisition could hardly ignore the activities of Ignatius and not want to question him on his teaching.¹¹

Annotation fifteen: The central issue

While there were many issues involved in Ignatius' teaching and activity that the Inquisition wished to investigate, the central one concerned

the validity of inner experience. From what Ignatius had experienced at Manresa, he was convinced that God communicated directly with the individual person. After telling of his five visions at Manresa he had said in the Autobiography:

These things that 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. (Aut 29)

But the clearest exposition of this conviction comes in the fifteenth annotation of the Spiritual Exercises.

But while one is engaged in the Spiritual Exercises, it is more suitable and much better that the Creator and Lord in person communicate himself to the devout soul in quest of the divine will, that he inflame it with his love and praise, and dispose it for the way in which it could better serve God in the future. Therefore, the director of the Exercises, as a balance at equilibrium, without leaning to one side or the other, should permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature directly with his Creator and Lord. (SpEx 15)

There is no doubt that this teaching is similar to that of *alumbradismo*. What saved Ignatius from a conviction of heresy was his refusal to draw the *alumbrados*' conclusion that because of the validity of inner experience there is no need for the externals of Christian worship and discipline. In spite of, or as many would now argue, because of, his mystical experiences at Manresa, and later at La Storta and Rome, he held to the necessity of remaining part of the institutional church in its incarnational reality. He had seen the interconnectedness of all truth. The Rules for Thinking with the Church bear this out, and many of them reflect his experiences of being branded an *alumbrado*.¹²

*Melchor Cano*¹³

The suspicions of *alumbradismo* that fell on Ignatius personally from the 1520s were extended over the years to the book of the Spiritual Exercises and eventually to the Society of Jesus itself. One of the most prominent and able early critics of what we now call Ignatian spirituality was the Dominican theologian, Melchor Cano. He was implacably hostile to the *alumbrados* and associated Ignatius with them. Between 1556 and 1558 Cano wrote a number of letters in which he affirmed that the Society was a heretical force whose Exercises were undermining Church and State. A treatise that he wrote with the intention of sending it to Pope Paul IV was subsequently lost and we do not know if the Pope ever received it. A document discovered in the British Library in 1977 and attributed to Cano is almost certainly the work in question. It is known by the first word of its title, the *Censura*.¹⁴

Suspicious of the Spiritual Exercises

It contains attacks on the Society of Jesus, on Ignatius, and on the Exercises. Firstly, he deplored the fact that they offered everyone the same contemplative spirituality, irrespective of different temperaments and callings. Cano believed that it was not feasible to combine the active and contemplative lives, and he was concerned that people who tried to do so might neglect the works proper to their vocation. This had been an error of the *alumbrados*, some of whom had been led in their enthusiasm to abandon their responsibilities to home, work and family. Cano feared that through the Exercises the same upheavals would occur.

Secondly, Cano disapproved of the importance he considered the Exercises accorded to affective spiritual experience. The person making them, he wrote, is given to understand that during the retreat he will experience the work of grace in his soul and be granted consolations: To make such a promise is presumption, an attempt to force the hand of God.¹⁵

Thirdly, Cano criticised what he considered the encouragement given in the Exercises to indifference as a means of discerning God's will. In general, he felt, the Society erred by according an excessive and distorted

importance to conformity with the will of God, an attitude that resembled that of the *alumbrados*. This naturally led to his having difficulties with the election. Referring to the teaching that God should be allowed to work directly on the soul, he calls it *una clausula no muy sana* (not a very wholesome teaching). He held that this way of discerning God's will undermined respect for reason, learning and authority.

Differences and Similarities

It would be easy to focus on Cano's exaggerations and so dismiss his critique as untrue and therefore irrelevant. Ignatius was never an *alumbrado* nor do the Exercises promote *alumbradismo*. The judgements given at his various trials confirm this. It is true that he taught mental prayer (what he called meditation and contemplation), but in contrast to the *alumbrados* he never opposed this to vocal prayer (which he in fact encouraged). Far from being critical of the external dimension of Christian worship Ignatius not only took part in it and found devotion in it, but defended it against its critics as we see in the Rules for Thinking with the Church. Furthermore, the central place that he gave to the Passion in the Spiritual Exercises was totally at variance with the condemnation by the *alumbrados* of contemporary Spanish devotion to the Passion.

Nevertheless, Ignatius and the *alumbrados* did share certain common beliefs and aspirations. Of these we might isolate three as probably the most significant.

Firstly, they were both convinced of the possibility and desirability of combining contemplation and action. The consequence was that they considered their teaching on prayer to be accessible to all, and not confined to those in religious life.

Secondly, they both expressed confidence in the possibility and desirability of an affective experience of God's love. This was part of their shared conviction about the validity of inner spiritual experience.

Thirdly, they both believed in the possibility and desirability of divine guidance even in the ordinary decisions of life.¹⁶

Spiritual diary

Although Cano had met Ignatius and was familiar with the text of the Spiritual Exercises (having his own annotated copy) he did not have access to what we know as Ignatius' Spiritual Diary. Would the Diary have given him a different perspective on Ignatius or would it have confirmed his worst suspicions? Let us remind ourselves of this document and its background.

In 1541 the early companions entrusted the composition of the Constitutions of their recently approved order to Ignatius and Jean Codure. The latter died within months and Ignatius was left alone with this daunting task. In the same year he had been elected the first Superior General and the period 1541-1544 turned out to be a time of rapid expansion of the Society. Besides the administrative work involved in governing this body, Ignatius chose to be heavily engaged in many apostolic projects in Rome itself, while at the same time suffering from serious ill-health. He had little time or energy to give to the 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 the 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 allowing such an income, but now Ignatius had second thoughts and was leaning towards excluding such income. So he began a discernment process of forty days which lasted from 2 February until 12 March.

Discernment log book

The so-called Spiritual Diary or Journal, consisting of two copybooks, has been more accurately named by Joseph Munitiz as 'a discernment log-book'.¹⁷ In it Ignatius recorded his inner experiences during prayer throughout this period. Writing it was part of his discernment process, just as a contemporary exercitant facing a serious decision would be aided by keeping similar notes or records. Hence some knowledge of the Spiritual

Exercises, and especially of the election process, is necessary in order to understand the text's contents, especially those in the first copybook.

But Ignatius also realised that some of the experiences he recorded, some of the graces he was receiving at this time, seemed to promise more lasting value and meaning for himself (i.e. value and meaning beyond the context of this particular election). These passages he encircled with a line and then copied onto two separate pieces of paper which have also survived.

But let us focus for the moment on the election. The outcome Ignatius was seeking was not given to him in some kind of self-authenticating illumination, a First Time experience in the language of the Exercises. He had to find another way. He began his discernment, therefore, by composing a separate document noting the pros and cons as he saw them in regard to the poverty issue. He kept these notes by his side during prayer throughout this whole period. There are several references to them in the text. He had clearly opted to use the 'First way of making a good and correct choice' in the Third Time. But although he tried to make use of his reasoning powers through prayerfully considering the pros and cons of the argument, this method did not produce a result that was satisfying to him. So he eventually turned for enlightenment to his experience of consolations and desolations, or in his own terminology, to the Second Time for making a good and sound election.

The very difficulties met by Ignatius in this discernment process are part of its value for us. He experienced much uncertainty and confusion even about the method he should use. He was not saved by his accompanying mystical experiences from the messiness that many know as part of a discernment process. Yet it must be added that not many people would be so stubbornly insistent on confirmation, so unwilling or unable to bring the process to closure.

The trinitarian dimension

In spite of Ignatius' vision of the Trinity at Manresa, there is little prominence given to the Trinity in the Spiritual Exercises. The one notable exception is the contemplation on the Incarnation. Here the image of the Three Persons gazing down on the world and its inhabitants gives us not only the starting-point of the exercise but the essential context for its

unfolding.¹⁸ Apart from this contemplation we are generally left in the Exercises with a more implicit presence of the Trinity. It is implicit 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. It is implicit in the Contemplation to Attain Love where the Trinity is again not named but can be inferred.

Nevertheless, the Exercises are predominantly Christocentric while the Diary gives this central place to the Trinity. There is an obvious discontinuity as well as a continuity between the spirituality of the two texts. It is not a new spirituality that emerges in the Diary, but one that has evolved, even evolved considerably, from that of the Exercises and the Manresa experiences that underpinned them. As part of this developed Trinitarian consciousness we might also note how in the Diary some of the most striking visions are of the Third Person.¹⁹

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.²⁰

Munitiz argues persuasively for an intrinsic link between the Contemplation to Attain Love and the Trinitarian experiences that Ignatius enjoyed in Rome:

In the Diary, an endearing phrase to refer to God is that of 'Giver of Graces': in the Contemplation 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.²¹

Returning to Cano

For our present purpose we may leave aside the physiological repercussions of Ignatius' mystical experiences such as tears, warmth, *loquela*

and so forth. The Christian mystical tradition has always judged such phenomena as of secondary importance. Instead let us return to Melchor Cano and the question that we posed earlier. Would he have changed his opinion about Ignatius if he had access to the Spiritual Diary? It seems more likely that he would still have discovered *alumbradismo* in its pages. The core beliefs that Ignatius shared with the *alumbrados* are again present.

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Firstly, the possibility of combining contemplation and action. Ignatius was living a full and busy life during the weeks that he gave to this discernment process. Although in the Diary he was mostly recording his prayer experiences he also mentioned events that occurred

outside of times of formal prayer. God breaks in on him in the most ordinary of circumstances. Indeed in the discernment itself it is while Ignatius is having his midday meal that he receives the final decisive consolations.

Secondly, the Diary is suffused with confidence in the affective, and even sensible, experience of God's love.

Thirdly, the Diary expresses Ignatius' conviction that God can and does guide the Christian in the ordinary decisions of life. Granted that the issue of the poverty of the Society was not exactly ordinary, it is clear that Ignatius was always aware of the intimacy of God's nearness and help in all circumstances, no matter how mundane.

Cano would have found in these traits further confirmation that Ignatius was an *alumbrado*.

The exercises and the diary

The relationship between the Exercises and the Diary is two-way rather than one-way. We have seen how the Diary presupposes the Exercises. I would suggest that the Exercises need the Diary to interpret them more in depth and to develop their potential. For example, if we accept that the spirituality of the Diary goes beyond that of the Exercises, what does that say to our way of giving the Exercises? If we accept that

there is a shift from Christ as the dominant figure in the Exercises to the Trinity being the central focus in the Diary, does this suggest that we may, and maybe ought, to give a more Trinitarian slant to our presentation of the Exercises? To make more explicit what is often implicit in the Exercises? If we do not honour the development in Ignatius' own life, do we risk selling people short? I am thinking particularly of exercitants who are already well experienced in the spiritual life.

Mysticism and growth

The attitude one takes on this issue may well be coloured by one's views on wider questions such as the nature of mysticism, and Christian mysticism in particular, whether mysticism is open to everyone, whether mysticism can be taught or even induced. Even if one wants to avoid the term mysticism altogether, one's view may be linked with an understanding of growth in the spiritual life, its relationship with other kinds of growth, and especially one's view on where growth is meant to lead.

The classical paradigm of such growth, as a movement through purification and illumination into union, is mirrored in the Exercises themselves. There is great wisdom in this paradigm when it is handled with flexibility and sensitivity. In its Neo-Platonic origins it pointed to an intellectual union, the peak of contemplation. As the Christian tradition evolved the theory was able to accommodate affective union (as in the Cistercian and Franciscan traditions) and conative union, or union of wills (as many interpret the Ignatian tradition).²²

From a theological perspective there is no doubt that our destiny is to be in union with the Trinitarian God. But it is more difficult to answer the question developmentally. Is a conscious awareness of moving more and more deeply into the orbit of the Trinity necessary for our growth in relationship with God? Is it enough to maintain a focus on the person of Christ, to foster a Christocentric spirituality, believing that this will be sufficient to open ourselves and others to further movements of grace? We remember Jesus' words to Philip, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). Or do we need to be more explicit in presenting the life of the Trinity as the emerging focus of our prayer and life?²³

The attitude of Ignatius

One of the difficulties I find in presenting this latter position is the attitude of Ignatius himself. I am not referring only to the absence of an explicitly Trinitarian dimension in the Spiritual Exercises, but also to his reticence in speaking either about his own prayer or prayer in general. Many have remarked on the paucity of teaching on prayer in the Constitutions. Ignatius will stress the conditions for a life of prayer, such as mortification, humility, purity of intention, obedience, but say little or nothing about prayer itself.²⁴

What puzzles me is that Ignatius, as we see from the pages of the Spiritual Diary, was receiving deep mystical gifts, mostly of a Trinitarian kind, during his years in Rome. Yet he did not rewrite the Spiritual Exercises in the light of these experiences as he could have done. He seems to have decided that, while his earlier experiences, particularly those in Manresa, could be of help to others, those in Rome were for himself alone. Maybe he was correct, but I wonder by what criteria he made that decision. Other mystics, such as his near contemporaries, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, invited others to aspire to the kind of union they had reached. John, as we know, first handed his followers a map of Mount Sion, showing the way to the summit of union with God. Ignatius, on the other hand, does not seem to have held out such an invitation. At best he points to the beginnings of his own journey. There is an extraordinary reticence about his later experiences. Even his Autobiography ends with his arrival in Rome.

Ignatius' restraint was not shared by Nadal. Speaking to a Jesuit audience he says:

We know that Father Ignatius received from God the singular grace to enjoy freely the contemplation of the Trinity and to rest in it. One day the grace would lead him to contemplate the whole Trinity, to be drawn to it and be completely united to it in great devotion and consolation. At another time he contemplated the Father, at another the Son or the Holy Spirit. He enjoyed this contemplation frequently at other times, but especially (almost as his only prayer) during the last days of his life.²⁵

Nadal goes on to describe this prayer as a great privilege, but one that is also given to the Society of Jesus and is linked with the Jesuit vocation. He adds, "Therefore let us also place the perfection of our prayer in the contemplation of the Trinity".²⁶

Nadal's viewpoint here does not deal specifically with the giving of the Exercises, but it adds an intriguing challenge to any further reflections on this question.

¹ The substance of what follows is also contained in my article "The Autobiography of St. Ignatius", *Spirituality*, vol. 6, no. 31 (2000), 214-217 and vol. 6, no. 32 (2000), 280-283.

² See Thomas H. Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God: A Commentary on the Doctrine of St. Ignatius of Loyola concerning Spiritual Conversation*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources (1978).

³ See the masterly article by Leonardo R. Silos, "Cardoner in the Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola", *AHSI*, vol. 33 (1964), 3-43.

⁴ "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". Aut. 27.

⁵ Nadal, *Comentarii de Instituto Societatis Iesu, Dialogus Secundus*, *MHSI*, vol. 90, 612.

⁶ Our difficulties with decisions often arise from a lack of awareness of connections and inter-relations, both between the human and secular realities with which we are dealing, and between these human realities and the divine realities that are communicated through faith. We need the gift of discernment that Ignatius received to see the interconnectedness of situations and decisions.

It was also this sense of interconnectedness that gave Ignatius a great freedom in the face of secular learning, neither demonising it nor canonising it, but seeing it in its relationship with revealed truth, recognising in both different aspects of the one Truth. It was this same sense of interconnectedness that allowed the apostolate of education to emerge within the early Society of Jesus, even though the adoption of this apostolate was in discontinuity with the ideal of mobility in Ignatius' original vision.

⁷ See Alistair Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism in Sixteenth Century Spain: The Alumbrados*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992.

⁸ Even if this description of *alumbradismo* is coloured by the hostility of its opponents and based in large part on hearsay, the fact that these accusations were in the air

made it inevitable that the Inquisition should be alarmed. Nor is it surprising that the *alumbrados* should be suspected both of Lutheranism and Erasmianism. These two movements themselves were often confused with each other at this period both in the popular mind and by the Inquisition. What all three movements have in common is an appeal to the validity of inner experience. In this area the borderline between orthodoxy and heterodoxy has always been unclear.

⁹ Miona fled from Spain in 1530, became Ignatius' confessor for a second time in Paris, and later joined the Society of Jesus.

¹⁰ There was also the eccentric manner in which Ignatius and his four young male companions dressed — in a long grey habit with a grey hood.

¹¹ In November 1526 Alonso Mejia, acting as the inquisitorial visitor of the University of Alcala, began an investigation. This was to be the first of many — in Alcala, Salamanca, Paris and Rome.

¹² Ignatius chose to live with the tension between accepting both the validity of inner experience and the authority of the Church. As in all such situations this both-and approach is far more difficult to sustain than a simpler either-or choice. Not only did Ignatius not fit into the *alumbrado* mould but neither had he any hankering after the kind of spiritual church dreamed of by some of the Reformers. On the other hand he did not limit God's action in the world to the sacraments and the official teaching of the Church but maintained the reality of a deep and uniquely personal communication between God and each individual. This unified vision is at the heart of Ignatian spirituality.

¹³ See Terence O'Reilly, "Melchor Cano and the Spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola", in Juan Plazaola, editor, *Ignacio Loyola y su tiempo*. Congreso internacional de historia, 9-13 Setiembre 1991. Bilbao: Mensajero – Universidad de Deusto, 1992.

¹⁴ The full title reads: *Censura y parecer contra el Instituto de los Padres Jesuitas*.

¹⁵ He also affirms that people making the Exercises are encouraged to express in words the affective graces they have received, and in this way to edify others. This means, in practice, that during their meditations they are not only nourishing themselves but also preparing nourishment for others, an activity that must leave their souls unsatisfied.

¹⁶ The conclusions they drew from this last point in respect of authority were certainly different (the *alumbrados* rejecting it, Ignatius embracing it), but that is another issue. Ignatius had an equal respect and reverence for his own and other people's personal religious experience as he had for tradition and authority. For him, experience and authority were not **alternative** sources of knowledge, wisdom, or even revelation. They were **complementary** sources to be held together in a healthy, creative, even if at times painful tension.

¹⁷ "It becomes clear at once that the Spiritual Diary consists of sheets on which Ignatius has noted precisely these 'consolations and desolations', the day-by-day process of diverse 'spirits'. It is essentially a log-book intended to be maintained during a relatively short period (unlike the normal diary), and it contains references

only to occurrences that fall under these headings". Joseph A. Munitiz, *Inigo: Discernment Log-Book: The Spiritual Diary of Saint Ignatius Loyola*. London: Inigo Enterprises, 1988, Introduction, 8.

¹⁸ One could argue that the explicit presence of the Trinity here is essential to release the power and dynamic of the Second Week as a whole.

¹⁹ The absence of the Holy Spirit from the pages of the Spiritual Exercises has often been commented on and variously explained (e.g. fear of the Inquisition). There are a mere five references in the Mysteries of the Life of Christ (Exx 263, 273, 304, 307, 312) - where they could hardly be omitted without censoring the gospels - and one in the Rules for Thinking with the Church (Exx 365).

²⁰ Spiritual Diary, 11 February 1544, 14.

²¹ Munitiz, *Log-Book*, Introduction, 13.

²² Spiritual growth is often presented as a movement from activity to passivity, from complexity to simplicity, from wordiness to silence. The traditional paradigm leans towards the apophatic and this can cause difficulty for those whose spirituality is more kataphatic. However, this problem is not insuperable and it is not the question that I am raising. Mine has to do with the relevance for us of Ignatius' mystical journey, and what this may say to our giving of the Exercises.

²³ This might involve contemplating the Trinity in its internal relations as well as in its outreach into creation.

²⁴ We recall the well-known story told by Luis Gonzalves da Camara: "When the Father speaks about prayer, it always appears that he takes for granted that the passions have all been fully mastered and mortified, and it is this that he most respects. I remember that once when I was speaking of a good religious whom he knew and I said that he was a man of much prayer, the Father altered my remark and said 'He is a man of much mortification'"

²⁵ Nadal, *Commentarii de Instituto Societatis Iesu. In Examen Annotationes*, MHSI, vol. 90, 162.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 163.