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The Beloved Disciple and the
Spiritual Exercises

HENRY J. SHEA, SJ

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a word from the editor. . .

Imaginative prayer plays a prominent role in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Of this, there can be no doubt. But just what Ignatius meant by *ymaginación* is another question.¹

In the last decade, spiritual writers have encouraged great liberty in Ignatian contemplations. Exercitants should indulge their imaginations by putting themselves into the story, interacting with the biblical characters and perhaps even becoming one of the characters, in order to see where their minds take them. Furthermore, exercitants should not be distracted by concerns about fidelity to the biblical narratives. If such concerns do trouble exercitants, then they need only ask whether their imaginings produce good fruit in their lives. If so, then they can feel confident that these imaginings are from God.

Now, without denying that such use of the imagination can open exercitants' eyes to truths about themselves—truths that are gratifying, surprising, or healing—it would appear nevertheless to reduce Scripture to a vehicle for stimulating the imagination, since there exists no reason in principle to remain with the narrative once the imagination has been stimulated. But Scripture itself is the word of God—and a far more central and certain word than any private revelation, no matter how profound that private revelation might be. To put this another way, Scripture judges the veracity of all personal revelations, and not vice versa. At some point, then, untethered imaginings represent less an engagement with the divine, and more a scavenger-hunt into one's own subconscious.²

Ignatius was not the first to promote imaginative prayer. It was popularized in the fourteenth century by Franciscans, who took their lead from St. Bonaventure (1221–1274) and his *Life of Christ*. His imagi-

¹ The word *ymaginación* appears in *SpEx* 47.3, 65.3, 66.1, and 121.2.

² Fr. Michael Ivens (d. 2005) put it succinctly: Ignatian contemplations must be “text-grounded without being text-bound.” See *Keeping in Touch: Posthumous Papers on Ignatian Topics*, ed. Joseph A. Munitiz, SJ (Leominster: Gracewing, 2007), 133.

native elaborations upon the Gospels reads like a prototype of the *Exercises*: readers should “consider,” “meditate,” “contemplate,” and “render themselves present” to the biblical scenes. But Bonaventure also noted that imagination has its limits: “all due regard must be paid to the truth of the facts of [Jesus’s] life, to his justice and divine doctrine, and nothing be inconsistent with faith and good works.”³

In the fifteenth century, representatives of the *Devotio Moderna* continued to promote imaginative prayer. Two notable works were *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), and the *Ejercitorio de la vida espiritual*, by García Jiménez de Cisneros (1455–1510), both of which impacted Ignatius. Like Bonaventure, both writers counseled caution. Cisneros wrote:

The first precondition [for making these exercises] is that your prayers be consistent to the sacred scriptures, and to the sayings of the saints, and to the examples of the Fathers, since anything not in accordance with scripture, even if it seems good, is suspect, and for good reason. And because there are many who would try to make the scriptures suit their own sentiments, it will be helpful for you to communicate [the results of what happens in] your exercises to a person who is spiritually advanced, and to take his advice about them.⁴

Not surprisingly, then, Ignatius exhibits similar restraint in the *Spiritual Exercises*. As early as annotation 2, he instructs directors to “accurately narrate the history” of the biblical narrative to exercitants—most of whom would not have had Bibles ready at hand—while exercitants should pray over the history as “the authentic foundation.”⁵ Later in the *Exercises*, Ignatius reminds exercitants seven times to “recall the history.”⁶

³ St. Bonaventure, *Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (New York: P. J. Kenedy and Sons, 1881), 6.

⁴ García Jiménez de Cisneros, *Ejercitorio de la vida espiritual*, ed. José María Casciaro (Madrid: Ediciones Rialp, 1957), 30–31. My translation. For the *Imitation*, see book 1, chapter 4.

⁵ *SpEx 2; The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, trans. George E. Ganss, SJ (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992), 21.

⁶ *SpEx* 102.1, 111.1, 137.1, 150.1, 191.1, 201.1, 219.1. On Ignatius’s use of the word

One might be surprised to learn that only once does Ignatius instruct exercitants to enter the story, and he does this in the contemplation on the nativity:

The First Point. This is to see the persons; that is, to see Our Lady, Joseph, the maidservant, and the infant Jesus after his birth. I will make myself a poor, little, and unworthy slave, gazing at them, contemplating them, and serving them in their needs, just as if I were there, with all possible respect and reverence. Then I will reflect upon myself to draw some profit.⁷

Despite what various writers have suggested, the remainder of the *Exercises* gives no clear indication that Ignatius was advising this form of prayer for the entire retreat.⁸ True, Ignatius does repeatedly ask exercitants to apply their five senses to biblical scenes, which some interpret as another way of saying that one should enter the story.⁹ But this is not necessarily so. By way of analogy, one can bring many different degrees of nuance to watching a film, most of which do not include taking a role within the story or changing the details of the story:

1. One can watch a film distractedly.
2. One can watch a film with full attention, noting everything.
3. One can be so engrossed by a film that one loses sense of time. One forgets that one is watching a film.
4. One can ruminate over the meaning, complexities, contradictions, and mysteries of the story.
5. One can try deliberately to cultivate affection and empathy for the characters.

historia, see George E. Ganss, SJ *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, 163n63.

⁷ *SpEx* 114; trans. Ganss, 58–59.

⁸ See for example Joseph Veale, SJ, “Saint Ignatius Speaks About Ignatian Prayer,” in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 28, no. 2 (March 1996), 6. David L. Fleming (d. 2011), briefly endeavored to make this case with an argument that seems somewhat strained; see *Like the Lightning: The Dynamics of the Ignatian Exercises* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004), 31.

⁹ *SpEx* 18, 65–70, 121–26, 129, 132–34, 204, 208–09, 226–27, 247–48.

6. One can imagine being invisibly present to the characters as the story unfolds.
7. One can imagine the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations that come from being invisibly present in the scene.
8. One can imagine oneself as an independent agent in the story, conversing with the characters, making one's own choices, and thereby changing the details of the story.
9. One can imagine oneself as one of the characters already in the story, speaking and acting through that character, and thereby too changing the details of the story.

A close reading of the *Exercises*, I suggest, indicates that numbers 2 to 7 are really what Ignatius has in mind most of the time. Even in the aforementioned contemplation on the nativity, one could argue that Ignatius was thinking more along the lines of 6 and 7 than 8 or 9.¹⁰

In light of this interplay between prayerful imagination and fidelity to Scripture, the significance of Henry Shea's work seems all the more evident. In a well-researched essay, Shea maintains that the anonymous "beloved disciple" in John's Gospel—while almost certainly a real historical figure—was also intended by the evangelist to be an imaginative "point of insertion" for those who heard the Gospel read aloud. Insofar as Scripture is inspired, the hearer receives a divine invitation, so to speak, to enter the story, and enjoys a privileged position from which to see and hear Jesus. God invites the hearer to *feel* and to *experience* what it means to be "the one whom Jesus loved." At the same time, the structure of the invitation—that is, the very narrative of the story—provides an objective framework that precludes the hearer from wandering from the divine revelation.

¹⁰ At Ignatius's request, Fr. Jerome Nadal (1507–1580) composed his own series of imaginative contemplations on the Gospels for Jesuit scholastics. If one expects that Nadal would have endeavored to communicate Ignatius's particular understanding of imaginative prayer, then see Nadal's *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels, Volume 1: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Frederick A. Homann, SJ (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2003). Walter Melion of Johns Hopkins University provides an introductory study of great subtlety (pp. 1–96).

Shea then elaborates upon the powerful parallels between Johanne and Ignatian contemplations. For both, the goal is deeper “interior knowledge” —not of ourselves, but of our Lord, “who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely.”¹¹

Fr. Hervé Coathalem once described this interior knowledge as “knowledge of the heart.”¹² Shea has the same intuition. To see where he goes with it makes reading this essay on biblical exegesis a heartfelt experience in itself.

* * *

On behalf of both the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality and Fr. Timothy Kesicki (UCS), president of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, I express gratitude to Br. Guy Consolmagno (MAR) and Fr. Michael Harter (UCS), both of whom have completed their three-year terms on the seminar. Fr. Randy Sachs (UNE), whose term also ends this summer, has graciously agreed to a second round on the seminar.

Barton T. Geger, SJ

Editor

¹¹ *SpEx* 104.

¹² Hervé Coathalem, *Ignatian Insights: A Guide to the Complete Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Charles J. McCarthy, SJ, 2nd ed. (Taichung, Taiwan: Kuangchi Press, 1971), 148.

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The Beloved Disciple and the *Spiritual Exercises*

In the Fourth Gospel, the unnamed “disciple whom Jesus loved” functions as a literary device by which readers can enter the narrative. Likewise, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola invites retreatants to imagine themselves in scenes from the life of Christ. That heartfelt “interior knowledge of the Lord” which both texts hereby promote offers yet another example of the convergence, long-recognized by the mystical tradition, between Johannine and Ignatian spiritualities.

The unnamed “disciple whom Jesus loved” in the Gospel of John remains one of the most mysterious and elusive figures in the New Testament.¹ “It is this disciple,” concludes the Gospel’s epilogue, “who testifies to these things and has written them” (John 21:24), and a vast quantity of scholarship, in consequence, has been dedicated to determining his historical identity. A long tradition extending back into the second century identifies this disciple with the apostle John, son of Zebedee. But the advent of historical criticism subjected this tradition to heavy critique, and a wide range of alternative theories were proposed in its stead, identifying the beloved disciple with figures as diverse as Lazarus, Thomas, Mary Magdalene or simply an unnamed follower of Jesus. More recently, a series of French exegetes has made the case anew for the traditional association with John the apostle, even as the complete canonical text is understood as a later redaction by a Johannine

¹ John 20:2. All English-language quotations of Scripture, unless noted otherwise, have been taken from the *New American Bible Revised Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2011). Scripture citations appear hereafter in parentheses in the body of the article.

school.² While most scholars agree, in any case, that the “disciple whom Jesus loved” must have been a historical figure of some kind, increasing attention is being paid to the complementary symbolic import of this disciple within the narrative.³ According to much contemporary narrative criticism, the beloved disciple in the Gospel of John is also a representative figure whose role serves as a literary device. In other words, as Brendan Byrne argues, this disciple is not merely framed by the author as an historical eyewitness whose testimony validates the narrative, but his appearances also comprise a leitmotif that serves as an ideal “point of insertion” for the reader.⁴

The correlations between these latter developments in biblical scholarship and the dynamics of Ignatian contemplation in the *Spiritual Exercises* are remarkable and largely unexplored. They imply that the author(s) of John’s Gospel essentially shared the same intuition that inspired Ignatius to invite exercitants to enter imaginatively into the Gos-

² Henri Cazelles, “Jean, fils de Zébédée, ‘prêtre’ et apôtre,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 88, no. 2 (2000): 253–58; Jacques Winandy, “Le disciple que Jésus aimait: pour une vision élargie du problème,” *Revue Biblique* 105 (1998): 70–75; P. E. Boismard, “Le disciple que Jésus aimait d’après Jn 21,” *Revue Biblique* 105 (1998): 76–80; Jean Colson, *L’énigme du disciple que Jésus aimait* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1969). This position was also adopted by Benedict XVI in *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 218–27.

³ Raymond Brown observes: “The thesis that he is purely fictional or only an ideal figure is quite implausible. It would mean that the author of John 21:20–23 was deceived or deceptive, for he reports distress in the community over the beloved disciple’s death. The disciple was idealized, of course; but in my judgment the fact that he was a historical person and a companion of Jesus [is] obvious.” Rudolf Schnackenburg furthers: “To begin with it must be said that a figure drawn as a type or symbol can nevertheless be a historical person. A ‘typical’ significance has also been supposed for other persons in John’s gospel (cf. Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, Thomas, etc.). . . the anonymous figure introduced by the evangelist and the editors as the ‘disciple whom Jesus loved’ and brought in at the last supper, is an historical person.” Andrew Lincoln confirms: “For this reason the dominant scholarly view is that the Beloved Disciple was a founding figure and teacher in a particular group of Christians [who has] been idealized and given a role at significant points in the narrative about Jesus in order to emphasize and legitimate its perspective.” Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 31; Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 3 (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 378, 385; Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 22.

⁴ Brendan Byrne, *Life Abounding: A Reading of John’s Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 5.

pel scene so as to make the mysteries one's own.⁵ In contrast with other Gospels, in which the exercitant must develop his or her own points of entry, at times almost from scratch, here the author has arguably built an ideal "point of insertion" within the text itself. This is not to say that reading John with the desire of sharing in the experience and graces of the beloved disciple represents an entirely new practice—a long patristic and medieval tradition, in fact, had basically suggested its readers do the same. But narrative criticism has provided a renewed impetus to engage such a reading by its novel illustration of how the text itself is crafted to engender this spiritual experience, thereby enabling every reader to draw close to Jesus as the disciple whom he loves.

The term "woman" specifically hearkens back to the name initially given to Eve. . . .

The parallels between the leitmotif of the beloved disciple and the Ignatian spiritual tradition are also profoundly thematic. As Ignatian spirituality has long been characterized by a special emphasis upon the senses and imagination, the affect and heart, and the desire for an "interior knowledge" of the love of Jesus, so do these same themes shape the experience and figure of "the disciple whom Jesus loved."⁶ In a particular way, these parallels converge in the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Just as devotion to this heart was historically linked to the Fourth Gospel and even connected directly with the experience of the beloved disciple, so has the Sacred Heart been foundational in the spirituality of countless Jesuits. By far one of the most poignant testimonials to this is found in the last major reflections of Pedro Arrupe (1907–1991) on Ignatian spirituality, "Rooted and Grounded in Love," first delivered as

⁵ *Spiritual Exercises* 114, 121–25, hereafter abbreviated *SpEx*. Of course, this intuition long preceded Ignatius, who probably encountered it first in the *Vita Christi* of Ludolph of Saxony. Ludolph's method followed in a long medieval tradition that extended back through Franciscan texts into the Cistercian and monastic writers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, at which time the desire to imitate the humanity of Christ led to the contemplation of Jesus in the imagination, *sicut praesens*. See Giles Constable, "The Imitation of the Body of Christ," in *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 194–217.

⁶ *SpEx* 104. "Autographum (=A)," *Monumenta Ignatiana. Exercitia spiritualia S. Ignatii de Loyola et eorum directoria*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1969) I:224 (hereafter *Exercitia*). Unless noted otherwise, all translations are mine.

a lecture in Rome not long before his stroke and later sent as a letter to the whole Society. As the lecture drew to a close, Arrupe made a strong personal appeal:

If you want my advice, I would say to you, after 54 years of living in the Society and almost 16 of being its General, that there is a tremendous power latent in this devotion to the Heart of Christ. Each of us should discover it for himself—if he has not already done so—and then, entering deeply into it, apply it to his personal life in whatever way the Lord may suggest and grant. . . . The Society needs the “*dynamis*” contained in this symbol and in the reality that it proclaims: the love of the Heart of Christ.⁷

Acknowledging the devotion as “one of the most profound affective sources of my interior life,” Arrupe went so far as to identify the Sacred Heart as “a symbolic expression of the very core of the Ignatian spirit.”⁸ By serving as a biblical “point of insertion” for the imaginative contemplations of Ignatian prayer, the leitmotif of the beloved disciple provides a uniquely fitting way to experience anew this “very core,” as it invites every reader to draw near the love of God manifest for us in the heart of Jesus. The beloved disciple is conveniently present at moments in the paschal mystery in which the divine love is dramatically unveiled—moments that also feature in the *Exercises*, from the Last Supper to the crucifixion to the empty tomb. These encounters of the disciple with Jesus evidently affect him so profoundly that they come to shape and define the disciple’s very identity, to the point at which the epilogue describes the disciple simply as the one “whom Jesus loved, the one who had also reclined upon his chest during the supper” (John 21:20). The encounters are, in effect, transformative of identity in the same way in which Ignatian spirituality seeks to cultivate such a profound familiarity with Jesus that, in the words of the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus: “Jesuits know who they are by looking at him.”⁹

⁷ Pedro Arrupe, “Rooted and Grounded in Love,” in *The Spiritual Legacy of Pedro Arrupe, SJ* (New York: New York Province, 1985), 190–91.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁹ GC 35, d. 2, no. 2; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg

I. The Relevant Passages: “The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved” in the Gospel of John

The first explicit reference in the Gospel of John to “the disciple whom Jesus loved” takes place at the Last Supper (13:21–30). In introducing the scene, the Evangelist highlights for the reader how the love of Jesus comprises the hermeneutical key of all that will unfold: “he loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end” (13:1).¹⁰ After the washing of the feet, one of the disciples, “the one whom Jesus loved,” is described as “reclining upon the chest of Jesus [ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ]” (13:23). First-century readers of the Gospel would have understood this beloved disciple’s position as one of intimacy and privilege, an indication of “high status” due to a “close relationship to Jesus.”¹¹ C. K. Barrett places the scene in further context:

Persons taking part in a meal reclined on the left side; the left arm was used to support the body, the right was free for use. The disciple to the right of Jesus would thus find his head immediately in front of Jesus and might accordingly be said to lie in his bosom. Evidently he would be in a position to speak intimately with Jesus, but his was not the place of greatest honor; this was to the left of the host. The place occupied by the beloved disciple was nevertheless the place of a trusted friend.¹²

The Greek word κόλπος, which can be translated alternately as “bosom,” “breast” or “chest,” generally connotes affection, but it has special resonance in John’s Gospel. As Origen was the first to underline, this same word was already used in the Johannine prologue to describe the

(St. Louis, Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009), 734.

¹⁰ The original Greek text makes plain the correlation between this “love to the end” and the love shown upon the cross through an *inclusio* often lost in translation. “He loved them to the end [εἰς τέλος ἠγάπησεν αὐτούς]” and the words of Jesus before expiring upon the cross, “it is finished [Τετέλεσται],” are both phrases that derive from the same Greek root τελέω.

¹¹ Jerome Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007), 234.

¹² *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 446. Barrett here cites Pliny the Younger as data: *Cenabat Nerua cum paucis; Ueiento proximus atque etiam in sinu recumbebat* (Plin.-I. Ep. 4.22.4).

relation between the Father and the Son: the Son, who is “in the bosom of the Father [εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς],” makes the Father known (1:18). Anticipating the parallelism that features so prominently in the latter part of the Last Supper discourse, the relation of Jesus to the beloved disciple is portrayed as a reflection of the communion of love between the Father and the Son.

As the scene unfolds, Peter bids the beloved disciple to ask Jesus who it is that will betray him. Raymond Brown indicates the likelihood that Peter would have been reclining at some distance on a couch to the right of the beloved disciple, placing Peter within the beloved disciple’s line of sight. Judas, who receives the ill-boding morsel from Jesus, was probably seated to his left, perhaps occupying the place of honor due to his status as treasurer.¹³ The tenor of the scene is one of intimacy and affection, sandwiched in the text between the washing of the feet and the new commandment of love. In like measure, it is marked by Jesus’s humble, kenotic vulnerability in the face of an approaching betrayal.

The “disciple whom Jesus loved” does not make another explicit appearance until the scene at the foot of the cross (John 19:25–27), where he stands beside Mary. She, like the beloved disciple, remains unnamed throughout the Fourth Gospel and is simply referred to as the mother of Jesus. “Woman,” Jesus says to Mary, “behold your son.” Then to the beloved disciple, he says, “Behold, your mother.” Upon Jesus’s commendation, we are told, “from that hour the disciple took her into his home [εἰς τὰ ἴδια].” While there is good reason to conclude that this mutual entrustment literally involved the beloved disciple taking Mary into his house, Rudolf Schnackenburg recalls that the Greek words often translated here as “home” more precisely mean “into his own.” The phrase possesses a much broader connotation in the original Greek that includes an interior, “spiritual sense.”¹⁴

¹³ Brown’s speculations are all based upon the Roman triclinium, in which couches were arranged in a “squared-off horseshoe pattern . . . around a common table.” The descriptions of the action in the narrative require that certain figures be placed in determinate places. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, vol. 2, Anchor Bible 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 574.

¹⁴ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 3, 279.

In keeping with this broader connotation, a long theological tradition has seen deeper spiritual meanings in this passage.¹⁵ Brendan Byrne notes that the unnamed mother of Jesus “clearly has a role within the narrative that, like that of the beloved disciple, is both personal and symbolic.”¹⁶ The term “woman” specifically hearkens back to the name initially given to Eve in the second creation narrative (Gen 2:23) and is designed to portray Mary as “the New Eve.” Just as Eve was named “mother of all the living” (Gen 3:20), Mary is “to be the mother of all those who through faith will be ‘born from above’ into the ‘eternal life’ of God.”¹⁷ Within this vision, Francis Moloney observes, the beloved disciple is representative of each and every member of the “new family of Jesus established at the cross,” within which Mary has a privileged “maternal role.” She is from that hour the mother of every disciple whom Jesus loves.¹⁸ In turn, following the Resurrection, all those “related to Jesus by faith but not necessarily by kinship” are referred to as brothers and sisters of the Lord, sharing the common divine father to which Jesus ascends (John 20:17). For John, the beloved disciple is to become the “first of many” brothers and sisters, a representative figure of all those made spiritual kin through the paschal mystery.¹⁹

Half a dozen verses later, a soldier thrusts his lance into Jesus’s side, causing an outpouring of blood and water. The narrator mysteriously interjects: “an eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true” (19:35). He has spoken these things, the text informs us, “so that you also may come to believe” — an authorial purpose that will be repeated in the initial conclusion of the Fourth Gospel at John 20:31. Most scholars agree that the author intends for the eyewitness at John 19:35 to be identified with the beloved disciple, whose testimony is also stated as

¹⁵ For an extensive summary of patristic and medieval exegesis on this passage, according to which Mary is herein made mother of the church, see Hugo Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, trans. Sebastian Bullough (New York: Random House, 1961), 45–57.

¹⁶ Brendan Byrne, *Abounding Life*, 318.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina 4 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1988), 504. Also see David J. Hawkin, “The Function of the Beloved Disciple Motif in the Johannine Redaction,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 33 (1977): 144.

¹⁹ Craig Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 243.

true in the epilogue at John 20:24.²⁰ This would make the beloved disciple a privileged witness to the final “piercing” of the body of Jesus upon the cross.

For the author of John, this is a moment of intense spiritual significance. Within the frame of reference of the Fourth Gospel, the flowing of blood and water from the side of Jesus recalls earlier statements of Jesus associating these elements with the divine life he has come to deliver.²¹ Blood serves as an allusion, first, to the Bread of Life discourse,

In accompanying Jesus to the foot of the cross, the disciple is given unique insight. . . .

with its “clear eucharistic overtones,” and the promise of Jesus that “whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life” (John 6:53–54). In the water, there is an unmistakable allusion to John 7:38, where Jesus speaks

of living water flowing from his κοιλία, which can be rendered “stomach” but can also signify “the heart,” or the innermost center of the person. Echoing the Exodus tradition of water springing from the rock and leveraging the deep biblical associations among water, blood, and life, the Johannine portrayal of these final moments of the passion thus conveys spiritual meaning that extends well beyond the physiological. The beloved disciple stands as a witness to how the new divine life (ζωή) that Jesus has come to give now bursts forth through his passion and the fulfillment of his hour. Biblical commentators note that in a Johannine context this mystery is deeply connected to the gift of the Spirit,²²

²⁰ “There can be little doubt,” insists Raymond Brown, “that in the writer’s mind this witness was the Beloved Disciple mentioned in vss. 26–27. In 21:24, which may be a clarification of this verse, the Beloved Disciple is identified as an eyewitness whose testimony is true.” *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, 936. Cf. Andrew Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 480; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 3, 290.

²¹ Andrew Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 479.

²² Brendan Byrne, *Abounding Life*, 323. Byrne notes that the symbol of “living water” has also been understood as a reference to the life-giving Spirit bestowed “after Jesus had been ‘glorified’ (cf. 19:30c).” This is in keeping with the pneumatic character of the verse from Zechariah that the Gospel author declares fulfilled: “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of mercy and supplication, so that when they look on him whom they have thrust through, they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and they will grieve for him as one grieves over

just as, concurrently, a long ecclesial tradition understood the water and blood to be symbolic of how the church and the sacraments, especially baptism and the Eucharist, pour forth *ex latere Christi*.²³ In a similar way, as Hugo Rahner extensively illustrated, a connection between John 7:38 and 19:34 has long been drawn to signify that from the “pierced heart” of the Crucified, having “loved to the end,” streams of “living water” and spiritual consolation flow.²⁴

Having seen the heart of Jesus pierced through at the foot of the cross, on the morning of the resurrection the beloved disciple receives the message of Mary Magdalene and runs to the empty tomb with Peter (John 20:2–10). He outruns Peter and arrives first, a detail often interpreted as “a sign of his greater love” and status as a model disciple.²⁵ Perhaps out of deference to Peter’s authority, the beloved disciple waits for Peter to enter before doing so himself. Together they see “the burial cloths,” with the “cloth [σουδάριον] that had covered his head . . . rolled up in a separate place.” The narrative reaches its climax in verse eight when the beloved disciple, it is said, “both saw and believed [καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐπίστευσεν].” This is followed, however, by the surprising observation in verse nine that “they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead.” The entire scene concludes with the disciples returning home, apart from Mary Magdalene, who, remaining behind, encounters the risen Christ.

The apparent ambiguity between verses eight and nine has provoked considerable debate. Since the verb πιστεύω can simply connote the acknowledgement of some fact, Augustine, followed by some modern interpreters, alleged that the beloved disciple simply “believed” the testimony of Mary Magdalene that the body was not present in the

a firstborn” (Zech 12:10).

²³ For a thorough recapitulation of the long history of this theological interpretation, see Hugo Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche: Die Ekklesiologie der Väter* (Salzburg: Müller, 1964), 177–223, and the more recent analysis of Jorge Mejía, “Born from the Side of Christ,” in *Towards a Civilization of Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985), 101–43.

²⁴ See Hugo Rahner, “On the Biblical Basis of the Devotion” and “The Beginnings of the Devotion in Patristic Times,” in *Heart of the Saviour: A Symposium on Devotion to the Sacred Heart*, ed. Josef Stierli, trans. Paul Andrews (New York: Herder, 1957), 15–58.

²⁵ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 3, 489.

tomb.²⁶ This would potentially resolve any conflict between the two verses in question. But for various reasons, most exegetes understand this interpretation to be insufficient. It is generally held, rather, that the author presents the beloved disciple as having arrived at faith in the Resurrection. Even though the disciple had apparently not yet arrived at such a complete Resurrection faith as to grasp the fulfillment of Scripture, the whole thrust of the narrative implies that a new faith “that Jesus has overcome death” has been stirred within him.²⁷ Schnackenburg argues this on a grammatical and rhetorical basis, contending that “the change from present historic to aorist and the rapid succession of the two verbs,” *to see* and *to believe*, “without any kind of object,” denote that the disciple “understood the situation, so to say at a glance, and immediately came to believe” in the Resurrection.²⁸

Others emphasize the role of the burial cloths themselves. The beloved disciple, they suggest, is drawing an inference from the fact that the cloths were left behind. This is something grave robbers would never do, but even more significantly, it provides a strong contrast in the narrative with the resuscitation of Lazarus, who stepped into the light “tied hand and foot with burial bands,” “his face wrapped in a cloth [σουδάριον].”²⁹ In sharp distinction, Jesus discarded “the wrappings of death” in a “culminating indication” of the completely “self-possessed, majestic act” of the Resurrection.³⁰ According to Brendan Byrne, the cloths constitute a distinctively Johannine “sign” meant to elicit faith

²⁶ Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus* CXXIV, 120.9.

²⁷ Gail O’Day and Susan Hysten, *John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 193; Andrew Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 490–91.

²⁸ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 3, 312. Schnackenburg considers verse nine, which has semantic resonance with the synoptics, as having been added by a redactor and therefore providing no effective contrast with verse eight, which he interprets as attributing to the disciple “full faith in the resurrection of Jesus.”

²⁹ The inclusion of this detail has long been recognized as having, at least in part, an apologetic purpose designed to dispel the “idea of the body being stolen,” presuming that grave robbers would never have left the burial cloths to carry away a stiff, naked corpse. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 311.

³⁰ Brendan Byrne, “The Faith of the Beloved Disciple and the Community in John 20,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 23 (1985): 88; Gail O’Day and Susan Hysten, *John*, 193.

from the beloved disciple, whose deep personal love enables him to “see and believe.” But this disciple will not be the last person to be led to faith on the basis of signs and love rather than by a visual encounter with the risen Christ. In this way, Byrne argues, the beloved disciple emerges within the passage as a Johannine model for all future disciples, who, according to the promise of John 20:29, are also blessed for having believed without having seen.³¹

The last explicit reference to “the disciple whom Jesus loved” is made in the final chapter of John’s Gospel, often characterized as an epilogue. The disciples are again fishing, albeit without success, when Jesus calls out to them from the shore and directs them to “cast the net over the right side of the boat.” As the disciples obtain a catch too plentiful to haul in, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” recognizes the risen Christ, informing Peter: “it is the Lord” (21:7). Once again, this disciple is juxtaposed to Peter in a prominent way, and as at the Last Supper, he serves as a privileged intermediary between Peter and Jesus on account of his unique familiarity with the Lord. As at the empty tomb, a close relationship of love enables the beloved disciple to recognize Jesus in circumstances that would otherwise remain opaque. Later, after Jesus bids Peter follow him in an evident allusion to Peter’s martyrdom, Peter turns as they walk along the shore and, seeing the beloved disciple, inquires after his destiny.

In a “parenthetical reminder” typical of John’s Gospel, the narrator not only identifies the disciple here as the one “whom Jesus loved” but also, elaborating, reminds the reader that this disciple was “the one who had also reclined upon his chest during the supper.” This intimate privilege evidently had such an impact that it was now regarded by the author as essential to the disciple’s very identity. In response to Peter’s inquiry, Jesus re-directs Peter’s attention to his own vocation, saying, “what if I want him to remain [μένειν] until I come?” (21:22). The verb μένειν has special significance in John: rendered alternately as “abide,” “remain,” “dwell,” and “stay” in English, it recurs some forty times in the Fourth Gospel. Emphasized especially by Jesus in the Last Supper

³¹ Brendan Byrne, “The Faith of the Beloved Disciple and the Community in John 20,” 90–93; *Abounding Life*, 330–31.

discourse, the verb encapsulates the vocation of every disciple—that is, to “remain” and “abide” with Jesus. At John 21:22, the very last instance in which the verb is employed in the Fourth Gospel, it is finally the beloved disciple who is said to “remain.” On the one hand, Jesus’s words are undoubtedly meant to refer chiefly to the historical beloved disciple, whose privileged “remaining” with the Lord underwrites the credibility of his testimony for the community. On this account, in the following verse (21:24), the narrator switches into the first-person plural to affirm, “it is this disciple who testifies to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.” But at the same time, in keeping with this disciple’s representative character and with the overarching summons of the Fourth Gospel, his vocation to “remain” with Jesus can be understood as a model for every reader as well.

There are two additional occasions in which an unnamed disciple is mentioned in John’s Gospel, John 1:35–37 and 18:15–16, and both are sometimes identified with the “disciple whom Jesus loved.” The strongest case for this association can be made for John 18:15–16, where it is stated that “Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus.” This “other disciple [ἄλλος μαθητής],” who is described as already “known to the high priest,” enters “the courtyard of the high priest with Jesus.” In keeping with the pattern in John of presenting the beloved disciple alongside Peter (John 13:23–25; 20:2–10; 21:20–23), the unnamed disciple is coupled with Peter and portrayed as having a particular association with him. “The other disciple,” on account of “his acquaintance with the high priest,” speaks to the gatekeeper so that Peter is able to enter the courtyard. After this, however, the narrative shifts its focus to Peter and his denials, and the unnamed disciple recedes from view.

Two chapters later, in the empty tomb scene at John 20, the “disciple whom Jesus loved” is also described on three successive occasions as “the other disciple” (20:2; 20:4; 20:8). While the grammatical constructions and manuscript traditions of both John 18 and 20 do differ slightly, Franz Neiryck has demonstrated through close textual analysis that these two stories, which exhibit other “formal similarities” beyond “the use of this phrase,” “are consciously put in parallel by the evangelist.”³²

³² Franz Neiryck, “The ‘Other Disciple’ in Jn 18, 15–16,” in *Evangelica: Gospel*

In addition, the decision of the “other disciple” to accompany Jesus “into the high priest’s palace suggests the deep attachment to Jesus characteristic of the Beloved Disciple.”³³ It would dovetail with the portrayal of the beloved disciple as remaining with Jesus even at the foot of the cross, providing greater continuity to the Johannine passion narrative. Though the association of “the other disciple” of John 18:15–16 with “the disciple whom Jesus loved” is not universally accepted, a host of Johannine scholars assent to it.³⁴ Within the context of spirituality, at least, it seems perfectly suitable to include this passage among the others when presenting the beloved disciple as a leitmotif for prayer.

One could not ask for a better stage upon which to make the imaginative contemplations of the Spiritual Exercises.

There is one more passage associated with the beloved disciple. Near the beginning of John’s Gospel (1:35), John the Baptist is accompanied by two disciples, one of whom is explicitly identified as “Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother” (1:37). The other disciple, however, remains unnamed. A substantial portion of Johannine scholars have suggested that this disciple is the “disciple whom Jesus loved.” Richard Bauckham argues that this is “almost certainly” the case on the basis that the reader, “bound to notice to the anonymity of this disciple,” who alone remains

Studies—Études d’Évangile, ed. F. Van Segbroeck (Leuven: Leuven University, 1982), 358–62; Kevin Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989), 71–89. Raymond Brown, among others, regarded Neiryneck’s analysis as so compelling that he changed his position, noting in *Community of the Beloved Disciple* that Neiryneck had “convincingly shown” that the “other disciple” should be “specifically identified as the Beloved Disciple” (New York: Paulist, 1979), 82.

³³ Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, 822.

³⁴ See Raymond Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 82; Ernst Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 7–21*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 167–68. More recently, scholars who espouse at least the likelihood of this association include Andrew Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 449; Brendan Byrne, *Abounding Life*, 298; Jerome Neyrey, *The Gospel of John*, 296–97; R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 222. Among the reasons for disagreement with this identification would include, as Schnackenburg outlines them, the unlikelihood of the beloved disciple being at once known to the high priest and close to Jesus, and the failure of the author to identify explicitly this figure as the beloved disciple, as is done elsewhere. See Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 3, 235.

unnamed, is intended to “retrospectively identify the anonymous disciple loved in 13:23” with that of 1:35–40.³⁵

But there is also some skepticism about the possibility of establishing this. Andrew Lincoln remarks that “there is nothing to prevent one seeing the unnamed disciple as the Beloved Disciple,” but a later reference to two unnamed disciples at John 21:2 is enough to demonstrate that not every unnamed disciple in the Gospel should be identified with the disciple whom Jesus loved.³⁶ Derek Tovey, writing from the perspective of narrative criticism, argues that the author intentionally leaves the second disciple unnamed as part of a “rhetorical ploy” to “create a ‘space’” for the beloved disciple within the narrative even from “the beginning” (John 15:27).³⁷ This reinforces the role of the beloved disciple as eyewitness while at the same time preserving the disciple’s “anonymity and elusiveness.” This enables the author to let the disciple recede into the backdrop of the story until the Last Supper, at which time, according to an intentional narrative strategy, the presence of the disciple is recalled to provide the reader with a personalized “inside view” into the central climactic events of the narrative.³⁸ For literary support, Tovey points to what many believe is an *inclusio* between John 1:35 and 21:2. In the latter passage, which relates the scene at the shore, seven disciples are present, the last two of whom are unnamed. The Greek genitival phrase used here to denote the two disciples is literally identical in both John 1:35 and 21:2: ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ δύο.³⁹

³⁵ Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 85.

³⁶ Andrew Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 118.

³⁷ “And you also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:27). These words of Jesus in the Last Supper discourse could thereby be linked to the beloved disciple’s role as a testifying eyewitness.

³⁸ Derek Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 120–47.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 132. Daniel Stramara has elaborated upon this *inclusio* to argue persuasively that the chiasmic structure of the end of the *inclusio* at John 21:2 points to John of Zebedee as the beloved disciple. See “The Chiasmic Key to the Identity of the Beloved Disciple,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2009): 5–27.

Reaching the same conclusion by different means, Raymond Brown contends that the author refrained from using the title the “disciple whom Jesus loved” at the outset of the narrative to reflect how the beloved disciple “achieved his *identity* in a christological context.” When first called, the disciple “had not yet come to understand Jesus fully” and could not yet be given his celebrated epithet.⁴⁰ Only later, after having laid upon Jesus’s chest, could he be identified as “the one whom Jesus loved.”⁴¹ In sum, as with the scene at the courtyard of the high priest, the many biblical indicators of an association make it legitimate and even fitting to include John 1:35–40 when using the perspective of the beloved disciple in Ignatian prayer. In this way, too, the reader who would inhabit this place within the narrative can likewise accompany Jesus from the very beginning of his ministry.

II. The Beloved Disciple as a Point of Insertion in the Gospel Narrative

Even as narrative criticism has helpfully drawn new attention to how the “disciple whom Jesus loved” can serve as a way for the reader to step into the narrative, it is far from a new discovery. For many early Christian authors, the beloved disciple’s testimony, especially to the “living water” flowing from Jesus’s pierced heart (κοιλία [John 7:38; 19:35]), was an invitation to the whole church to participate in the same mystery the disciple had experienced. Justin Martyr (100–165), who often referred to Jesus simply as “the Pierced One,” wrote in the *Dialogue with Trypho* of how the whole church is “hewn from the heart [κοιλία] of Christ” (Isa 51:1),⁴² from whom living waters spring forth as from a rock and overflow into the hearts of those who drink from it.⁴³ Hugo Rahner suggests that such themes in Justin, who himself be-

⁴⁰ Richard Bauckham concurs: “The anonymous disciple here is almost certainly the beloved disciple, who cannot, of course, on first acquaintance be called, as he is later, ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved.’” *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 85.

⁴¹ Raymond Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 32–33.

⁴² Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 135.3 (PG 6, 788c).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 114.4 (PG 6, 740c).

came a Christian in Ephesus, represent a “continuation of an originally Johannine tradition of preaching.”⁴⁴ The same themes are also found in Irenaeus (ca. 125–202) and Hippolytus (ca. 170–235), both of whose lineages early tradition also traced back to John. But the language of insertion emerges in an even more explicit way with Origen (ca. 185–254), who, in something of an exegetical and mystical flourish, wrote that “no one can apprehend the meaning of [John’s Gospel] except he who has laid upon Jesus’s breast and received from Jesus Mary as his mother as well. Such a one must become another John and have revealed to him, as if he were John, Jesus by Jesus himself.”⁴⁵ Augustine, in like measure, suggests at the very end of his tractates on John that it was not only for John to “drink from the font of the breast of the Lord” but also for the “whole church,” spread throughout the world, “each according to his own capacity.”⁴⁶

These threads ran in diverse ways through the writings of dozens of patristic and medieval authors.⁴⁷ By way of the great German Dominican mystics, such as John Tauler and Henry Suso, these devotions were handed on to, among others, Ludolph of Saxony, who belonged to the Order of Preachers for thirty years before entering the Carthusian monastery at Strasbourg. In the prologue to the same *Vita Christi* perused by Ignatius in his convalescence, Ludolph encourages the reader to “imagine yourself reclining with John on Jesus’ breast”⁴⁸ and later bids him “make haste to enter into the Heart of Christ,” “opened by a

⁴⁴ Hugo Rahner, “The Beginnings of the Devotion in Patristic Times,” 45.

⁴⁵ Origen, *Commentaria in Evangelium Ioannis*, 1.6 (PG 14, 29c–31a). Likewise Hilary of Poitiers writes: “Following the example of John, let us recline on the Lord Jesus so that we may be able to experience and speak to these truths.” *De Trinitate*, 2.21; *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* 62 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979), 57.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus CXXIV*, 124.7; *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* 36 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 687.

⁴⁷ See Hugo Rahner, “The Beginnings of the Devotion in Patristic Times” and Josef Stierli, “Devotion to the Sacred Heart from the End of Patristic Times Down to St. Margaret Mary,” in *Heart of the Saviour*, ed. Stierli, trans. Andrews, 15–58, 59–107. For more recent commentary, see Timothy O’Donnell, *Heart of the Redeemer* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992).

⁴⁸ Ludolph of Saxony, “The Prologue of the *Vita Christi*,” trans. Milton Walsh, in “To Always Be Thinking Somehow About Jesus’: The Prologue of Ludolph’s *Vita Christi*,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 43, no. 1 (2011), 32.

lance," so that the reader may join his love to the incarnate love of God.⁴⁹ The tradition of reading the Gospel of John so as to receive the same graces that the beloved disciple did, therefore, was alive and well long before the birth of narrative criticism. What was the holy intuition of patristic and medieval authors, however, has in this case been decidedly confirmed by recent biblical scholarship, which, while using rather different analytical tools, has proposed that the narrative itself is designed to facilitate the same participative experience that Origen and Ludolph commended to their readers.

The publication of R. Alan Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (1983) was a watershed moment in contemporary Johannine studies. Culpepper's application of narrative criticism to the Gospel text set him apart from previous critical exegetes who were more interested in questions of authorship, dating, and processes of redaction. By contrast, comparatively little attention had been given to "the integrity of the whole [narrative], the way its component parts interrelate, its effects upon the reader, or the way it achieves its effects." Culpepper suggested this was particularly ironic in the case of John, which has long been recognized as "the most literary of the gospels," with its tightly crafted structure and narrative sophistication.⁵⁰ The narrative approach to the Gospels adopted a "synchronic perspective as opposed to a diachronic one," focusing attention "upon the final form of the text as we have it today" rather than the history of its composition.⁵¹ In addition, while those who follow in Culpepper's footsteps do make literary comparisons between contemporaneous ancient literature and the Gospel texts, they do not confine themselves to this. Culpepper has argued, rather, that the Gospel authors employed pre-existing techniques alongside new, creative forms, tailoring their literary techniques to their unique theological intent, and as a result, literary analysis of the Gospels requires a sensitivity to what is genuinely new in the author's methodology. Finally, Culpepper proposed that narrative criticism could place the historicity of the Gospels in proper perspective, contending that the author(s) of the Fourth Gospel wrote "realistic nar-

⁴⁹ Ludolph of Saxony, *Vita Iesu Christi*, 2.54 (Paris: Palmé, 1865), 676.

⁵⁰ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 4–5.

⁵¹ Derek Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel*, 21.

rative,” crafting a “story that is a sublime blend of historical tradition and faith.”⁵²

Narrative criticism considers every literary work as structured within three dimensions: the author, the reader and the text. But within these basic dimensions, there are additional layers, such as the implied author (i.e., the perspective that the author takes on within the text) and the implied reader (i.e., the presumed audience of the author, which is often distinct, particularly with ancient texts, from the actual contemporary reader). Narrative critics approach a text as a literary composition

Conscious that it is in the imagination that we conjure up those things we most want. . . .

to be deciphered and unraveled, assuming that “the author has encoded his meaning by the way he tells the

story and structures its various parts.” They attempt to uncover this meaning through a “decoding” analysis that delivers the interpretation the author intended for the implied reader.⁵³ Particular attention is paid to the way in which the narrative shapes the perspective of the reader, as much by “implication and indirection” as by what is explicitly stated.

There are various aspects of the beloved disciple leitmotif that narrative critics see as significant for its “decoding.” First, there is the salient fact that the disciple remains unnamed and shrouded in a certain elusiveness. David Beck laments, in this regard, that scholarship has for the sake of convenience replaced the designation “the disciple whom Jesus loved” with the often capitalized “Beloved Disciple,” turning the original epithet into a “proper noun, which for all practical purposes makes a name of it.”⁵⁴ This compromises somewhat the original intention of the author, who specifically refrained from giving the disciple a name. The omission of a name is not, of course, a “manifestation of the author’s ignorance,” but as with “the mother of Jesus,” a reflection of

⁵² R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 9, 231–37.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁴ David Beck, “‘Whom Jesus Loved’: Anonymity and Identity: Belief and Witness in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 222.

the author's "conscious intent" to describe this disciple solely on the basis of "markers of intimacy" with Jesus—not only the spiritual intimacy of having been loved by him but even by a position of physical closeness, having "laid close to his breast at the supper."⁵⁵ These "descriptive epithets," evidently, were considered to be even more "significant than the name would have been."⁵⁶ Moreover, it is likely that the implied reader of the Gospel would have already been familiar with the beloved disciple's identity within the community. His epithet, explains William Kurz, should therefore be read instead as a literary clue for the implied reader, who is to "look for symbolic functions he may be meant to have in the narrative." According to Kurz, the omission of a name enables the implied reader to freely identify "the disciple whom Jesus loved" both with the narrator *and* with himself. The device does facilitate "the identification of this disciple with the narrator," which is made explicit in the epilogue (John 21:24); but it also invites all implied readers "to identify themselves with this disciple" and to make the disciple's perspective their own.⁵⁷

In addition to the absence of a name, there is the "indeterminacy" of the beloved disciple. There are very few personal details related about the beloved disciple himself, making him appear at times almost a featureless character. In narrative theory, this is commonly understood as a device used to invite the reader to identify with the character's perspective. Unlike other unnamed figures in John, such as the Samaritan woman or the man born blind, there is almost nothing about the beloved disciple's "familial relationships, social standing, occupation, physical condition, or his past."⁵⁸ By contrast, the aspect of his character most

⁵⁵ Jean Zumstein, "The Mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmerman (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 642.

⁵⁶ Paul S. Minear, "The Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John: Some Clues and Conjectures," in *The Composition of John's Gospel*, ed. David E. Orton (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 187.

⁵⁷ William Kurz, "The Beloved Disciple and Implied Readers," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 19, no. 3 (1989): 101–02.

⁵⁸ David Beck, "The Narrative Function of Anonymity in the Fourth Gospel Characterization," *Semeia* 63 (1993): 154. The one exception to this could be the familiarity of the unnamed disciple with the high priest at John 18:15–16.

strongly emphasized—his profound experience of the love of Jesus—is precisely what the author hopes every reader will encounter and make his own. It is no coincidence, moreover, that the author explicitly underlines the centrality of Jesus’s love both before and after the introduction of the beloved disciple, forming a literary intercalation, or sandwich. In between the poignant interpretive remark, “he loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end” (13:1), and the new commandment, “as I have loved you, so you also should one love one another” (13:34), the “disciple whom Jesus loved” is explicitly introduced to the reader for the first time (13:23–25). In this context, of course, the Evangelist could never have intended to convey the disciple’s experience of having been loved by Jesus as being exclusively reserved for him. Such a narrow interpretation would ultimately undercut the whole thrust of the passage and of the Gospel itself.⁵⁹

On the contrary, as the end of the Last Supper discourse makes plain, the encompassing hope of the entire narrative is that the love with which the Father loved Jesus “may be in them and I in them” (17:26), that every reader may become even more ‘the disciple whom ‘the Father’ and ‘Jesus loved.’”⁶⁰ This parallelism between the love of Father/Son and Jesus/disciple is honed by the Greek by the word *κόλπος*: just as Jesus abides upon the *κόλπος*, or “chest,” of the Father (1:18), so does the beloved disciple lie upon the *κόλπος* of the Son (13:23). All of these narrative features, in sum, converge and point toward the conclusion that the author has specially tailored the figure of the unnamed beloved disciple so that the reader may “fill in the identity gaps in the beloved disciple’s narrative with her/his own identity.” By way of an intricately arranged literary device, each reader is invited to enter into “the paradigm of discipleship that the beloved disciple presents,” a paradigm shaped above all by the experience of having been profoundly loved by Jesus.⁶¹

⁵⁹ This is certainly not to dismiss, however, but simply to qualify and contextualize, the traditional understanding that the historical disciple whom Jesus loved, associated with John of Zebedee, had a special closeness to Jesus.

⁶⁰ William Kurz, “The Beloved Disciple and Implied Readers,” 102.

⁶¹ David Beck, “The Narrative Function of Anonymity in the Fourth Gospel Characterization,” 154.

The beloved disciple also possesses a unique level of spiritual insight that sets him apart from others. Just as he enjoys a unique familiarity with Jesus at the supper, so, after the Resurrection, he is the one to see and believe at the tomb (20:8) and to recognize that “it is the Lord” upon the shore (21:7). In this respect, James Resseguie proposes that the disciple “represents *the ideal point of view of the narrative*,” the perspective from which the author hopes the reader will interpret the narrated events.⁶² This ideal perspective contrasts with the typical misunderstandings from “below” of other figures in the Fourth Gospel, such as Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, who remain only at “the level of appearances”⁶³ and consistently misinterpret Jesus’s spiritual metaphors for grace, such as “rebirth” and “living water,” in a literal, physical sense. The ideal point of view of the beloved disciple, however, is not to be confused with the view of Jesus, whose perspective remains ineluctably “above” that of the others. Between these two levels, the beloved disciple is meant to serve as an accessible yet optimal perspective for every reader. In accompanying Jesus to the foot of the cross, the disciple is given unique insight into the significance of his pierced side, testifying as an “ideal witness” so that the reader may believe (19:35). In a manner that sets the disciple apart from the others, he correctly interprets the “signs” (2:11), from the burial cloths to the catch of fish, so as to recognize what all Johannine signs ultimately reveal: “the glory in the flesh.”⁶⁴ The “close link between the narrator and the beloved disciple,” moreover, only further accentuates his perspective as the one that uniquely grasps the meaning of key events in the Gospel, as the whole narrative is “focalized through his perception.”⁶⁵ In this way the author intends, Derek Tovey explains, for the perspective of both narrator and reader to “converge” at the viewpoint of “the disciple whom

⁶² James Resseguie, “The Beloved Disciple: The Ideal Point of View,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 537–38. Italics in the original.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 540.

⁶⁴ James Resseguie, “A Narrative-Critical Approach to the Fourth Gospel,” in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 18.

⁶⁵ Derek Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel*, 140.

Jesus loved.”⁶⁶ This ideal point of view, in sum, not only facilitates an experience of the love of Jesus; it is also uniquely positioned to enable the reader to grasp the central meaning of the dramatic structure of the Fourth Gospel—namely, the divine glory manifested in human flesh through the death and Resurrection of Jesus.

The beloved disciple has long been presented in idealized terms as the model believer, and much of this analysis would corroborate these characterizations. But there are important qualifications to be made to such an assessment. In her recent study, *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John*, Susan Hylen focuses attention on the ways in which the beloved disciple is a more “rounded” and even ambiguous figure than he is sometimes assumed to be. At the supper, after the beloved disciple asks Jesus about the identity of his betrayer, Jesus reveals his answer through handing Judas a morsel. Even though the beloved disciple was the very person to have made the inquiry, he is evidently included “among those who do not understand” the significance of Jesus’s words to Judas: “what you are going to do, do quickly” (13:28).⁶⁷ Then there is the scene at the empty tomb, already recounted above. If the beloved disciple did indeed come to faith in the Resurrection at that moment (20:8), this faith seems to be qualified by the succeeding verse: “they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead” (20:9). There is also the peculiar question why, if the disciple came to a Resurrection faith, he failed to tell anyone else. Kelli O’Brien avers that in this strange act of omission the disciple falls far short of “authentic discipleship”—at least as far as the Johannine model is concerned. “The full standard of discipleship is to believe *and to witness*. The beloved disciple believes something but does not witness.”⁶⁸

Some commentators take her observations one step further, noting that the perspective of the beloved disciple appears to alternate between eyewitness experience and post-Resurrection insight. Tovey

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Susan Hylen, *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 92–106.

⁶⁸ Kelli S. O’Brien, “Written That You May Believe: John 20 and Narrative Rhetoric,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67 (2005): 297. Italics in the original.

suggests that the beloved disciple represents “a dual perspective,” conjoining the “lack of understanding” of an eyewitness with “the subsequent settled understanding and certainty formed by post-Resurrection experience, retrospective remembrance and reflection on scripture.” In the beloved disciple, “the post-resurrection point of view obtrudes into the pre-resurrection story time,” creating a point of view at once retrospective and proleptic.⁶⁹ This theory could also shed light on apparent discrepancies in the narrative, such as at the Last Supper and the empty tomb, where the beloved disciple seems to possess inside insight while the disciples collectively are still described as unknowing. This combined paschal perspective is at any rate certainly the point of view that the author wants the implied reader to adopt, in keeping with the “sublime blend of historical tradition and faith” that is John’s Gospel. The implied reader is to come to understand the whole of Jesus’s life and its culminating paschal events in a vivid, historically grounded way, but also, more deeply, through a hermeneutic grounded in faith, love and the Resurrection.

As was recalled above, Arrupe believed the heart of Jesus to be “a symbolic expression of the very core of the Ignatian spirit.”

The point of view of the beloved disciple, then, is imperfect and developmental. He is before all else an ideal because he is profoundly loved by Jesus, not because he possesses complete insight from the very first moment or because he always responded in an ideal way. “He is exemplary,” concludes Hylen, “but not perfect.”⁷⁰ Like the other characters in John, he only gradually comes to deeper faith and more committed discipleship, and he does so in a “relational” way that depends upon the example and witness of others, from the mother of Jesus to Mary Magdalene.⁷¹ Far from compromising the thesis that the “disciple whom Jesus loved” constitutes an ideal “point of insertion,” however, this only makes his position all the more commensurate with every reader, whose faith is also in a process of ever gradual deepening and

⁶⁹ Derek Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel*, 126–47.

⁷⁰ Susan Hylen, *Imperfect Believers*, 105.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

development. In the Fourth Gospel, observes O'Brien, "believing is a process of uncovering errors and weaknesses and coming to a deeper, more authentic relationship with the Word."⁷² As this was true for the disciple whom Jesus loved, so is it true for us.

In sum, the contributions of narrative theory underscore how the beloved disciple serves as a prime "point of insertion" for every reader. While there is no way to definitively prove that the author intended this to be so, the many arguments of narrative theory converge upon this conclusion and make it compelling. The author of John has carefully woven the place of "the disciple whom Jesus loved" into the narrative so that he is present at each of the crucial moments of the paschal mystery—and perhaps even from the initial call of the disciples onward. The beloved disciple is also located in precisely those places and positions in the narrative that embody a personal relationship with Jesus Christ marked by trust, affection, intimacy, devotion and love. He leans in upon the bosom of Jesus at the supper; he stands beside Mary at the foot of the cross; he sees the soldier's lance pierce through the side; he runs to peer into the empty tomb; he views the burial cloths and believes; he shares breakfast with the risen Christ by a charcoal fire and shore. One could not ask for a better stage upon which to make the imaginative contemplations of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

III. Love and the Heart: The Coincidence of the Ignatian and the Johannine in the Beloved Disciple

In a lecture entitled "St. John's Gospel and the Exercises of St. Ignatius" given at the Center for Ignatian Spirituality in Rome, the Jesuit biblical scholar Donatien Mollat began by recounting a surprising anecdote. He related how the Carmelite mystic St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi (1566–1607) was reported to have had a vision on the first vespers of the Feast of St. John in which she understood God to be rejoicing in the souls of John and Ignatius together. De' Pazzi insisted: "'*Spiritus*

⁷² Kelli S. O'Brien, "Written That You May Believe: John 20 and Narrative Rhetoric," 302.

Joannis et ille Ignatii est idem' [the spirit of John and the spirit of Ignatius are one and the same]." Her reason was that they were both singularly focused upon love: "*illorum scopus et finis, amor et caritatis; 'totus est amare et conducere ad amandum'*" [their scope and end is love and charity; all is for loving and leading others to love].⁷³ For both Ignatius as for John, this vision of love is not only painted in the broad strokes of the *Contemplatio* or the famous synthesis of John 3:16; theirs is a love, rather, verified "more in deeds than in words,"⁷⁴ a love "to the end" (John 13:1) manifested through the supreme kenosis of the cross (John 15:13).

Both authors, moreover, are focused principally upon the concrete, incarnate aspect of the mystery. They are concerned not only with "the Word of life," "what was from the beginning," but also with "what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands" (1 John 1:1). A brief glance at the *Spiritual Exercises* is enough to verify this as thoroughly Ignatian. The preponderance of the *Exercises*, after all, consist of contemplations that one enters through the senses and imagination. Ignatius not only wants the exercitant to "see with the imagination the synagogues, villages and towns where Christ our Lord preached"; he wants him to delve into the most humble and concrete details, contemplating the journey of the Holy Family by considering even the curvature and breadth of "the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem."⁷⁵ His meditations engage the whole person, the senses as well as the spirit. In the same way, Mollat remarks, John paints his scenes with vivid detail in "a pedagogy of seeing, of hearing, of touching, of tasting, of feeling in the spirit and in truth. It is a school of concrete contemplation."⁷⁶ The passion narrative opens with the scent of "genuine aromatic nard" in a house "filled with the fragrance of this oil" (John 12:3), just as it closes with the burial of Jesus amidst "a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about one hundred pounds" (John 19:39). John even uses "sensory language" to express "the experience

⁷³ Donatien Mollat, "St. John's Gospel and the Exercises," in *The Word of God in the Spiritual Exercises* (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1979), 101–02.

⁷⁴ *SpEx* 230. *Exercitia*, I:306.

⁷⁵ *SpEx* 91, 112. *Exercitia*, I:216, 228.

⁷⁶ Donatien Mollat, "St. John's Gospel and the Exercises," 115–17.

of communion with God in Christ.⁷⁷ “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). “Unless I wash you”—unless my hands cleanse your feet—“you will have no inheritance with me” (John 13:8). The beloved disciple, who also has his feet washed by Jesus at the supper, is privy to some of the most vivid and palpable instances of these sensory experiences.

For John as for Ignatius, however, the imagination is not engaged as an end in itself but as a means of engendering faith and enkindling the affect. Thomas is invited to place his hand into the wound in Jesus’s side precisely so that he might “not be unbelieving, but believe” (John 20:27). In his monograph on the use of the John’s Gospel in the *Spiritual Exercises*, David Stanley suggests that “John is the Gospel writer who has most clearly shown how *the way* of narrating Jesus’ human experience can serve the growth of the Christian’s relationship with Jesus.”⁷⁸ It is narrative crafted to engender love born of faith, written “that you may have life [ζωή] in his name” (John 20:31). Carlo Maria Martini, in a series of talks published as *The Ignatian Exercises in the Light of St. John*, tells us that “the spiritual formation of the Fourth Gospel is not out to explain—because words do not explain it—but to indicate a way of entering into . . . the heart” and receiving “the sap of a mature Christian life.”⁷⁹ The Fourth Gospel, relates Stanley, intends to draw us into that “mysterious ‘abiding’ with Father, Son, and Spirit in which for [John] the fullness of Christian existence consists.”⁸⁰ More than anyone else, observes Martini, the “disciple whom Jesus loved” embodies this “point of arrival”; this figure “makes one see where this path of welcoming the mystery of the Incarnation should lead us, to this intimacy with the Lord, which is especially described in the Last Supper.”⁸¹ In lying upon Jesus’s heart at the supper, the reader, too, can develop an “experienced

⁷⁷ Ibid., 116.

⁷⁸ David Stanley, *‘I Encountered God!’ The Spiritual Exercises with the Gospel of Saint John* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986), 26–28, 326–27. Italics in the original.

⁷⁹ Carlo Maria Martini, *The Ignatian Exercises in the Light of St. John*, trans. Joseph Gill (Anand, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1981), 8.

⁸⁰ David Stanley, *‘I Encountered God!’ The Spiritual Exercises with the Gospel of Saint John*, 7.

⁸¹ Carlo Maria Martini, *The Ignatian Exercises in the Light of St. John*, 24, 84–85.

familiarity” with the love of God in the incarnate Word; there, through a contemplative abiding, this love can touch the core of the affect and become the “hearts’ charity’s hearth’s fire.”⁸²

Of course, all of this corresponds profoundly with the *Exercises*. Its Gospel contemplations engage the imagination as a means by which to enter into what is desired, namely, “an interior knowledge of the Lord, who has become man for me, that I may more love and follow him.”⁸³ Conscious that it is in the imagination that we conjure up those things we most want, Ignatius draws on that direct line which mysteriously connects our imagination with our deeper desires. Following in the long medieval tradition of the *memoria Christi*, Ignatius moves us beyond day-dreaming toward “an affective rumination (*cogitanti ex desiderio*)” of the contemplated mystery.⁸⁴ Even as the Gospel contemplations begin with a composition of place and an imaginative attentiveness to what the persons are saying and doing, they are ultimately to be focused—through colloquy, repetition, and application of the senses—more upon *el sentir y gustar de las cosas internamente*,⁸⁵ the interior feeling and tasting of the mysteries. It is now a commonplace to observe how Ignatius employs the unique Spanish verb *sentir* to connote what cannot be fully captured by any single English word, as it encompasses both what is felt in the affect as well as what is experienced and known. Thus, Ignatius counsels the exercitant to ask for grace in the meditation on the Incarnation *pidiendo que en si sintiere*,⁸⁶ according to how one is affectively moved in oneself, and to return in every repetition to *donde aya sentido la persona algún conocimiento, consolación o desolación*,⁸⁷ wherever one has experienced some knowledge, consolation or desolation.

It is in the application of the senses, however, where Ignatius wants the exercitant to dwell wherever one has felt (*sentido*) greater spiritual

⁸² Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” stanza 35, line 280, in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1998), 107.

⁸³ *SpEx* 104. *Exercitia*, I:224.

⁸⁴ James Walsh, “Application of the Senses,” *The Way Supplement* 27 (1976): 60.

⁸⁵ *SpEx* 2. *Exercitia*, I:142.

⁸⁶ *SpEx* 109. *Exercitia*, I:228.

⁸⁷ *SpEx* 118. *Exercitia*, I:232.

movement and relish, that this affective reception of the imagined mystery reaches its greatest depth.⁸⁸ There Ignatius bids the exercitant to apply each of the five senses to the mystery in an imagined, interior way “to draw fruit” from it.⁸⁹ Karl Rahner advises that “a true application of the senses does not approach its object from the outside, but enters into its interior and, as it were, identifies itself with it in such a way that it experiences it in the totality of the power of imagination, which is

Perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of the early Jesuit devotion to the pierced heart of Christ, however, is found in the journals of Peter Canisius.

a unity of sense and intellect.”⁹⁰ In his penetrating studies of this Ignatian mode of contemplation, Joseph Maréchal famously suggested that there were three distinct “degrees” at which an application of the senses is made.⁹¹ The first is plainly literal and involves a simple, direct

application of the senses of the imagination. But, Maréchal argued, Ignatius intentionally constructs this method of meditation to lead those disposed into a deeper, more intuitive mode of prayer. In the second degree, the simple application of the senses merges with a “symbolic transposition” in which the emotional values associated with sensible objects in the imagination are transferred onto a spiritual reality.⁹² The sensible object thereby becomes a kind of sacrament, embodying an affective, spiritual movement. Thus Ignatius mysteriously bids the exercitant to “smell the infinite fragrance, and taste the infinite sweetness of the divinity.”⁹³ According to Maréchal, this movement may dispose the

⁸⁸ SpEx 227. *Exercitia*, I:304. “Donde aya sentido mayores mociones y gustos espirituales. . . .”

⁸⁹ SpEx 123. *Exercitia*, I:123. “Y refletiendo en sí mismo, sacar dello algún provecho.”

⁹⁰ Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (New York: Herder, 1966), 94.

⁹¹ Joseph Maréchal, “Application des sens,” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité: ascétique et mystique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1932–95), 1:810–28; “Un essai de méditation orientée vers la contemplation,” in *Études sur la psychologie des mystiques*, vol. 2 (Brussels: L’Édition Universelle, 1937), 365–82.

⁹² Joseph Maréchal, “Application des sens,” 826–27.

⁹³ SpEx 124; *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola, 1968), 55.

exercitant to receive yet a third degree, an infused mode of prayer that the second degree approaches only asymptotically. In this latter stage, the application of the senses may become uniquely mystical as the exercitant experiences the contemplated mystery in a direct and intuited way as a “special gift from God.”⁹⁴

All of this can shed light on how an Ignatian imaginative contemplation can be made using John’s Gospel and the place of “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” The disciple leans in upon the heart of Jesus at the supper, even as this gesture literally embodies a deeper, interpersonal and even spiritual love. In the same way, when imagined in prayer, this uniquely sensible embrace may engender a “symbolic transposition” in which the touch of the physical heart of Jesus enables the exercitant to experience, in an affective and interior way, the love of God—and even through grace to be touched directly by the infused love of this God-in-flesh in the deeper realm of the spirit. The words used to express such an experience will always fall short of it. But as Karl Rahner has shown, the “heart,” as an essential *Urwort* and *Ursymbol*, bears within itself “an overplus of meaning.” More specifically, the “heart” is uniquely suited to express the interior life of the person and to symbolically embody this personal life in its totality: “I give you my heart.”⁹⁵ Even as it may be excessively sentimentalized at times, it is, as a word and symbol, irreplaceable. As Rahner indicated, the “heart” remains one of those primordial poetic words that, on the basis of deep human experiences, communicates much more than it connotes, even bearing the capacity to render realities “translucent” to God as their illimitable source.⁹⁶ All of this converges in a special way in the heart of the incarnate Word, “font of all consolation.”

In like measure here converges all that is connoted by the rich Spanish verb *sentir*, as we may at once touch, feel, experience and know the love of God made flesh. The physical heart of Jesus serves as a sac-

⁹⁴ Joseph Maréchal, “Application des sens,” 827.

⁹⁵ Karl Rahner, “Behold this Heart!': Preliminaries to a Theology of Devotion to the Sacred Heart,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1967), 327–30.

⁹⁶ Karl Rahner, “Priest and Poet,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1967), 295–98.

rament, a *Realsymbol* and intrinsic expression of the love of the God who has come near to us. Here in the bosom of Christ, heart speaks to heart, and the love of God may be poured out from the heart of Jesus into ours (Rom 5:5), “the lover giving and communicating to the beloved all that he has,” as he is able, and the beloved to the lover.⁹⁷ The keynote of love with which the Last Supper begins, however, is only an overture, and this same dynamic continues in John through the whole paschal mystery. There, through cross and resurrection, the love of God in Jesus is fully unfurled in glory. The one who inhabits the place of the beloved disciple is the privileged witness to this utter manifestation of love “to the end”; he sees Jesus hung upon the cross and his heart pierced through, just as he gazes upon the final victory of his love, “stronger than death,” in the empty tomb and the Resurrection. Such a perspective likewise enables the reader to experience fundamental graces of the Exercises, which, in the words of Pedro Arrupe, themselves lead “us to ‘*sentir*’ the love of the Heart of Christ giving unity to the whole Gospel.”⁹⁸

In this way the experience of “the disciple whom Jesus loved” dovetails with the time-honored Jesuit devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, the French mystic who became the principal source of the devotion in its modern form, herself spoke of the Lord inviting her to take the place of “that beloved disciple, of resting on the breast” of Christ, in the very first of her mystical experiences.⁹⁹ But even before Margaret Mary Alacoque related her experiences to Claude La Colombière (1640–1682) in 1675, devotion to the heart of Jesus had already played a central role in the spiritual life of many prominent Jesuits.¹⁰⁰ William Bangert has shown how the spiritual writings of Jerónimo Nadal (1507–1580), that great herald of the Jesuit *modo de proceder*, are centered upon the heart, which he described as the “atelier of the Holy

⁹⁷ *SpEx* 231. *Exercitia*, I:306.

⁹⁸ Pedro Arrupe, “Devotion to the Heart of Christ,” in *Other Apostolates Today: Selected Letters and Addresses—III*, ed. Jerome Aixala (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1981), 334.

⁹⁹ Margaret Mary Alacoque, “Letter to Mother de Saumaise,” in *Letters of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, trans. Clarence Herbst (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954), 143.

¹⁰⁰ For further historical review of Jesuit devotion to the Sacred Heart, see John W. Padberg, “Notes on the History of Devotion to the Heart of Jesus,” in “Symbols, Devotions and Jesuits,” in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 20, no. 3 (1988), 15–22.

Spirit.” In his own spiritual life, Nadal became convinced, in experiences of intense affective movement, that Christ was conferring on him “not only his carnal heart, created love, but also his uncreated and infinite heart.”¹⁰¹ Joseph de Guibert has chronicled the “special devotion” of sixteenth century Jesuits, including Peter Faber (1506–1546) and Francis Borgia (1510–1572), to the “wound in the Savior’s side.” This devotion to the wounds, understood as symbols of Christ’s love, also included an especial focus upon the pierced heart. It served as a forerunner to the modern form of the Sacred Heart devotion that emerged with such vigor following the events at Paray-le-Monial in the late seventeenth century.¹⁰²

Perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of the early Jesuit devotion to the pierced heart of Christ, however, is found in the journals of Peter Canisius (1521–1597). On September 4, 1549, the same day on which Canisius would profess his final vows in Rome before Ignatius, Canisius paid a visit to the tombs of Peter and Paul, where, before the blessed Sacrament, he had a spiritual experience that became a founding inspiration for his many apostolic labors in Germany.¹⁰³ The following journal excerpt is still used today in the Office of Readings of the Society of Jesus for his feast:

Finally, my Savior, I seemed to be gazing at the Heart of your Sacred Body with my own eyes. It was as if you opened it to me and told me to drink from it as from a spring, inviting me to draw the waters of salvation from these springs of yours. I was filled with longing that the waters of faith, hope, and charity would flow from your Heart into me. I thirsted for poverty, chastity, and obedience. . . . Then I dared to touch your beloved Heart and bury my thirst in it.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Jerónimo Nadal, *Orationis observationes*, 138, cited in William V. Bangert, *Jerome Nadal, S.J., 1507–1580: Tracking the First Generation of Jesuits*, ed. Thomas McCoog (Chicago: Loyola, 1992), 202–03.

¹⁰² Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, 392–98.

¹⁰³ *Petri Canisii Epistulae et Acta*, vol. 1, ed. Otto Braunsberger (Freiburg: Herder, 1896), 53–57.

¹⁰⁴ Peter Canisius, “The Office of Readings,” April 27, in *Supplement to the Divine Office for the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2002), 22–23.

In embracing this devotion, Canisius had been strongly influenced by the writings of thirteenth century German Cistercian Mechthild of Hackeborn, who, along with her sister and abbess Gertrude the Great, can be named among the many medieval and patristic authors who shared a devotion to the heart of Christ well before its modern manifestations.¹⁰⁵

But in modern times, it was in the Society of Jesus, in particular, that this devotion found a home. Between the revelations at Paray-le-Monial and the suppression of the Society, the devotion had already become so central to the spirituality of Jesuits that, on the eve of the suppression in 1767, then Father General Lorenzo Ricci (1703–1775) would send a letter to the whole Society imploring them to “celebrate with the greatest possible fervor the recent feast of the Sacred Heart, ‘in whom alone the Society will find a refuge and unfailing help.’”¹⁰⁶ In like measure, notes de Guibert, the Sacred Heart of Jesus was regarded as “the main safeguard and the great source of hope” by the remnant of the Society that survived in Russia, just as it proved a focal theme of the generalate of Jan Roothan (1785–1853) and beyond.¹⁰⁷ Following the Second Vatican Council and its period of reform, Pedro Arrupe commended devotion to the Sacred Heart to the whole Society on multiple occasions, expressing his conviction that the experience of “the inexhaustible riches hidden in the Heart of Christ” was the “grace of the greatest importance at this moment in the history of the Church and the Society.”¹⁰⁸ As was recalled above, Arrupe believed the heart of Jesus to be “a symbolic expression of the very core of the Ignatian spirit.”¹⁰⁹ For him it was “an open door to the secret recesses of God” and God’s “activity ‘*ad extra*’ in the gift of

¹⁰⁵ “Besides the *Liber Specialis Gratiae* Mechthild left a valuable legacy of prayers to the Sacred Heart. They were lifelong favourites of St. Peter Canisius, who copied some of them into a little book and carried them always with him. Even on his death-bed he had this book, black from constant thumbing, in his hands.” Josef Stierli, “Devotion to the Sacred Heart from the End of Patristic Times Down to St. Margaret Mary,” 73–75.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, 402.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 446, 470ff.

¹⁰⁸ Pedro Arrupe, “Devotion to the Heart of Christ,” 337.

¹⁰⁹ “I am convinced,” Arrupe concluded, “that there could be few proofs of the spiritual renewal of the Society so clear as a widespread and vigorous devotion to the Heart of Jesus.” Pedro Arrupe, “Rooted and Grounded in Love,” in *The Spiritual Legacy of Pedro Arrupe, S.J.*, 190–91.

himself," a "spring" of "intimate joy" that enables us to "love with the same love which Christ communicates to us."¹¹⁰

But Arrupe also specifically asked how this historic Jesuit devotion might be made more accessible to a contemporary audience. In this way, once again, narrative criticism's insights into the beloved disciple of John's Gospel prove uniquely apt. For one, in my experience, they closely correspond with how Ignatian imaginative prayer is usually taught and used today. The experience into which this Johannine leitmotif

It could even be said that for people of the Exercises, to stand with Christ upon the cross as did the beloved disciple is almost a native position.

invites the reader is uniquely personal and draws the reader into a close relationship with Jesus. The scriptural texts provide a basic structure for imaginative contemplation while enabling the praying person to tailor the contemplation to his or her own context. The scenes are set so as to move the affect with a characteristically Ignatian touch. In light of all this, one cannot help but ask: might not this Johannine leitmotif be uniquely suited to making the Sacred Heart of Jesus accessible in a renewed way? It is indeed hard to conceive of a more personal and direct way of encountering the love of the heart of Jesus than through becoming oneself, through imaginative Ignatian contemplations, the biblical disciple whom Jesus loved, the one who lay upon his breast at the supper.

The same heart upon which the beloved disciple leaned was also pierced through upon the cross. In a particularly poignant essay of Karl Rahner, "The Man with the Pierced Heart," he suggested that the Jesuit priest of tomorrow is one who must, like his Lord upon the cross, let his own heart be pierced out of love. For Rahner, God made the "most comprehensive statement" of his love for the world in the piercing of this heart, an incomprehensible love "pleased to conquer only in death." In the pierced heart of Christ, Rahner writes, each may "contemplate in

¹¹⁰ Pedro Arrupe, "A Feast of Sorrow or Joy?" and "Mystery of the Merciful Love," in *In Him Alone is Our Hope: Texts on the Heart of Christ*, ed. Jerome Aixala (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1984) 125–31, 141–46.

its archetypal simplicity what he himself should be." But this heart, for Rahner, is not only the great *schola affectus*; it is also "the center of the world, in which all the powers and currents of world history are, as it were, bound together into one" by the love of God in Christ.¹¹¹

In this way the same thread that runs through the Gospel of John, culminating in the love expressed upon the cross in "him whom they have pierced," is likewise woven through the *Exercises*, from the colloquy of mercy with the crucified Christ in the First Week through the grace of compassion by which one shares in the Third Week in the suffering love of the Redeemer. It could even be said that for people of the Exercises, to stand with Christ upon the cross as did the beloved disciple is almost a native position. There, we, too, may receive Mary as our mother, taking her "into our own." There we may also console her and stand in solidarity with her inmost sorrow. There we may even bear to look openly as the heart of her Son is pierced through. It is perhaps only because the beloved disciple had leaned upon the heart of Jesus, in all intimacy, friendship, and love, that he was the only apostle to abide with Jesus in his darkest "hour." Certainly it is there, standing "beneath the banner of the cross" and "placed with the Son," that the disciple's love showed its most steadfast depths.¹¹²

But, of course, neither the Gospel of John nor the *Exercises* culminate in the Third Week. The same "disciple whom Jesus loved" runs to peer into the empty tomb—and believes. Later, as the one who "leaned upon [Jesus's] breast at the supper," he shares breakfast with the risen Christ and his companions upon the shore. His exclamation from the boat—"it is the Lord"—manifests the joy of the Resurrection that makes all joy "complete" (John 15:11). In the same way that the figure of the beloved disciple calls us to stand with Mary beside the cross, so does it beckon us to run the path to the empty tomb, to share in the breakfast

¹¹¹ Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, 14, 242, 253; "The Man with the Pierced Heart," in *Servants of the Lord*, trans. Richard Strachan (New York: Herder, 1968), 113–19.

¹¹² *Formula of the Institute 1550*, no. 1; *The Constitutions and Complementary Norms of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 3. At La Storta Ignatius experienced the Father placing him with the Son carrying the cross: "el Padre me puso con el Hijo." "Acta patris Ignatii" (Autobiography) in *Monumenta Ignatiana*, *Fontes Narrativi de S. Ignatio de Loyola*, 4 vols. (Rome: 1943) I:498, note 22.

of bread and fish by the fire, and to embrace the call to “remain” and “abide” with the risen Lord (John 21:22).

A patristic and medieval tradition identified the beloved disciple, the one whom Jesus wished to “remain” with him, as an archetypal contemplative to be contrasted with Peter, an archetype of an apostle.¹¹³ Given that Ignatian spirituality does begin with the contemplative, this alone would be enough to commend the perspective of the beloved disciple to anyone who makes the Exercises. A Jesuit is, after all, in the celebrated phrase of Nadal, “*simul in actione contemplativus*”—a contemplative, in other words, who is likewise in action.¹¹⁴ To return to the question of authorship with which this essay began, however, the “disciple whom Jesus loved” is a role that tradition attributed to someone who was also a model of apostolic writing and ministry, the same apostle John who, it is said, in his final years could not cease preaching the words, “love one another.” The whole of the Gospel that bears his name, in any case, and particularly the perspective of the beloved disciple, situates the reader to receive a distinctly contemplative-apostolic grace—an Ignatian grace: “the grace we receive as Jesuits,” in the words of the 35th General Congregation, “to be and to go with [Jesus], looking on the world with his eyes, loving it with his heart, and entering into its depths with his unlimited compassion.”¹¹⁵ For the love that every disciple encounters by drawing near the heart of Jesus is far from static. It bestows, rather, the dynamic and animating grace of an apostle, *simul in actione contemplativus*, impelling us to love others with the same love with which we have been loved, that our “hearts’ charity’s hearth’s fire” may set the world ablaze.

¹¹³ See Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus CXXIV*, 124.5–7; Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*, 21.5, 2640.

¹¹⁴ Jerónimo Nadal, *Epistolae P. Hieronymi Nadal, Monumenta Natalis* (Madrid: Typis Augustini Avrial, 1905), IV:651. See Joseph Conwell, *Contemplation in Action: A Study in Ignatian Prayer* (Spokane, WA: Gonzaga University, 1957), 23–39, 79–84.

¹¹⁵ GC 35, d. 2, no. 15; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 739.

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