

JAMES HANVEY SJ

Towards  
*a Theology*  
of Ignatian Prayer

## Introduction.

The title of this short essay aims to both inform readers of its content and alert them to the unique complexities in developing a theology of Ignatian prayer. If, in its most formal sense, theology is the attempt to speak about God and especially to speak as truthfully and as coherently as we can about our experience of God, then any attempt at a theology of Ignatian prayer will always be a work in progress: a movement towards but without necessarily arriving.

Ignatius is one of the great masters of Christian prayer, but he produced no theological manual to expound his teachings or to speculate about their theological implications. The Spiritual Exercises are exactly that – ‘exercises’. Although carefully constructed and arranged with a clear purpose in view – the conversion to a deeper and more authentic Christian life and discipleship – the Exercises deliberately seek to avoid any direct theological speculation.<sup>1</sup> However, this does not mean that they do not contain a theological vision of considerable depth and creativity. From the very beginning, the Exercises place us in relation to God. The ‘self’ is both grounded in this relationship and always becoming in and through it. Here, we find that Ignatius can deploy the classic theme of being a ‘pilgrim’ – a viator – but with an early modern sense of agency, awareness, vocation, and responsibility to self before God and to others. The radical theocentrism of the Exercises is the measure and the possibility of the whole economy of relationships, natural and supernatural, in which we are engaged. Integral to these possibilities is the full ‘communio’ of the Church, visible and invisible, its tradition, teaching, devotions, practices and life. Through each exercise of prayer, we come to experience God and God’s purpose, especially in the Incarnation, in an intense interior relationship with God. This practice is not one of withdrawal from the world, but

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rules for Thinking with the Church, §352-370, which is especially important in view of Ignatius’ experience with the Inquisition and the opposition of the Dominicans in Salamanca and Melchior Cano. The Rules are also constructed in the context of the contested doctrines of the Reformation. Cf. O’Reilly, Terence W., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Contexts, Sources, Reception* (Brill: 2021), pp. 24-27, Chapter 10. See also O’Malley, J. W., *The First Jesuits* (Harvard UP: 1993), Chapter 8.

a relocation in it. It is a movement of recovery and rediscovery which is epistemologically and existentially grounded in a 'new' love for all created things through God's salvific love.<sup>2</sup>

Even in these brief introductory paragraphs, we have already begun to recognise that the appropriation of our prayer of encounter will require, at some level, to translate it into its theological form. This, too, will be part of the hermeneutics that Ignatian prayer invites us to undertake; experience, to become appropriated, must also be reflected upon. Throughout the Exercises we are formed in this school of reflection. 'To draw fruit' for Ignatian prayer is also a learning, a seeking to understand more deeply what God is asking, what God is disclosing of himself, ourselves and the reality of our world.<sup>3</sup> We are invited into the constant reflective action of the whole community of faith from the beginning, that action of 'pondering', so that the mystery not only discloses itself to our minds but takes root in our hearts, 'and the perfume fills the whole house'.

Of course, this activity of reflection which draws on theology and enters into a reciprocal process of interpretation mediated through the self and the cultures which it inhabits, will inevitably pose its own challenges. Where experience is the source, in order for it to actually become a theology, it will have to test itself against the tradition(s) of the Church, while remaining open to its own constantly unfolding and living dynamic. This, too, will entail an alert critical and reflective dialogue with the cultures in which it lives and from which it draws. If Ignatian prayer ultimately finds that the '*Contemplatio ad Amorem*', its theological and hermeneutical habitus (God's activity in all things, which is more than a theological proposition but a living and encountered reality<sup>4</sup>), then it will also find that it is always a dynamic, that 'pilgrim', prayer and theology are drawn by the magis of God's own self – *semper maior* – in the world. For this reason, while we can map its essential contours (again, move towards), we can never finalise it.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The literature on the Spiritual Exercises is vast, especially when one considers how each section itself generates its own sub-study and literature. In an essay which covers so much material, even though it is largely confined to the text of the Spiritual Exercises, I have decided to only footnote where I believe it to be necessary or helpful. In particular, *Diccionario de espiritualidad Ignaciana*, J. García de Castro Valdés & P. Cebollada, eds., vols. 37 & 38 (2007), Mensajero-Sal Terrae. As well as the other essays in these volumes, the interested reader will find useful entries and bibliographies covering all parts of the Exercises and much else besides.

<sup>3</sup> Practically every exercise instructs us to 'consider', 'reflect and draw fruit'. This process is integral to the pedagogy of the prayer itself and informs the epistemological transformations which it brings about – the Pauline dynamic of Ephesians 4:23; Philippians 2:5, I Cor. 2:16. Theology, here, emerges through the devotional life and practices as well as a deepening assent to the mysteries of faith contained in Church's teaching.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Aquinas ST.II.II. q1.art 2.ad. 2. We should bear in mind Aquinas' understanding that faith always goes beyond propositions to possession of their object, which is another theological presupposition/experience of the Exercises. Ultimately, faith itself must end in prayer, which is the gift of knowing and loving God who desires to be known and loved, and therefore, a God who reveals Himself. The Exercises live this experience of faith and testify to its truth.

<sup>5</sup> The very nature of the Spiritual Exercises will also legitimately give rise to varieties of experience and reflection without losing their common 'genetic' source. The studies in volume one of *Oración Ignaciana, 'maestros y escuelas'* is a good example of this (Colección Manresa no. 93, 2025).



**A challenge to theology.** At another level, the very fact of attempting a theology of Ignatian prayer presents a question to contemporary theology. Apart from the complex question of what spirituality is, the idea that one should see the necessary and intrinsic unity of spirituality and theology will appear problematic.<sup>6</sup> Methodologically, we have become accustomed to separating systematic theology and spirituality. The reasons for this are complex and have much to do with theology's need to defend itself and its rational integrity in academic and cultural environments, and the development of 'spirituality' as a separate area of psychological and anthropological enquiry beyond explicitly religious beliefs and practices. Cultures that have been undergoing various forms of secularisation will tend to dismiss religious faith and experience as belief systems that have little or no objective validity. They may be psychologically helpful or function as symbolic structures created to serve socio-political purposes, but secularisation will regard them as ultimately obsolete. At best, they may be matters of private choice that serve particular personal or cultural purposes but have little role in the scientific accounts of the world and realities humans inhabit. If theology is engaged in defending its own account of God, the world, and humanity and makes a claim upon 'truth(s)' that cannot be reduced to subjective opinion, then the more general anthropological approaches to spirituality may appear to misrepresent or breach theology's defence. Consciously or unconsciously, theology may import the prejudices of the age into itself and its own presuppositions. When this occurs, it will carry a bias against spirituality in its traditional as well as contemporary sense, coming to think of it as contaminating its objectivity and its rational, historical and speculative methodologies. Of course, theology has always had to justify itself in the areopagus of the sceptical world eager to liberate itself from everything that appears to

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Hense, E., & Maas, F., eds., *Towards a Theory of Spirituality* (Peeters: 2011). See also, Waaijman, K., *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (Peeters: 2002); *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality* (Blackwell: 2005), esp. introductory essay by Sandra M. Schneiders, 'Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality', pp.15-33.

threaten its own sovereignty. When theology enters this process of ‘liberation’, it risks selling its own inheritance for a mess of pottage – of losing its own source and exchanging its accountability to the community of faith for tenure in the academy. It becomes an endless, albeit sophisticated, word game that is largely solipsistic. The alienation of spirituality and theology can only lead to the impoverishment of both. It robs theology of its living stream in the life of the community of faith and its experiential knowledge of God’s salvific presence. It silences its voice and imagination so that it confuses mission with self-serving gnosis. It robs spirituality of its accountability and responsibility to the God it experiences and the community that the Holy Spirit has gathered and sustains as witness to the mission of the risen Christ. Von Balthasar is correct when he says, ‘only those theologies became vitally effective in history which bore their spirituality not as an addition, but within themselves which embodied it in their innermost being’.<sup>7</sup>

Ignatius and the tradition of Ignatian prayer know nothing of this separation. Even as it demonstrates its extraordinary vitality and adaptability to the cultures, peoples, and situations in which it arises, it stands within the ancient traditions of the Church Fathers. This means that the attempt to map the reflective interplay between theology and prayer in the Ignatian tradition is an attempt at retrieval, on the one hand, and a challenge to both contemporary ‘spirituality’ and theology on the other.<sup>8</sup> It issues a challenge not only in refusing the separation of theology and spirituality but also by being radically Christian in the Roman Catholic tradition.<sup>9</sup> That Ignatian prayer flows from a unity of theology and spirituality is the first and deepest mark of its profoundly Christian form and unity. Its grounding principle is given in one of the most controversial aspects of the Spiritual Exercises: ‘God deals directly’ with the person.<sup>10</sup> For Ignatius this is no abstract principle of theism. It is the experiential discovery of a God who is encountered in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, a God who is immediate and available through the life-giving gift of the Holy Spirit. In other words, it is always a Trinitarian God who is experienced in mission, *pro nobis*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Von Balthasar, H. U., *The Unity of Theology and Spirituality in Convergences: To the Source of Christian Mystery* (ET Ignatius Press: 1984), esp. pp. 17-45 (essay originally published in *Gregorianum* 1969). Further developed in Von Balthasar, H. U., *Herrlichkeit: Eine Theologische Ästhetik* (Johannes Verlag: 1988).

<sup>8</sup> For a helpful discussion of the unity of theology and spirituality cf. Von Balthasar op. cit. See also, Ashley, J. M., *Renewing Theology: Ignatian Spirituality and Karl Raner, Ignacio Ellacuría, and Pope Francis* (University of Notre Dame Press: 2022) and Hanvey, J., *La Visione Di Francesco Per Una Teologia Rinnova, Civiltà Cattolica*, 4 Maggio 2023, pp. 2009-220.

<sup>9</sup> Although the Spiritual Exercises clearly arise out of the Roman Catholic tradition and become an important source of the Church’s post-reformation reform, that did not stop them from appealing to protestants then. Cf. the adaptations of *Persons’ Directory* in England and now proving an important ecumenical resource, especially the introduction, Persons, R., & Houliston, V., Robert Persons S.J.: *The Christian Directory (1582): The First Booke of the Christian Exercise, Appertayning to Resolution* (Brill: 1998). The use of scripture in the Ignatian tradition of prayer is an evident appeal to all denominations Cf. the observation of Von Balthasar op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Sp. Exx §19

<sup>11</sup> All of these aspects bring their own controversies and warrant a much fuller examination than this essay will allow. However, it is necessary to recognise them and their importance in a critical discussion of a ‘theology of Ignatian prayer’.

If it is to be true to the interplay of experience, prayer and theology, especially as they interact with their historical and social contexts, then a ‘theology of Ignatian Prayer’ can only be a tentative, contingent exercise, always open to revision. It can only be ‘towards’ – an attempt that must be content to remain permanently incomplete.<sup>12</sup>

**Two preliminary notes:** Before we begin what can only be a ‘tour d’horizon’ of the principal theo-spiritual dimensions of the Exercises two preliminary notes may be helpful. First, for the purposes of this essay the definition of ‘spirituality’ adopted by Michael Gorman in his study of St. Paul will also prove useful for us, ‘A common and helpful definition of spirituality, from a Christian perspective, is that it is the “lived experience” of believers – those who affirm that “Jesus is Lord”... it is always a *transformative*, and it consists of habits and practices that both express and enable that transformation’.<sup>13</sup>

Second, we shall be dealing mainly with the text of the Spiritual Exercises. Although they have clear themes, the text is a dynamic and experiential one. The theology emerges as much in the interplay of these themes as in their individual development. Indeed, we cannot really appreciate them or their significance except through their interrelationality. They also presume a transformative participation physically, through the body exercises and ascetical practices suggested for the prayer, affectively and intellectually through the reflective practices recommended for practically every exercise, ‘I will consider and draw fruit’. Obviously, this organic structure has its own unity. Any attempt to honour the integrity of the Exercises will inevitably risk the appearance of repetition. An attentive reading, however, should show that this is not repetition in any strict sense but an effort to draw attention to another dimension or facet of a familiar dimension (e.g. Incarnation), but now disclosed through another optic.

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<sup>12</sup> 20th-century theologians that begin to recover the theological dimensions of Ignatian prayer and spirituality. The theological implications of Ignatian spirituality grounded in the Spiritual Exercise runs through the theologies of Karl Rahner, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Eric Przywara, Gaston Fessard, Ignacio Ellacuria, and Hugo Rahner for example. For an examination of the influence of the Exercises and their translation into some of these theologies, see Arzubialde, Santiago, S.J., *Ejercicios espirituales de S. Ignacio. Historia y análisis* coll. Manresa, 2nd edición, (2009); Ashley, J. M., *Renewing Theology: Ignatian spirituality and Karl Raner, Ignacio Ellacuría, and Pope Francis* (University of Notre Dame Press: 2022). To this I would also add ‘Dialectic and the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises’ in Crowe, F. E., *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea* (University of Toronto Press: 2006), pp. 235-251.

<sup>13</sup> Gorman, M. J. *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and his Letters* (W.B. Eerdmans: 2017), Chapter 5, ‘Paul’s Spirituality’.



## 1: A Theology grounded in the ‘Text’ of the Spiritual Exercises.

The obvious text in which we can discover the contours and principles of Ignatian prayer is the *Spiritual Exercises*.<sup>14</sup> As Ignatius testifies, ‘The Spiritual Exercises are all the best that I have been able to think out, experience and understand in this life’.<sup>15</sup> Although these ‘exercises’ originate in Ignatius’ own experiences, especially at Loyola and Manresa, they continued to be confirmed, deepened and refined throughout his life. While the final text still preserves the core of these experiences, Ignatius continued to shape the texts from his fresh experience of directing people through them and also in the light of his own theological formation and the difficulties he encountered with the theological orthodoxies of his time.<sup>16</sup> Notwithstanding the role the Society comes to play in the counter reformation and the formation of early modern Catholicism, for Ignatius and the first companions, the Exercises are not intended as a polemical instrument. Their aim is the

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<sup>14</sup> On approaches to the text, cf. Melloni, Javier (ed.), *Actualidad De Los Ejercicios Espirituales 500 Años Después*, Colección Manresa, vol. 90 (2024), Mensajero-Sal Terrae (Spain).

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Fr. Miona, 1536. See also, De Castro Valdés, José García, S.J., ‘Companionship in the Spirit: A History of the Spirituality of the Society of Jesus’, *Hong Kong Journal of Catholic Studies*, no. 12 (2021), pp. 69-137.

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, he was obliged to defend the theology at their core before the Inquisition. They also have significant instructions for the director to invite the Exercitant to measure their ecclesial obedience in ‘the rules for thinking with the Church’ and in avoiding getting lost and confused in the complex contested doctrines that mark the reformation. Cf. *Rules for Thinking with the Church Sp. Exx. §352 ff.* Again, a more complete treatment of a theology would need to explore the ecclesiology – theological, historical, and practical – that the Exercises contain and their contribution to the formation of the ‘sensus fidelium’, especially given the role it has in ecclesial discernment and synodality.

conversion and reform of Christian life, 'seeking and finding God's will in the disposition of one's life for the salvation of the soul'. Lainez expresses the view that the witness of a Christian life is ultimately the better remedy for the problems that beset the Church.<sup>17</sup> In pursuing this goal, the Exercises seek to return us to 'first principles' and, therefore, to help us attain a balance that can give us confidence in the faith that the Church teaches while applying 'the hermeneutics of generosity' to those who may be confused or in error.<sup>18</sup> What we discover, even in these most formal principles, is not only a way of moving through a historically conflicted terrain but also the determination to keep the soteriological goal in view – 'ayudar a las almas'.

This will be true of all Ignatian prayer. It never loses sight of our own need for salvation and to help others seek theirs. It lives out of an unending gratitude for the grace it receives in the crucified Christ, which grows into the desire that all may be saved, for the love of God can never be separated from the love of neighbour. At the heart of Ignatian prayer is the experience of Paul, '*caritas Christi urget nos*' (2 Cor. 5. 14-15), which defines its imaginative horizon and gives it its apostolic or missionary character.<sup>19</sup> In this respect, the salvific love of God that is personally encountered in the Exercises reveals itself to be the 'magis', a dynamic trinitarian Love. The 'impelling' love of Christ is the indwelling action of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, all Ignatian prayer will have a deeply pneumatological character that is also the source of its generativity. We shall return to this important dimension later, but it is nonetheless important to note it here at the beginning. In a sense, it seals the soteriological character of the theological-spiritual dynamic that informs the whole Ignatian charism. Thus, the theological form of Ignatian prayer is a prior openness to all things that seek their ultimate good. It is grounded in the knowledge of God's own love and never an abstract concept derived from the logic of the divine being. It is a knowledge that comes through the encounter with the crucified and risen Christ. The cruciform centre of Ignatian prayer, constantly seen in Ignatius's own life and experiences (such as the vision at La Storta) will always resist the pressure to make it into a mysticism which leaves the world behind or a technique for a spiritualised gnosticism. Even before we begin to explore the 'text' of the Exercises, it challenges us with its practice and its theological substance.

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<sup>17</sup> Sp. Exx. ann. §1. O'Malley, J. W., *The First Jesuits* (Harvard UP: 1993), esp. pp. 276 ff. It appears that after 1560, the Society's approach becomes more polemical as the Society's mission in protestant lands expands and the Church realises that it is a much deeper challenge, extending beyond Church reform into political allegiances. Even so, this takes place mainly through lectures and sermons rather than the Exercises. Cf. also Scarisbrick, J. J., *The Jesuits and the Catholic Reformation* (Historical Association: 1988). Ngetich, E. K., 'Catholic Counter-Reformation: A History of the Jesuits' Mission to Ethiopia 1557-1635', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 42.2 (2016), pp. 104-115. NB: For Von Balthasar, it is the neo-scholasticism of the Counter-Reformation 'and the excess of the theoretical theology of the baroque era' that cements the separation of theology and spirituality. op. cit. pp.34-35.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Sp. Exx. Ann. §22. As an example of this also in practice cf. Ignatius' letter of instruction for the new university at Ingostadt, 1549.

<sup>19</sup> For a contemporary reading of this dynamic of desire, see Williams, Geoffrey B., S.J., 'The Way of the Faithful: Exploring the Dynamics of Desire Using the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola', *Hong Kong Journal of Catholic Studies*, no. 12 (2021), pp. 139-175.



## **2: The dynamic theocentrism of Ignatian prayer and its asymmetry.<sup>20</sup>**

The annotations at the beginning of the Exercises, given for the help of the director, presuppose that God is the principal actor in the life of the person choosing ‘to make’ the Exercises. The role of the director is to facilitate this action and to help the exercitant compose himself or herself to allow God to act freely and to cooperate with the movement of grace. From the beginning, therefore, we find ourselves in a living dynamic relationship between God and the person. That delicate and profound interplay of grace and nature is no longer an abstract theological principle, but a living incarnate personal reality – an interior drama which changes the person and will bear fruit in life. God’s action never overtakes human freedom or places it in subjection. On the contrary, it realises it so that we come to know the truth that St. Paul exclaims, ‘For freedom, Christ has set us free’ (Gal. 5:1). In a very real way, the whole movement of the Exercises will offer us a theology of freedom that can critique contemporary notions of autonomy, while enriching our understanding of what freedom entails for both the individual life and the social or common life.

The relationship that God establishes, even when we live in its dynamic of reciprocity – giving and receiving – is always a liberating, asymmetrical one. God is always first.<sup>21</sup> Even as friends who come through experience to have a ‘familiarity’ with God and God’s ways, we know that we only do so on the basis of God’s grace and not on the basis of our own power or merit. The God who encounters us in the Exercises is always our Creator and Lord. The

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<sup>20</sup> For a characteristically distilled treatment and overview of the dynamic of the Exercises, see ‘The Dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises’ in Veale, J., *Manifold Gifts: Ignatian Essays on Spirituality* (Way Books: 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Formula of the Institute §1. Also cf. the profound contemplation on the Nativity where service is born of gratitude and a sense of one’s own poverty. Sp. Exx. 110ff. already prepared in the Call of the Earthly King and petitioner prayer Eternal Lord of All things. Sp. Exx. 91ff.

more intimacy and familiarity deepen, the more we open ourselves to the inexhaustible mystery of the Divine Majesty. Importantly for Ignatian prayer and mysticism, while the experience of the Divine Majesty is always present as the ultimate ground and telos of the encounter, it is not strictly speaking ‘apophatic’. It not only carries an awareness of God’s incomprehensibility, but it is ‘affectively’ charged. Our experience and knowledge of God is always given in the salvific economy of God’s presence, revealing the personal nature of God ‘*pro nobis*’, our creator and redeemer. The experience of God’s incomprehensibility (not the same as God’s unknowability) is the recognition of the inexhaustible nature of God’s salvific Love, made known in Christ, and calls out our own response, i.e. the Holy Spirit moving from out of our own depths that has no limit but grows in the very act of giving.<sup>22</sup>

The significance of this runs throughout the whole experience of the Spiritual Exercises. It appears in the simple, almost matter-of-fact but remarkable statement of Annotation 15, ‘the director as a balance at equilibrium . . . should permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature with his [sic] director’.<sup>23</sup> The same experience of a direct and personal relationship is foundational for the whole practice of discernment. It receives a more formal articulation in the Principle and Foundation. Especially in the latter, the whole dynamic drama of our existence is set out. We only know ourselves and become ourselves when we live in a relationship with God, who is our ultimate end and fulfilment. Our purpose is nothing less than ‘to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord’ in this world and come to live eternally in God’s presence in the next. The effect of the Principle is to relativise all created things. Nothing but God can be our legitimate end, and no one but God can bring about our salvation or bring us to the fullness of life.

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<sup>22</sup> For the range and significance of this way of perceiving and referring to God (the Triune God), cf. *Diccionario*, vol. 37, pp.652-656. Within the context of a much wider range. see Nuría Martínez Gayol Fernández’s study, *Gloria De Dios En Ignacio De Loyola*, Colección Manresa, Vol.34 (2005), Mensajero-Sal Terrae (Spain), esp. ‘Anexo’, pp. 171-182; 483-487.

<sup>23</sup> ‘inmediate obrar al Criador con la criatura y a la criatura con su Criador y Señor’. This was already a dangerous and controversial claim in Ignatius’ day as his dealings with the Inquisition show. See, O’Reilly, Terence W., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Contexts, Sources, Reception* (Brill: 2021), esp. Chapters 4 & 10. However, the principle comes back into significance with Karl Rahner, especially in the third essay in *Das Dynamische in der Kirche* (Herder: 1958). The essay is (in English) ‘The Logic of Concrete Individual Knowledge in Ignatius of Loyola’. Although the philosophical tradition upon which Rahner draws in his earlier work, *Geist in Welt: zur Metaphysik der endlichen Erkenntnis bei Thomas von Aquin* (1957), puts Maréchal’s neo-Thomism in critical discussion with Kant and Descartes, Rahner defends the Ignatian principle as a way of developing the groundwork for a Christian anthropology that can respond to the challenges of modernity. For a critical discussion of this aspect of Rahner’s thought, see James M. Ashley op. cit. Chapter 4, and Endean, P., *Karl Rahner and Ignatian spirituality* (Oxford UP: 2001), esp. Chapter 2. It can also be found in Bernard Lonergan’s discussion of religious experience in *Method in Theology* (Darton, Longman and Todd: 1973), pp. 105-107. See also Valdés, José García De Castro S.J., *El Dios Emergente: Sobre la ‘consolación sin causa* (2001), Mensajero-Sal Terrae (Spain), especially the treatment of Ignatius’ experience at the Cardoner in Chapter VII.1.2.



### 3: The drama of human Freedom and the mystagogy of the emerging self.

The Principle and Foundation is almost an Augustinian formulation that alerts the Christian life to distinguish between desire and love, *uti* and *frui*.<sup>24</sup> However, it does more than define the existential task. It calls for a new epistemology and requires a re-ordering of our relationship to all created things in the light of this knowledge.<sup>25</sup> The Principle and Foundation become the measure of our spiritual as well as existential freedom (*indiferentes a todas las cosas criadas*), especially when it results in how we choose to value things: ‘consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honour to dishonour, a long life to a short life’.

What is proposed here is a whole theology of the self and freedom, a ‘praxis’ that shapes how we understand, value and act in the world. It is a radical theocentrism that shapes the self and our agency. It enters a way of living and comes to its ultimate incarnation in Christ and our following of Him. *Imitatio* is now transposed into the ontology of companionship and the sending of an apostle. We have already begun to move from what we may call a general theological anthropology to one that is Christologically determined. It will receive its particular form in the ‘election’ or choice to follow Christ and participate in his mission. As we shall see, Ignatian prayer will always move within a dynamic Christology – a Christ always on a mission. However the mission may present itself to us, the prayer itself will, in some way, have this transcendental movement into the world and its need for salvation. Yet, precisely because of its ‘Theo-Christo-centrism’, our prayer, like our lives, will have the freedom to engage the world and its needs without being submerged or distracted by it.

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<sup>24</sup> The emergence of the new self-awareness, and sense of ‘self’ and conversion, in the process of the Exercises finds a similar process in the searching of St. Augustine in the Confessions. Without the interplay of the self with God, it remains broken and dispersed: e.g. Conf.11.28.38 where the reading of the psalm gives us the narrative of our life. Stock, B., Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation (Harvard UP: 1996)

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Augustine, De. Trin. Bk.X.8; Bk.12.13.21. Aquinas In Jo. 1.6.3.

Here, we may also begin to see the nature of Ignatian asceticism. It not only serves the classical purpose of spiritual discipleship and consecration to the sovereignty of God, but it is also the condition for apostolic freedom realised in the concrete service of a needy world.<sup>26</sup> With the Principle and Foundation we have already entered the theatre of grace and a world transformed by it.

Ignatian prayer is attentiveness to such a world and God's immanent-imminent action within it. In other words, whatever form it may take, even when it is hidden (as in the nativity), it is always the *kairos*-event of the kingdom. The contemplative vision of Ignatian prayer and theology will constitute the activity of the 'eyes of faith', the 'eyes of the apostle' that grasp this moment of God's appearance. In grasping the relationship between the Divine immanence-imminence and transcendence we come to know the immediacy of God's presence. Annotation §15 is now the experience of God acting in history – the event of the Kingdom and the key to the '*contemplativus simul in actione*'. It is not only the fruit of prayer but of Christian life. In this process, both in the Exercises and throughout the subsequent prayer life of the person who has made them, what began as the search for that 'freedom' or '*indiferentes*' grows into '*acatamiento*'.<sup>27</sup> It is a habitus, a grace, a disposition before our Creator and Lord that is often translated as a loving reverence. It certainly is that, but it is not a passive state. It is a reverential 'readiness' born of a personal love poised to serve. It does not impose or set any conditions upon God but attentively waits for God to make His will known. It has come to understand and to live the principle of the Incarnation revealed in Christ's obedience to the Father's will and stated at the beginning of the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*, 'love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than words'.<sup>28</sup>

This transformative movement of freedom, from *indiferentes* to *acatamiento*, expressed in the capacity to return the love of God that we have received contains a whole theology of the interplay of grace and nature now made real in a person's life – a life which is always available for service and 'to be sent'.<sup>29</sup> Again, we see the living unity of nature and grace, prayer and mission but recognise that it is actually grounded in the experience of the Divine unity of being and mission.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Sp. Exx. §97-98; Notice that all the instructions containing or advising ascetical practices are never offered as an end in themselves but as a means to better dispose ourselves and obtain the grace that is sought. Cf. §73-86

<sup>27</sup> 'Acatamiento' is a significant experience for Ignatius, usually that aim of discernment or any desire to be disponible to the Divine will. For a more complete exploration, see Gayol Fernández, op. cit., pp.93-105, which is especially present before the Divine Majesty. See also p.182 and the preceding discussion above.

<sup>28</sup> Sp. Exx. §230.

<sup>29</sup> On the significance of devotion cf. Staab, C. M., "Always Growing in Devotion": The Grace of Devotion in the Life of Ignatius of Loyola and the Society of Jesuits', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 56.1 (2024).



#### 4: The theological dynamism of reciprocity.

In this constant movement of exchange, an *admirabile commercium*, we begin to enter into the deep reciprocal dynamic of Ignatian spirituality. The reciprocity begins with God's own initiative to 'deal directly' with us. As we have seen, of necessity, it is asymmetrical: it flows from God's absolute freedom to us in the gift itself, for God's self-gift can have no equal return. It is a pure gratuity that is itself the event of Love.<sup>30</sup> In doing so, God's self-communication creates an awareness in us that we have the capacity to receive His gift, which in turn calls forth our own freedom not only to receive it but also to return it through the gift of our own self. Love calls forth love and creates the capacity to actualise love in loving acts. The effect of this en-graced capacity is not only to dilate the heart with regard to God and neighbour, especially in compassion for those who suffer for want of God or through acts of others, but it also expands the imagination so that the possibilities for enacting love are also changed.<sup>31</sup> In some sense, the dynamic of reciprocity is never just circular. It becomes something 'more' than the Ignatian 'magis' in which the self is confirmed in its own act of self-transcendence. In the Exercises, the dynamic of reciprocity is a growing sense of gratitude with its corresponding humility. Far from diminishing the self in the movement of gratitude and humility, it becomes expanded and empowered in it. With God, we come to discover that service is not servitude but the freedom that comes from the ontological and existential knowledge that we are God's own self-gift. Self-gift is not a loss of self but a coming into an ever-greater life. For these reasons,

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Aquinas. ST 1. Q.38.a 1& 2. On the nature of gift and the Holy Spirit. The theological understanding of the supreme gift of God's self in the trinitarian missions resolves the aporia of gift teased out by Jacques Derrida in his discussion of the impossibility of gift in *Given Time. I. Counterfeit money*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (University of Chicago Press: 1992). Also, Fortin, J.-P., 'Theology Giving Back: A (De)constructive Reading of Jacques Derrida's Phenomenology of the Gift', *Religious Studies and Theology*, 40.1 (2021).

<sup>31</sup> 'Implicitly in Ignatius' position on election is the principle that grace creates new capacities', comments Michael Ivens on annotations 14-16 in *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary* (Gracewing: 1998), pp.12-16.

the ancient shibboleths of autonomy and self-fulfilment and all their modern forms are redefined; indeed, we may say they are 'redeemed'. The dynamic of Ignatian prayer that we experience in the Exercises is always one of a redemptive conversion and liberation of the self. The theological anthropology that begins to emerge in the mystagogy of the Exercises is also a mystagogy of the person or 'self' who comes to understand in the new consciousness of humility and gratitude that its own being and existence is always a becoming 'saturated' by grace.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> It is important to notice the frequency with which the Exercises invite us to consider 'por mi'. As well as deepening our own interior understanding of the magnitude of the mystery we are praying, it makes us conscious that we are in a real, experiential and immediate relationship with God. Through this consciousness of the 'mi', the self is more clearly grasped, and through the 'por', the dynamic of reciprocity, which is the mark of our newfound redeemed freedom, begins to grow.



## 5: The ‘mystagogy’ of the person/self.

It is worth exploring this ‘mystagogy’ of the person a little further as it becomes a constant dynamic of prayer schooled in the Exercises. It will also permit us to uncover an often-overlooked aspect of the pneumatology, which is the hidden font of all Ignatian prayer.

We can see the whole process at work in the attention each exercise gives to the grace that is desired. The preparatory prayer for each exercise remains constant. It is effectively the Principle and Foundation translated into the prayer which purifies and orders our desire. Whatever the circumstances in which we find ourselves, it sets the direction of our life. The preparatory prayer of each exercise becomes the habitus of a whole life. The second preparatory prayer addresses the particular grace that we are seeking, such as, for example, asking for shame and confusion as I consider the effects of sin, especially my own sin. In the second week, the grace I seek is ‘an intimate knowledge of our lord, who has become man for me, that I may love him more and follow him more closely’. All of these requests take place within the relationship we are living with God. We are always beggars in prayer before our Creator and Lord, for we come before Him with the knowledge of our own poverty. This is why our ‘spiritual poverty’ is the constant out of which we live; it is the prerequisite for ‘actual poverty’.<sup>33</sup> The spiritual and the freedom for actual poverty that follows from it are Christologically grounded. As in Christ so in us, they are the condition for ‘being sent’ and the basis of the apostolic mysticism in which Ignatian prayer is realised.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cf Sp. Exx. §98 the petition before the Eternal Lord. At its heart is also the imitatio Christi which we embark upon in 2nd Week and becomes the form of our whole lives.

<sup>34</sup> Poverty as the condition of mission finds its expression in the Formula of the Institute §7. It is one of the first great graces/discoveries that Ignatius receives at his conversion, and its seriousness for him and the early companions can be seen in the attention given to discerning it for the Society in the Spiritual Diary (1544-45). However, it must always be understood and practiced in its theological or Christological context otherwise it becomes at best an ascetical practice which benefits only the practitioner. On the importance of the ‘icon’ of St Francis in this, see section 10 below.

In these prayers for our desires, we come to appreciate how desire, its purification, ordering and expansion are integral to Ignatian prayer and its dynamism. In the exercise of prayer and in the way in which it translates into reflective action, desire constantly deepens and increases. Desire is always ‘theological’. As our relationship with God and God’s action in the world unfolds, especially as we enter more completely into the mystery of Christ, our desire is purified, tending to become less our desire and more what God desires. The process is most clearly experienced in the ‘triple colloquies’. In many ways, these are a distinctive feature of Ignatian prayer: desire becomes the desire of Our Lady and Our Lord in the presence of the Father. The colloquies are also performative of our graced and growing freedom, of our transparency and intimacy with God, ‘as a friend speaks with a friend to a friend’ (§54). The presence of our ‘intercessors’, Our Lady and Christ, guarantees the authenticity of our desire and ensures its genuine orientation to the Father’s will. Though not explicitly mentioned in the colloquies, the Holy Spirit is, nevertheless, at the very heart of this movement. It is the Holy Spirit who places the desire in our hearts and makes our desire to do the Father’s will the supreme offering of love, following the pattern of Christ. It is also the same Holy Spirit who gives us the capacity and faithfulness to accomplish this desire (Rom 8.26-30; 1 Cor. 2).<sup>35</sup> Although the Holy Spirit is explicitly mentioned relatively few times in the Exercises, when understood in terms of the active graces of desire, this does not signal an absence.<sup>36</sup> On the contrary, what we have is the active experience and effects of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the person. From the perspective of a formal systematic theological analysis, this would open up the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit. A theology of Ignatian prayer then leads us into a theology of transformative desire and action as part of what we are calling the mystagogy of the relational self that emerges in prayer.

The other dimension of this pneumatological dynamic is to be found in the soteriological form and horizon of Ignatian prayer that translates into the ‘mission’ with Christ for the Kingdom and the salvation of souls. When we understand the pneumatological ground of mission as an indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the person, then we can begin to grasp how the imperative of being sent is the becoming of the ‘self’ in self-gift, which, in turn, is not only an *imitatio Christi* but also a union with Him in mission. We can now begin to see how present the Holy Spirit is not only in the conversion and transformation of the person but as source of discernment and those acts of love, truth, forgiveness and reconciliation which establish the dynamics of a social grace and announce the presence of the Kingdom. The ‘apostolic mysticism’ of Ignatian prayer that Hugo Rahner speaks of comes to be seen as a lived theology of the Holy Spirit.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. §62 ff., which continues with modulations throughout all the Exercises also with variations e.g. §118;139; 176; conocimento also with considerar.

<sup>36</sup> Dalmases identifies eight times, but we should note the prominence of the Holy Spirit in the Spiritual Diary and in the letters of St Ignatius. This should alert us to the pneumatological character of ‘normal’ Ignatian prayer. It should also be linked to the previous condensed observations on ‘gift’. Arzubialde explores the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Word incarnate in a more traditional line, op. cit. pp. 990-998.

<sup>37</sup> Rahner, H., *The Spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola: An Account of Its Historical Development* (Loyola UP: 1980). See also Joseph F. Conwell’s study of *Cum ex Pluribus*, Paul III letter which introduces the Formula of the Institute, 1540, in *Impelling Spirit: Revisiting a Founding Experience, 1539, Ignatius of Loyola and His Companions* (Loyola UP: 1997).

Throughout the Exercises we see moments of this intense new ‘relational self-awareness’ in which freedom itself is recognised as the graced gift to be used in service of God, neighbour and creation. For example: the two moments when this awareness is most in evidence is §60 in the awareness of the gift of God’s unlimited mercy in the Crucified and in the process of ‘election’ (§169), especially in the preparatory exercise of §165 (The Three Kinds of Humility). We may also note that all such moments return us in some form to the Principle and Foundation which is always our North star. In §60 and §165-169ff., a relational self-awareness is active, but it appears in different forms. The surging cry of gratitude and wonder in §60 is not lost; it settles into a deeply personal desire to follow Christ and seek God’s will as we come into the three ways of humility and the election. All such moments have been well prepared for in the prior experiences and landscapes of prayer. For example, in the exercises prior to §60, we have been introduced in a vividly intense experiential way to a ‘theology’ of sin – cosmic, social and personal – that is dynamic, structural and historical. The theology of sin in the first week does not allow us to reduce it to a moral exercise in guilt or shame. If these exercises show us the profound effects of sin that no one can escape, then we come to understand the consequences and extent of our epistemological, moral and spiritual distortions. However, the key to this understanding does not lie only in experiencing the effects but also in the overwhelming experience of Divine mercy and its cost. Without this, we would still fail to understand that sin is essentially a theological reality – not simply one of human imperfection. §60 marks the moment of our awakening and the restoration of our capacities to love and know the truth when we re-order our relations and perceptions in the light of the cross and the crucified Christ. With this recognition comes the realisation that we cannot disentangle ourselves and correct our distortions – this would also be part of the illusion under which we labour in our sin. The self-knowledge that comes to us in Ignatian prayer never allows us to slip into the Pelagianism or the voluntarism that has often been alleged against it. The knowledge that we have is always a mediated knowledge. It comes in and through the relationship that we have with God in whose ‘light we see light’.<sup>38</sup> This takes on a deeper quality of truth the more we enter into the experience of Christ (wks. 2-4). What we have in this process is the ‘mystagogy’ of the self, our coming to know who we are and what our purpose is. It is a process in which the capacity for gratitude and humility are the condition and the means of our knowing and understanding, for they keep us in the relationship of reciprocity through which we enter into and live the economy of God’s saving grace.

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<sup>38</sup> Ps.36.9. This line is often quoted in the theology of the Fathers and scholastics theologians as it expresses their epistemology and the way in which all truth and knowledge is ultimately grounded and illuminated by the Divine truth and knowledge. We can see here how it becomes an active principle in the theocentrism of Ignatian prayer. However, for Aquinas it is especially true when it comes to the beatific vision cf. ST. supplement question 92. Also cf. Beeley, C. A., Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light (Oxford UP: 2013).



## 6: Entering the mission of the Trinity.

We have been exploring the nature and range of the theocentrism of Ignatian prayer and its theological dimensions. However, as will now be evident, it is a Trinitarian-centrism. The whole experience of reciprocity that we have traced is a profoundly trinitarian dynamic. Although Ignatius clearly has a real, experiential and theological insight into the Trinity, especially in the relations of persons, the Exercises do not engage in abstract speculation.<sup>39</sup> The essential nature of the trinitarian experience is what contemporary theology would recognise as the economic life of the Triune God, which is encountered in our experience and in our history as a salvific movement. It is the Trinity in mission to a world in need of redemption through the incarnation of the Son and the immanent action of the Holy Spirit that fills and shapes Ignatian prayer and spirituality. This is given in the magnificent sweep of the contemplation on the Incarnation (§101 ff.). It moves from the unlimited horizon of the eternal Triune life into history, from the infinite movement of salvific love within and between the unfathomable mystery of the Divine persons to a small space in Nazareth and the assent that a young woman gives to God's eternal purpose. Of course, this movement and human response becomes the school of mission. The wonder and gratitude that always accompany Ignatian prayer from §60 now begin to move into the love that will take us into the heart of the Triune mystery and the God who is always 'labouring and working' for our salvation. The more we enter into this mystery, the more our own life becomes a participation in this mission. Far from removing us from the world, we are drawn to an ever-more intimate engagement with it. As we enter into the Divine mission, we can only follow the journey of the Son into 'the far country' that needs to be healed and released from the bondage of sin and the illusion that it can save itself.<sup>40</sup>

From Ignatius's Spiritual Diary, we see the extent to which Ignatius inhabits this trinitarian life, especially in the way in which he approaches the person's 'individually' without ever

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. esp. Autobiography §28; Spiritual Diary Feb. 24 §73; 6th Mar. §121 ff.

<sup>40</sup> One can find this innovation as a narrative theology in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, I, §59; vol. IV, II, §64. Using the same principle of the Chalcedonian relation of the humanity and the Logos in Christ, Barth also revises the protestant doctrine of justification.

losing sight of their perichoretic reality.<sup>41</sup> Notwithstanding how much he may be absorbed in their *communio*, he never loses the sense of the trinitarian mission, ‘let us work the redemption of the human race’ (§107). Once again, this trinitarian theocentrism conditions our perception of the world. It directs our affect and our actions so that in mission we experience their unity, and hence the restoration of our integrity through grace.

Ignatian prayer will always have ‘eyes’ looking at the world through the triune perception of its need. Our intellect and understanding, together with our will, are transformed and opened by our new knowledge, the Trinity’s vision of ‘the whole surface of the earth, and behold all nations in great blindness, going down to death and descending into hell’. What is determinative both for understanding and acting is not only our comprehension of the Divine soteriological movement but also the way in which it is accomplished. The eschatological reality of this understanding relocates us in the world and will be essential for the practice of discernment, as we shall see below in the exercise of ‘The Two Standards’. If the constraints of an overview essay prevent a more extensive treatment of this perspective, then it remains important for us to grasp the epistemological transformation and eschatological understanding that entering into the economic mission of the Trinity means for us and the new ‘way of proceeding’ that it will entail. Thus, a theology of Ignatian spirituality will always lead to the embodiment of a life and mission shaped by the kenotic reality of the incarnation and of the surrender/obedience in faith to the wisdom of the cross, revealing the trinitarian *communio* (I Cor. 2.).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In addition to references in note 27, cf. Ignatius letter to Borgia (1548), in which Ignatius recommends contemplating the persons of the Trinity with love as an alternative to severe penances. (Ep. 2, 233-237 BAC . Obras De San Ignacio de Loyola 46. Pp.829-832).

<sup>42</sup> For a fuller treatment of this, see Gorman, M. J., *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (Eerdmans: 2009).



## **7: The unity of identity and mission – Christology ‘from within’.**

The reality and intensity of the trinitarian reality leads to Christology and vice versa.<sup>43</sup> The Christ of the Spiritual Exercises and consequently the Christ of Ignatian prayers and spirituality is a Christ who is on mission. Although we may need the Chalcedonian definition to articulate the unity of the two natures in the person of Christ without confusion, through the Christological contemplations in the Exercises, we experience and know only the unity of the person of Christ. Indeed, the very mystery of the concealment and revelation of the divine and human natures in Christ forms the ‘wonder’ of our prayer.<sup>44</sup> As in scripture, so in the Exercises, there is no division between Christ’s identity and His mission.<sup>45</sup> Through the scriptural contemplations, we enter into a personal relationship with Christ as both the recipients of His ministry and the hearers of His teaching, and in which we become His witnesses, disciples and apostles. The use of imagination in these contemplations is not simply some human creative exercise but one that is a sort of ‘anamnesis’ of the Holy Spirit, drawing from the living presence of Christ,

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<sup>43</sup> For an important but somewhat different approach, see Hugo Rahner’s, *Ignatius the Theologian* (Chapman, English translation, 1968), Chapter III, ‘The Christology of the Spiritual Exercises’.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. The dynamic between the 3rd and 4th Wks. §196;223 takes us into the very mystery of the Cross and Resurrection as a Divine work.

<sup>45</sup> This unity is at the heart of the Christology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Vol. 3* (Ignatius Press: 1992), esp. IIB.

crucified and risen, in the community of faith, the Church, of which we are part.<sup>46</sup> The imaginative contemplation of scripture and the marshalling of devotional practices that also enact it provide affective as well as intellectual understanding.<sup>47</sup> At the theological level, in the school of Ignatian prayer and spirituality, it becomes both possible and necessary to grasp this within the interplay of the trinitarian persons and their missions. From the very beginning, we never encounter Christ except as being sent from the Father and as filled with Holy Spirit, whose very presence is the inbreaking of the Kingdom.

If the first Week is our conversion from sin to Christ, our redeemer and saviour, the following weeks continue a new phase of this conversion as the graced unfolding of the 'new self'. The grace that we ask for and shapes our desire (§104) is already one that enters into the mystery and the ontology of incarnation in its fullness. We ask for 'knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me' and, if it is the divine will, for love and discipleship. In other words, as we encounter the unity of identity and mission in the person of Christ, we also seek the redeemed integrity of mission and identity in our own lives. Our imagination, together with the application of the senses is, in effect, the development and practice of a 'connaturality' with Christ in His person and mission. It will find its ultimate realisation in the 'the three ways of humility' and the 'election'. Both are profoundly Christological and take us to the heart of Christ's kenotic-obedience in which He is revealed to be the chosen Son (elected) who also chooses (electing) when, from the beginning, He says, 'thy will be done'. In His person and in His act, the inner life of the Trinity opens to us as the economy of the Triune love that overflows into and through history and whose mission or telos is our salvation.<sup>48</sup> The Exercises never leave us in doubt about the way in which all these dimensions of the Divine mystery are at work, but neither do they let us drift into theological or intellectual speculation about them. We are always focused on and 'in touch' with the concrete, even physical, person of Christ. We can see this at work when, in the midst of the Passion, we are invited to 'consider how the divinity

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<sup>46</sup> The education of the imagination that takes place in the 'school of the Exercises', especially in contemplation of scripture, has a much wider application and significance than personal prayer. It becomes a way of entering into the 'prophetic' imagination that is the mark of the Kingdom and its advent. This, in turn, becomes a vital dimension of apostolic mission. Cf. Brueggemann, W., *The Prophetic Imagination* (Fortress Press: 2001); Wilder, A. N., *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Fortress Press: 1976).

<sup>47</sup> It is interesting that §164, in preparation for the three kinds of humility in §165 ff., asks, 'para hombre afectarse a la vera doctrina de Cristo nuestro Señor'. The 'true doctrine' is not only the teaching of Christ or the teaching about Christ. It has, I think, a much fuller meaning i.e. the whole person of Christ, for it is only in that form that we encounter and know the 'truth'. Likewise, our whole person – heart and mind – comes to embrace it/Him. If love and the love of knowledge are not our driving force, then we can never attain the third way of humility.

<sup>48</sup> For the activity of the Trinity in the Exercises and in *Spiritual Diary*, see O'Leary, B., *Ignatius Loyola: Christian Mystic* (Messenger Publications: 2023), pp. 89-96. O'Leary draws attention to the more pronounced presence of the Trinity in Ignatius' prayer in the *Diary* over the more implicit presence in the Exercises and how their focus is more Christological. He rightly notes that this is not a new spirituality but 'one that has evolved'. In general, this appears true, although much depends on how we understand 'evolved'. It assumes that the Exercises represent the earlier experience of Manresa, which they do, but the text already presents us with an evolution. The material of the Exercises is surely arranged to serve their purpose: the reform of one's life and the election, especially the closer following of Christ in mission. However, if my thesis is correct and we never know of Christ independently of his salvific mission, that mission can never be known independently of its trinitarian origins as established in §101. The use of Lord, Señor, and its variations, Criador y Señor, Hij y Señor – sometimes referring to the Father and at others to the Son – all operate within the economy of the trinitarian relations. I do not think that there is an 'evolution' as such between the Exercises and the *Diary*. Rather, it is the fluidity of Ignatius' use determined by the context and the purpose. From the 'autobiography', we learn that the Trinity was also prominent in his devotional life. Cf. *Auto*. §28.

hides itself' (§195). Though this whole contemplation is vivid and physical, it also anticipates contemporary theologies of the cross. Again, Ignatius does not want us to speculate upon the ontological question of the divine kenosis. He wants us to ponder what it means for us, first, to move us to even greater love and gratitude when we see how Christ suffers and labours for our sake, and second, in terms of the way in which God reveals the power of love in powerlessness, which becomes a critical 'wisdom' for mission and discernments. In a subtle way, the intimate knowledge and love that we receive in contemplating the crucified Christ also move us to solidarity with him and, through him, all who suffer. As we grow in connaturality with the Crucified, the heart and the self are also dilated. When this happens we find that we are being prepared for His mission. When in 'the three ways of humility' (§165ff.) we ask to share with Christ his rejection and humiliations, 'to be a fool for Christ' (§167), ontologically and existentially, we are already oriented to this deeper union in mission. We can now begin to appreciate how the Christology that the Exercises offers us is a 'Christology from the inside'. It is the knowledge that comes from love, for only through love itself and the whole commitment of our being can we truly know the 'who' of Christ. To deal with this adequately, a theology that draws from an Ignatian spirituality will need to develop a theory of knowledge based on love and loving, especially that love that has the power to sacrifice in order to save the other and that runs contrary to all our normal instincts for survival and control.<sup>49</sup>

The 'crucified Christ' is central to Ignatian Christology. If this centrality reflects the particular emphasis on the crucified Christ in the spiritual devotions of the time, it is not a pathology of the cross that dwells only on suffering. In the Crucified, we see the ultimate gift of love for us. The eyes of Ignatian prayer never leave the crucified Christ; it constantly reminds us that its Christology is not only personal but also can never be divorced from its soteriology.<sup>50</sup>

From the perspective of Ignatian prayer and spirituality, knowledge and love of Christ are inseparable from companionship with Him in mission. This lies at the centre of its mysticism. As noted by de Guibert, the Ignatian tradition differs from other great mystical traditions for it is not nuptial. Nevertheless, it is a union in mission grounded in the experience of the person of Christ who, as we have seen, we come to know in and through His mission.<sup>51</sup> It is this which gives us the key to Ignatian asceticism, which is understood in terms of the surrender in obedience and the self-gift in kenosis to serve 'all created

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<sup>49</sup> It is Augustine, following Paul, who identifies what the kenosis of the Divine on the cross means for our understanding. The powerlessness of the cross is actually God's refusal to enter into the evil economy of power, which the cross represents – absolute power – which is corrupted through our sin to become destructive power, even when it carries the illusion of offering security and peace (worldly power). For Augustine, God chooses to act by the 'power of righteousness'. In the Exercises, we come to see this is the Christological form of God's salvific action. It becomes the way of acting that must characterise his disciples and is the 'way' which is to be discerned for mission. See Augustine *De Trin.*, Bk. XIII, Chapter 13. For a fuller treatment of this in relation to the Two Standards and its political implications, see Hanvey, James S.J., 'Some Political and Cultural Implications of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola', *Hong Kong Journal of Catholic Studies*, no. 12 (2021), pp. 30-68.

<sup>50</sup> See how we are always placed in the presence of the crucified Christ §53, 60.

<sup>51</sup> de Guibert, J., *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine: A Historical Study*, G. E. Ganss, ed., W. J. Young, trans., (Institute of Jesuit Sources: 1964), pp. 50 ff.

things'. The *imitatio Christi* is obvious, and it is realised in the experience of 'being called and sent'. We see all these aspects come together in Ignatius's vision at La Storta. Christ is carrying His Cross (the Christ on mission), and Ignatius experiences the Father placing him with the Son.<sup>52</sup> He is given the assurance that God will be favourable to the emerging Society in Rome. In the vision, we see the dynamic of reciprocity again – the 'exchange of gifts' that is an 'exchange of persons' as well.

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<sup>52</sup> Autobiography §96; Spiritual Diary, Feb. 23. 1544, where Ignatius recalls the intensity of the vision at La Storta (1537) and places it within a trinitarian context. In Ignatius's account, prior to this vision, he had been asking for this grace from Our Lady. It is another form of the grace sought in the Sp. Exx. §104, which is further evidence that these 'graces' and the form of prayer that goes with them become part of the 'normal' prayer of those in the school of the Exercises. On the significance of La Storta, see García de Castro Valdés, J., et al. (eds.), *Diccionario de espiritualidad ignaciana* (Sal Terrae: 2007), vol. 38, pp.1092-1100. See also Kolvenbach, P., *The Road from La Storta: Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., on Ignatian Spirituality* (Institute of Jesuit Sources: 2000), pp. 1-4: 'The vision of La Storta has not been given to us so that we might stop to gaze at it. No, it is the light in which every Jesuit regards the whole world. This vision which opens out on to the very mystery of the Trinity in its work of love for the salvation of mankind – indeed, on to the mystery of the Divine Majesty that nothing can constrain or impede – places us, in virtue of this ineffable mystery, with the Incarnate Word who took the form of a servant and slave in the well-defined and limited reality of our history' (3).



## **8: Mission - inhabiting the Risen Christ.**

The Ignatian ‘Christology from within’ is neither possible nor complete unless we come to inhabit the Risen Christ. It is only possible because the Christ we know and encounter ‘*in via*’, which is the extension of the fourth week, is the Risen Lord (even under the form of the Crucified). It is his mission that we are called to, and the intimate knowledge and love of Him that we sought in week two can only be answered in our lives with Christ in and beyond the fourth week. Grace is given when we step out in mission with Him, for mission is the mystical union with the resurrected Lord. It is this, and only this, that makes the sacrifice of obedience and all that it entails in facing and overcoming all the hardships, resistances, and obstacles to mission possible. Ultimately, mission is consolation because it takes place in the companionship of the Risen Lord, ‘the consoler’ (§224). It is Christ as consoler – and consolation is a participation in the grace of the resurrection – who becomes the model for Christian witness in the world.

Living in the Risen Christ is a real, continuous experience. Here, too, we find the basis of a pneumatic ecclesiology sketched out in Acts. Our senses have been schooled to the new world, ‘seeing all things in Christ’ so that now we may enter into the fullness of His resurrection. As with the Church, so with us, the fourth week of the Exercises is the beginning of the mission that takes us into the world and down all the roads of history. The Risen Christ is not an absent Christ or an insubstantial one. No longer constrained and redefining matter, He is now present to all peoples, places and times. Once we comprehend this, we realise that our mission in His service has no limits; we come to ‘labour and work’ and journey under the *magis* of the Holy Spirit, the world of the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*. As we have seen, however, we never leave the crucified Christ behind. As with the disciples, so with us: we know Him by His wounds. They are our guarantor that His history and ours is real. It is not a gnostic fantasy. When the fourth week is seen in terms of mission, the *in via* of history, we can begin to see how Ignatian prayer and spirituality lay the foundations for a radical theology of the resurrection and discipleship, which can shape Christian life and direct us to the source of its universal dynamism.

It is easy to miss the radicalness of the fourth week and its determination of Ignatian spirituality. In part, this is because its very open-endedness appears to lack the intensity of the previous weeks. It is as if we have been let out of school! The apparent openness, like the resurrection appearances in scripture, seems to move into a diminutive key when we expect an overwhelming crescendo. As in the New Testament accounts, so in the fourth week, we are forced to abandon our expectations and worldly ways of thinking to enter into a new, continuous transformative reality. However, we should not underestimate its eschatological significance and power. No matter how familiar our world may appear to us post-resurrection, it is a world already changed. The world that inhabits the Risen Christ is even more radically different from the world after the discovery of quantum physics and its strange paradoxes. Not only is it materially changed, but it lives now forever within and before the 'kairos' of the Risen Lord. The strangely beautiful and delicate luminosity of the glory of the Risen Lord suffuses and restores creation and is present in the fourth week.

With this light, we come to the *Contemplatio*. The *Contemplatio* is our world now filled with the light, life and active presence of the Risen One. It is the continuation of His reality, the promise fulfilled but still unfolding, the 'beyond' into which the fourth week calls us. In this context, we can appreciate how the *Contemplatio* is a modality of the Incarnation flowing from the Triune life. For this reason, it cannot be annexed as some alternative source of mystical experience, which can be aligned and merged into a general category of mysticism to fit with theologies of religion and religious experience. If our understanding of this movement is correct, then the *Contemplatio*, too, comes within the eschatology of Ignatian prayer and spirituality.



## 9: The Eschatology of the Exercises and discernment.

Eschatology has come to the fore in contemporary scriptural studies and theology.<sup>53</sup> Traditionally, eschatology has treated the four last things: heaven, hell, death and judgment. These are clearly present in the first week and theologically recognised by Ignatius and his companions. Nevertheless, if we see eschatology only in the first week, we risk neglecting the other vital eschatological dimensions of the Exercises. Two main loci for this can be seen in the meditation on the Two Standards (Banderas) and in discernment. They are intrinsically connected.

The Two Standards is an exercise in discernment, which comes at a critical point in the second week. It answers the prayer we have made for 'knowledge and understanding', and it teaches us how to use that knowledge. The choice with which it presents us and the picture of Christ who invites us into His life and mission makes the Two Standards integral to the Christology of the Exercises. Arzubialde regards it as functioning as a 'parable'.<sup>54</sup> While it is possible to see it in terms of this genre, especially given its vivid heraldic and military imagery, such a categorisation can diminish its eschatological significance. In the Two Standards, Ignatius captures the eschatology of the New Testament, an inbreaking of the Kingdom which places every person in the moment of judgement: do we stand for or

<sup>53</sup> Traditionally treated under the 'last things' – heaven, hell, death and judgement. These, too, are strongly present in the Exercises, especially in the first and third weeks, but my argument here is that the Exercises also allow for a retrieval of eschatology which has been opened up by contemporary theological approaches.

<sup>54</sup> Arzubialde, op. cit. pp.379-398, esp. 395 ff.

against God, with or against Christ?<sup>55</sup> It reminds us, as Paul does, that we are engaged in a decisive struggle ‘with powers and principalities’ that no Christian can avoid or ignore. The genius of the mediation on the Two Standards lies in its ability to place us vividly in the immediacy of this drama at the heart of Christ’s mission. Like the temptations of Christ, it exposes the ‘strategies’ of the enemy, i.e. all those forces ranged against the Kingdom and against the fulfilment of Christian life through following Christ. The fundamental choice entailed in the Two Standards is also a choice that declares for the Kingdom in the midst of worldly values. It establishes that the eschatological ‘kairos’ of the Kingdom of Christ is a fundamental choice that must extend through all the choices of our lives and in history. The choice, however, is not only for or against the person of Christ but, as we saw in our brief examination of the unity of person and mission, it is also a choice for God’s way of working. The ‘foolishness of the Cross’ must also be part of our choice. The means are integral to the end if the sovereignty of God’s mercy is to become manifest in the world. As we saw in Christology, mission and person cannot be separated, and our discernment must reflect this. All authentic discernment must reflect this not only in the choice but also in the way it is realised. This, too, represents the eschatological form of discernment and the subsequent way in which it will shape history.

The Two Standards capture the battle that Christ faced in His own temptations and translate it into our lives and history. The subtle delusions and strategy of ‘Satan’ and his servants and their means are unmasked. They generate fear and terror; they make us subjects of this kingdom of death (spiritual and physical) by placing us in subjection. The contrast with Christ is striking. He does not seduce or coerce but calls and invites us in freedom, not primarily as subjects but as companions and friends. His honesty stands against the deceptions of the enemy. Christ never conceals or disguises the hardships of the struggle. The dynamic of reciprocity – the essential dynamic grace of companionship in mission – is now made explicit. Christ shares everything with us, and we with Him. With Christ now as our ‘Principle and Foundation’, the illusory promises of the world that lead us into servitude are exposed. Their process and their telos are revealed: through the lure of riches and honour, we are finally entrapped in the solipsism of our own pride. With Christ, though the way is counter-intuitive and by the logic of the world can never succeed, we choose their opposites: poverty, contempt and humiliation, bearing all things in humility.<sup>56</sup> The profundity of this choice should not be underestimated. It uncovers the ‘logic’ of the cross, which is integral to every act of discernment and the surrender in faith that it requires. In the Two Standards we must come to God’s way of working and enter the mystery that is the kenosis of the crucified Lord. God refuses to enter into the economy of evil even to defeat it. To wrestle with evil on its own terms would be the ultimate temptation.

It is clear that we will not be able to choose the standard of Christ unless we are in love with Him and have an absolute faith in His person and mission. In a sense, the Two Standards are our Caesarea Philippi moment. We choose the way of Christ and union with Him in rejection and powerlessness, declaring our faith that He is the Son of God and that

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<sup>55</sup> The Two Standards can be set within Christ’s temptations. For the Synoptics, the temptation in the desert marks the eschatological struggle for the Kingdom. We may note that at every point, Christ meets the temptations with the unequivocal assertion of God’s sovereignty. We can also find this echoed in the Two Standards, but it is transposed into a Christological key. The choice to work through powerlessness is the ultimate paradox of God’s omnipotence.

<sup>56</sup> Sp. Exx. §136-148.

the Father will fulfil His promises in Him. Our choice itself is a witness to Christ's Divinity; it is already the advent of the Kingdom every time we make it. Every act of discernment is such a moment. It is a decision for God and God's way of proceeding from the cross.

*Discernment.*<sup>57</sup> Fundamentally, discernment is a theological act. Any adequate theological treatment of it would need to understand it in context of pneumatology as well as in its anthropological and ecclesiological dimensions. Here, our principal concern is to indicate how discernment, although a sapiential act which realises a connaturality with the economy of God's grace also reveals itself as an eschatological act.<sup>58</sup> In terms of the economy to which we become 'attuned' through dwelling and being indwelt by Love, is the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*.

Irrespective of the matter(s) to be discerned, discernment is a gift that belongs to every Christian and is part of the practice of Christian life. The 'Our Father' is a prayer which every Christian can say, 'God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father"' (Gal.4.6). It is an eschatological prayer. Not only does it assert the sovereignty of God and of God's will, but it is also a prayer for the coming of the Kingdom. However, by the very act of praying it, we proclaim the presence of the Holy Spirit who is already the demonstration that the Kingdom has come. In praying that God's will be done, we pray for the gift of discernment and make it an eschatological event of the Kingdom's advent.

The rules for discernment and the election, which are given in the Exercises and have themselves generated substantial literature, are usually not treated within this eschatological context.<sup>59</sup> Not to do so leaves them open to becoming a protocol or a procedural decision-making process (albeit in the context of prayer). As we have argued, when this happens, there is a danger of forgetting that the means are as much part of a discernment as the end. The application of the rules and the movements of consolation and desolation will certainly need experience and attentiveness, especially in seeking to identify their origin as well as their effects. To do justice to the wisdom that they condense and apply is beyond the scope of this essay. Let it suffice to recognise their eschatological character and its significance for how we understand discernment and what is at stake when we practice it.<sup>60</sup> If discernment as a theological act is to be properly treated, it must attend to all these dimensions.

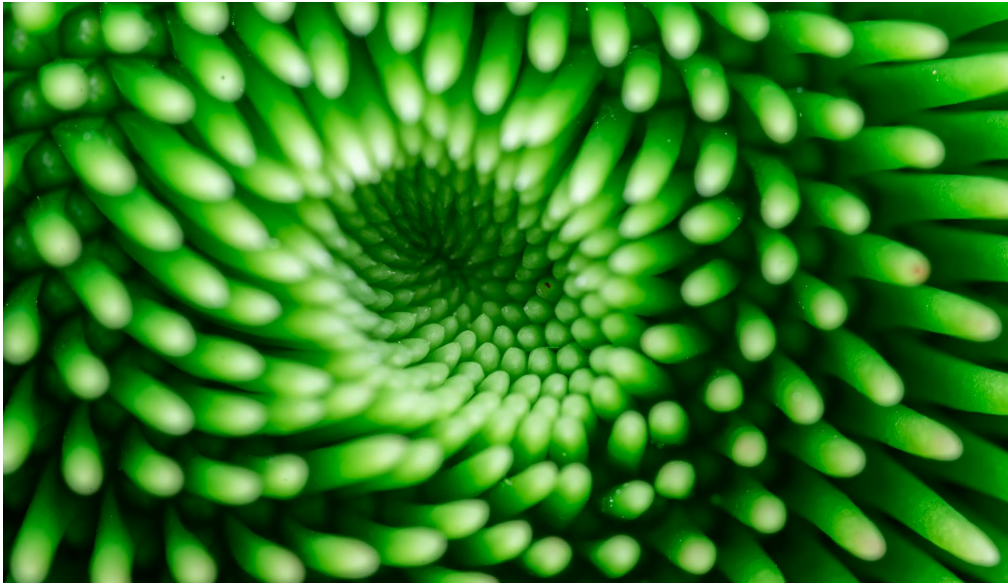
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<sup>57</sup> For a detailed treatment of discernment, see the essay by Sylvie Robert in this volume.

<sup>58</sup> For connaturality which is the gift of the Holy Spirit, see ST II-II, 45 2c. 'a feeling or intimacy with divine things such that its possessor has right judgement concerning divine things.' This is part of the Ignatian 'familiaridad con Dios', which also has an affective dimension. See. Roberts, op. cit. Discernment on 'To feel and taste things internally'.

<sup>59</sup> Rules for discernment Sp. Exx. §313-336.

<sup>60</sup> In addition to Sylvie Roberts in this volume, see Diccionario, vol.37, pp. 607-611, with its bibliography, and esp. Michael Iven's insightful commentary, op. cit. pp. 205-237. See also Hugo Rahner, op. cit., Chapter IV, and Terence O'Reilly, op. cit., Chapter 6.



## **10: An Ignatian integral ecology.**

As we conclude this overview of the interplay of theology and Ignatian prayer, it will be valuable to look briefly at the resources they offer to a theology and spirituality of creation. We have already seen how creation appears in the Principle and Foundation and is given to help us towards the end for which we are created, ‘to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord’. It would be a mistake to think that this is an instrumentalization of creation. The reverse is the case.

When we are ordered to God, we come to understand creation in its own ordering, inner purpose, and its own intrinsic goodness. Everything is created to give God glory through fulfilling its purpose in helping humanity achieve its end. The relationship is not instrumental or exploitative, but cooperative. It presupposes the ‘communio’ of creation, which serves God’s soteriological mission and is part of it (Rom. 8.22). Once more, we see how this becomes explicit in the key mediation of §60. It is our sinfulness that instrumentalises and exploits creation without regard to its own purpose, grace and goodness. Sin alienates us from ‘our Creator and Lord’ and all God’s works of creation, especially the communio that spans the supernatural and natural order (§ 55 ff.). The distorted epistemology of sin means we fail to understand the very nature of creation, how all created things are in relationship, and the fullness of life that they also seek and in which their intrinsic goodness is realised. However, before the cross of Christ, we experience the grace of forgiveness, which restores us to the communio from which we have been alienated. Coming to understand the immensity of Christ’s work of redemption, ‘shame and confusion’ is turned to surging ‘wonder’ and ‘gratitude’. In these emotions – already movements of consolation – I have begun to experience the new life of the Holy Spirit welling up and ordering all my relationships. Now re-ordered, I also come to ‘know’ creation itself in its truth, and this transforms my relationships to it. I become part of the new ecology that the grace of Christ brings. My redeemed freedom allows me to be an

agent of this new ecology, living in reverence and understanding for all that it provides for my proper use.<sup>61</sup>

The experience of §60 is one that never leaves us, for it is the Holy Spirit's 'memory' in us of what Christ has accomplished. It is also the beginning of our response – 'what have I done? what am I doing? what should I do?'<sup>62</sup> – that creates the graced capacity for relationships of reciprocity that we have identified as the inner architecture of Ignatian spirituality and, indeed, its ontology. In restoring me, Christ also restores creation to me and I to it. I come to see that creation has been a grace for me, continuing to support me until I can repent and be restored to the *communio* of heaven and earth. The great 'communio' of the angels, the saints, and all created things have desired my salvation; they have a soteriological purpose and mission that I am now called to take up. Ignatius does not have the poetry of St. Francis but in §60 and §61 we can detect the Ignatian canticle to creation, 'I will extoll the mercy of God our Lord, and pouring out my thoughts to Him, and giving thanks to Him that up to this very moment He has granted me life'.

Here, we have begun to enter into the world of the *Contemplatio*, the 'shabbat' of redeemed creation. It also marks a change from the formal propositions of God's presence in the created order. In the section on the examination of conscience (Sp. Exx. §32 ff) we see the scholastic formula at play, 'the perfect, due to constant contemplation and enlightenment of the understanding, consider, meditate and ponder more that God our Lord is in every creature by His essence, power and presence'.<sup>63</sup> The topic concerns the problem of swearing 'by a creature', and, in doing so, how we can observe reverence and respect for the Creator. If not, we risk falling into the sin of idolatry. The 'perfect' are those who see the signs by which the Creator is present to and in all things and, therefore, less likely to fall into such a sin. In many ways the treatment echoes Ignatius own experiences of coming to see how the whole of creation is filled with the Divine presence. More importantly, as we have seen, this is no longer a philosophical proposition to which we give a purely intellectual assent. In the journey between the first week and the *Contemplatio*, it has become our experience of God's salvific presence in all things. Creation can no longer be treated independently of God's redeeming activity, of which it is part, and the grace in which it shares. Now we can truly find **God** in all things (*Buscar y ballar a Dios en todas las cosas*) because we have come to find or know them in God. Creation has been restored to its own grace and not distorted into an idol as in pantheism.

Restored and available to us through the Resurrection of Christ, the wonder and the gratitude which creation elicits in us now become the self-gift, 'for love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than words'.<sup>64</sup> The '*suscipe*' (§234) is not only an offering which flows from the Spirit-filled heart overflowing in love, it expresses our ontological freedom and security for which the whole of creation longs, no longer *usque ad mortem*, but now

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<sup>61</sup> The most profound exploration of this can be found in the writings of Maximus the Confessor. See Blowers, P. M., *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World* (Oxford UP: 2018).

<sup>62</sup> Sp. Exx. §53. We should not overlook the significance of the frequency with which 'Creator and Lord' is used in the exercises of the first week.

<sup>63</sup> Sp. Exx. §39.2.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Sp. Exx. §230.1; also Hanvey, J., 'Laudato Si' and the Renewal of Theologies of Creation', *Heythrop Journal*, 59.6 (2018), pp. 1022–1035.

already drawing from the gift of eternal life. Here, too, we hear echoes of St. Francis. The complete self-offering is the point at which 'poverty' becomes the condition of our being, not as lack or threat, but as grace. Loving God makes us wonderfully poor, for, by possessing Him, we no longer need to possess anything. This is the poverty to which the creature comes with complete trust and thanksgiving before the Creator, as the Son before the Father. In the self-giving kenosis of our being, our time and history, 'all that we have and possess', we enter into an absolute dependency that surrenders to God's sovereignty in love. In the '*suscipe*', it is the person who speaks the *suscipe* of creation. The *suscipe* is the action which flows out of our contemplation and is its fruit. It is active recognition, response and confirmation that through the grace of participation we have come to live in the life of creation – Love's own salvific presence in all things. Creation is restored to us and reveals its sacramental nature. Through the action of this simple, humble prayer we have become 'priests of creation' for it is our eucharist 'on the world' (Teilhard de Chardin).

Even from this brief outline we can appreciate the theological and spiritual resource the Spiritual Exercises can be in a world facing multiple ecological crises. There will be no lasting solution unless there is a fundamental personal, political and economic conversion, a profound re-ordering of our relationships to creation and to one another.



## Conclusion.

There are a number of other themes which shape Ignatian prayer, not least role of the intercessors, but perhaps there is already enough for us to consider in terms of its theological dynamics. Theology, like the Exercises themselves, is a continual process of reflection which arises from experience and, in turn, serves to shape it. In their relationship, they constantly open up new possibilities. Although they bear the mark of the age in which they were first prayed and formulated, they have shown that they are not bound to it. This is surely an indication that they are an apostolic instrument of the Holy Spirit.

*James Hanvey S.J.*  
Secretary for the Service of Faith, Rome



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