









# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

# IES

The Road to Bethlehem—Is It Level or Winding?

*The Use of the Imagination in the Spiritual Exercises*

ERNEST C. FERLITA, S.J.

## THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

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## For your information . . .

We may sometimes wonder, on occasion with a touch of impatience, whether and how the decisions made at a general congregation ever really get put into practice. After serving as one of the staff at the Institute of Jesuit Sources who produced that big, fat, 808-page tome entitled *For Matters of Greater Moment: The First Thirty Jesuit General Congregations: A Brief History and a Translation of the Decrees*, I can assure you that it does happen; we do go from words to deeds. Sometimes it takes a long time to do so; but now and then an event bears witness to how rapidly one of those decisions can begin to be implemented. Here is an example.

Recently a new Italian magazine entitled *Liberal* appeared. Its subtitle is *An Encounter between Catholics and Secularists*. Although the Jesuits do not publish it, its first issue featured an exchange that responds directly to the Thirty-fourth General Congregation's desire that we make "a genuine attempt to work from within the shared experience of Christians and unbelievers in a secular and critical culture, built upon respect and friendship[ as] the only successful starting point" (G.C. 34, "Our Mission and Culture," no. 107). That exchange took place between Umberto Eco, the well-known author of both highly specialized works on semiotics and highly popular novels, such as *The Name of the Rose*, and Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, S.J., archbishop of Milan and an equally well-known author of both highly specialized works of biblical scholarship and highly popular spiritual books, such as *Reflections on the Church*.

As Eco said, what the magazine asked of both of them could seem embarrassing; "for a secularist [*laico*] and a cardinal to exchange ideas . . . an exchange of reflections between free men." That is exactly what they did in an exchange about the Millennium entitled "Who's Afraid of the Apocalypse?" It is "a subject which, while truly current, extends its roots quite a distance and has inspired fascination, fear, and hope in all members of the human family over the last two millennia." In a brief but thoughtful conversation, they asked what an apocalypse might mean to a secularist and a Christian today. They did not seek a definitive conclusion or neat resolutions to the problems posed by the idea, but they did reflect on whether there was "a notion of hope (and of our responsibility regarding tomorrow) which can be shared by believers and non-believers." They thought there was such a notion and that "the moment has not yet come to let television anaesthetize us while we await the end. There is still a lot left to do together." John O'Callaghan, S.J., former Jesuit general assistant in Rome, translated the original Italian text into English. The Social-Justice Secretariat of the Society in Rome published it in *Promotio iustitiæ* (65 [1996]: 63-68). I hope that more such conversations will further put into practice that decree of the congregation.

Every once in a while a book comes along that opens up a whole new line of thought and interpretation of a text so familiar that we may have thought almost everything that could be said about it had already been said. Such a book is *Loyola's Acts: The Rhetoric of the Self*. It is a study of the so-called *Autobiography* or *Memoirs* of St. Ignatius. The author, Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, maintains that that text, originally and in the critical edition called *Acta* (Acts), is not only an example of

autobiography; rather and much more, it is an example of “epideictic rhetoric.” No, the word “epideictic” is hardly in common use and it has not found its way into the tenth edition of *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*. “Epideictic” designates a type of rhetoric, a moral narrative that “classically treated praise or censure . . . as derived from . . . personal topics and as aimed at the honorable.” In this instance, just as Ignatius thought the primary purpose of life was epideictic—“to praise, reverence and serve God”—so the *Acta* was meant for such a purpose. Boyle’s book is an astonishing tour de force, from its first sentence through everything it brings to bear on what the *Autobiography* really is. Scenes and themes and subjects in the book range from codes of honor to eye-filled serpents, from secular and religious iconography to artistic theory and everyday custom. It is a serious book and not always by any means an easy read. But it is continually informative, fascinating, and thought provoking. After reading it, one will never look at Ignatius’s *Autobiography* in the same way again and certainly not simply as autobiography. By the way, do you know what bird was an apt symbol for Ignatius’s besetting temptations and why?

In Jesuit chronology, from Ignatius and the founding of the Society of Jesus to the present day, the suppression and survival of the Society comes almost at the midpoint. Another new book deals at great length with that utterly unexpected Jesuit survival in the Russian Empire. An English translation of its Italian title would be *The Society of Jesus in the Russian Empire (1772–1820) and Its Part in the General Restoration of the Society*. Its author is Marek Inglot, S.J., a member of the Jesuit Historical Institute in Rome. In 360 pages, including six thoroughly documented chapters and appendices containing important letters dating back to that time and letters written by members of the surviving Society, the book deals with the brief or letter of suppression and the Jesuits in White Russia, their consolidation, organization, and apostolic activities; the confirmation of the surviving Society (at first only oral and then in written form, hemmed in, however, by restrictions); and the contributions that that truly international group of Jesuits made to Russia. The author goes on to treat the further partial reestablishment of the Jesuits in Italy and then in other countries, including the United States. In his conclusion, Inglot brings us to the papal bull restoring the Society worldwide and the expulsion of the Jesuits from Russia. The very last sentence of the text is a quiet statement of fact: “In 1992 the Jesuits returned officially to Russia; on June 21, 1992, the ‘Independent Region of Russia’ was established, and on the following September 30 the order obtained official approval of its existence from the Russian government.” As the essay in this issue of *STUDIES* says in another context, “Without imagination that remembers the past, projects possibilities for the future and shapes human desires, there can be no action.” Those extraordinary Jesuits of the Russian survival surely had such an imagination. Even today they deserve our gratitude. And so does the author of this fine book that tells their story so well.

The next issue of *STUDIES*, January 1998, will begin the celebration of a most important event in the history of Jesuit spirituality and, indeed, of all Christian spirituality. An essay to be published then will be a “first” in several ways. Watch for it.

*John W. Padberg, S.J.*  
*Editor*

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# THE ROAD TO BETHLEHEM—IS IT LEVEL OR WINDING?

## *The Use of the Imagination in the Spiritual Exercises*

### Introduction

In 1963, several years before the resurgence of personally directed retreats, I was one of twenty-three Jesuits doing tertianship at Rathfarnham Castle in Dublin, Ireland. One of our assignments was to choose a topic related to the *Spiritual Exercises* and make a presentation on it to the group. Before beginning, however, we had to have our topic approved by the tertian master, Father Michael Connolly. I chose to talk about imagination in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Why that? Perhaps because at the time my imagination was actively engaged in a play I was working on, which I eventually called *The Ballad of John Ogilvie*. I needed permission, of course, to work on a project of this kind during tertianship, and Father Connolly gave it. Still, he was not all that keen about the topic of imagination in the *Exercises*, but finally he gave his approval.

Father Connolly's reservations were understandable. Though Vatican II was well underway, the Scholastic suspicion of the imagination still held sway. In his encyclical *Humani generis*, reaffirming the excellence of the Scholastic approach to theology, Pius XII maintained that the intellect was hampered by the imagination. He regarded the imagination as opposed to truth. Narratives in Scripture "must least of all be equated with myths or

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other such things which proceed more from an extravagant imagination than from the striving for truth and simplicity.”<sup>1</sup>

And this suspicion carried over into the *Exercises*, even though Ignatius accepted and even encouraged the activity of the imagination. “How is it,” asks Alexandre Brou, S.J., “that this activity is laid aside almost completely in the oft republished collections of the old-time Jesuits . . . ? Neither [Jerónimo] Nadal nor St. Francis Borgia go beyond reflections and affections. Doubtless, it is because the imagination is not under absolute control.”<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, while C. S. Lewis defends Ignatius for encouraging the activity of the imagination in his day and age, he cautions us about multiplying images in our prayer today. Ignatius dealt with people, he says, “whose visual imagination was weak and needed to be stimulated. But the trouble with people like ourselves is the exact reverse.”<sup>3</sup> Whether or not we go along with Lewis’s assessment, the implication is that for Ignatius imagination was restricted to visualization. But this is not the case. And that’s something I implied in my presentation at Rathfarnham by noting a couple of uses other than visualization. And it’s what I intend to pursue and expand on in this essay, in a way I could not possibly have done back in 1963.

Much has been written about the imagination in the *Exercises* since then. In fact, I must say I have been overwhelmed with the number of books and articles that have surfaced in the course of my research. And yet, even though I quote from some of them gladly, none of them, I believe I can say, renders superfluous what I am attempting here: to name and distinguish all the uses of the imagination Ignatius proposes. It is important to distinguish, for the simple reason that it tells us how to bring the imagination into play and what is to be expected of it.

Ignatius of Loyola was certainly one who brought his rich imagination into play. In his autobiography he tells us that, while recovering from

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<sup>1</sup> *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis*, 42 (Sept. 2, 1950): 577. I am relying here on the comments and translation of Gerald J. Bednar, *Faith as Imagination: The Contribution of William F. Lynch, S.J.* (Kansas City, Sheed & Ward, 1996), 39f. Bednar notes, however, that Pius XII had already issued *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943), “thereby approving of the responsible use of historical critical methods in biblical research. . . . Such a profound shift in the treatment of scriptural images would certainly imply a like shift in theology, yet that shift appeared to be more difficult to acknowledge. It did not come until the issuance of *Mysterium Ecclesiæ* under Paul VI in 1973” (40 n. 70).

<sup>2</sup> Alexandre Brou, S.J., *Ignatian Methods of Prayer*, trans. William J. Young, S.J. (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1949), 139.

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1966), 86.

his wounds, he repeatedly read over the only two books in the house, a life of Christ and the lives of the saints.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes he “stopped to think about the things he had read and at other times about the things of the world that he used to think of before.”

Of the many foolish ideas that occurred to him, one had taken such a hold on his heart that he was absorbed in thinking about it for two and three and four hours without realizing it. He imagined what he would do in the service of a certain lady; the means he would take so he could go to the place where she lived; the quips—the words he would address to her; the feats of arms he would perform in her service. He became so infatuated with this that he did not consider how impossible of attainment it would be, because the lady was not of ordinary nobility; not a countess nor a duchess; but her station was higher than any of these.

Nevertheless Our Lord assisted him, by causing these thoughts to be followed by others which arose from the things he read. For in reading the life of Our Lord and of the saints, he stopped to think, reasoning with himself, “What if I should do what St. Francis did, and what St. Dominic did?” Thus he pondered over many things that he found good.<sup>5</sup>

Pondering over those many things no doubt led to the experience and then the composition of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

The *Spiritual Exercises* may not be among the most imaginative works ever written (though, surprisingly, there are at least three authors, whom I will cite later, who come close to claiming as much), but it elicits more use of the imagination than any other work I know.

The use of the imagination is very much a part of the positive, or cataphatic, way of prayer. The positive way, as described by Anthony Ostini, S.J., “is incarnational in emphasis, centered on the mystery of God in Christ, in the life, death, and resurrection of the Word-Made-Flesh. It states that we can come to know something of God through what we know of God’s creation, especially in God’s supreme creation, Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup> The *Spiritual Exercises*, I would say, is the most cogent example of cataphatic prayer.

The negative, or apophatic, type of prayer, Ostini continues, “is transcendental in emphasis, centered on the mystery of God who cannot be

<sup>4</sup> *The Life of Christ* by Ludolph of Saxony and *The Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine, both translated into Castilian.

<sup>5</sup> *A Pilgrim’s Testament: The Memoirs of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Parmananda R. Divarkar, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), 7f.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Ostini, S.J., “Pray (Centeringly?) Always,” *Review for Religious*, 50, no. 6 (November-December 1991): 909.

known by the human mind. It states that only dark, silent love can comprehend the ever-greater God, who is formless and imageless mystery" (909). Imagination and intellect are incapable of attaining to God because God is best known by negation; and as we are told in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which best illustrates this type of prayer, "the most sublime thoughts are more hindrance than help during the time of contemplative prayer."<sup>7</sup>

Ironically, to help explain this type of prayer, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* readily resorts to imagery. In one brief chapter we are warned that anyone who tries to climb "the lofty mountain of contemplation through sheer brute force will be driven off with stones." One must "[w]ait with gracious and modest courtesy for the Lord's initiative" and not "impatiently snatch at grace like a greedy greyhound suffering from starvation." And speaking "half playfully," the author says: "[T]ry to temper the loud, crude sighing of your spirit and pretend to hide your heart's longing from the Lord. . . . For like a father frolicking with his son, he will hug and kiss one who comes to him with a child's heart."<sup>8</sup>

Images such as these, while meant to help one understand apophatic prayer, are not to be used *in* that prayer. However, when we are told "to pretend to hide our heart's longing from the Lord" (even though the author admits that one cannot hide it completely), how are we to do it without some use of the imagination? It may not be by using an image, but again the imagination is by no means limited to the imageable, the picturable, as I will shortly attempt to clarify.

It is the imageable that John of the Cross has in mind when he banishes the imagination from the realm of mystical prayer. For John the mystical way is summed up in the word *night*, which meant, first of all, as Hacker Fagot, S.J., explains it, "the night of the human senses by reason of the total renunciation of their use."<sup>9</sup> And Fagot shows how Teresa of Avila differed radically in this from John of the Cross. "The way to God she presents is certainly an interior way, in which she enters into herself to find God. Never, however, does she accept the renunciation of the imagination and the intellect. She strives to walk in the light, not the night. . . . Nor does it surprise us that her highest mystical union was accompanied by visual images such as her famous experience of transfixion by the seraph." Though John of the Cross "certainly recognized that all grace comes . . . through, and only through, the humanity of Christ," his approach to prayer

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<sup>7</sup> William Johnston, S.J., ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling* (Image Books, 1973), chap. 9, p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 46.

<sup>9</sup> From an as yet unpublished manuscript on the *Spiritual Exercises*.

bypassed the humanity of Christ. Not so for Teresa of Avila. According to Fagot, "Christ in his humanity is still the primary focus of her mystical life at its very summit."

It was her Jesuit confessors, especially Baltasar Álvarez, who led Teresa to the contemplation of the life of Christ, in which her rich imagination found full play. I am not suggesting, however, that the richer the imagination, the better the prayer. Whether one's mode of prayer is apophatic or cataphatic, we can hope that "like a father frolicking with his son," God "will hug and kiss one who comes to him with a child's heart." People vary in their imaginative abilities. And some people are more adept at using their imagination than others. There is no disputing that. But when some say they have little or no imagination, more than likely they are thinking that using the imagination is synonymous with having an image. This narrowed view is understandable. Indeed, for Aristotle, "and all his successors," in the view of Alan R. White, "to imagine was to have an image. As Descartes said, we cannot 'try to imagine a thing which is not imageable.'" White elaborates on this thought:

A connection of imagination with imagery gripped the thought of so many philosophers from Aristotle to the present day so strongly that they ignored the contradiction between it and their actual use of the notion of imagination. For this use shows starkly how commonly and naturally they speak, like us, of imagining the non-imageable and non-picturable, that is of imagining what on their own theory is unimaginable. They talk quite properly of imagining reasons, differences, dilemmas and lies, of imaginary wants and happiness, of imaginable caution and torment, of imagining what, why and how, and of imagining that, e.g., we believe so-and-so, that we can do such and such or that one conclusion contradicts another. Yet none of this is imageable.<sup>10</sup>

Ignatius was well aware that the imagination is not restricted to the imageable, to the picturable. In the first exercise of the First Week, he speaks of two different uses of the imagination. The first is imageable, "[w]hen a contemplation or meditation is about something that can be gazed on, for example, a contemplation of Christ our Lord, who is visible." The second use is not primarily imageable; it comes into play "when a contemplation or meditation is about something [abstract and] invisible" (no. 47), as in the first two meditations about sins.<sup>11</sup> A third use of the imagination is Contem-

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<sup>10</sup> Alan R. White, *The Language of the Imagination* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1990), 5f.

<sup>11</sup> This and all subsequent translations are from George E. Ganss, S.J., ed. and trans., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992). The word *abstract* does not appear in the original text. No doubt, by inserting it Ganss

plating with Fantasy (a word which I will justify in context). A fourth use is the Application of the Five Senses, which includes elements of fantasy. And a fifth use, another form of fantasy, can be described as the Imagined Situation. Finally, we can speak of the Dramatic Imagination, with which the entire *Spiritual Exercises* is conceived.

## Contemplation of the Invisible

Though contemplation of the visible is mentioned first, the first exercise of the First Week is about something “invisible,” and so I propose to start with that use of the imagination. Perhaps a better word for “invisible” is “unpicturable.” The “composition” for the meditation “about the first, second, and third sins”—that of the angels, of Adam and Eve, of a particular sinner condemned to hell—is not, strictly speaking, a composition of “place.” The composition is rather “to see in imagination and to consider my soul as imprisoned in this corruptible body, and my whole . . . self as an exile in this valley [of tears] among brute animals” (no. 47). Though there are elements here that are picturable, the totality cannot be put into imagery. It is a “vision” of the human condition that bears some similarity to apocalyptic visions, which often contain a number of picturable elements but do not form a composite picture. Consider the vision of the last judgment:

And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the Second Death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.<sup>12</sup>

Though a lake of fire is indeed picturable, one would be hard put to picture Death and Hades being thrown into it. A commentator, William G. Heidt, O.S.B., calls this a type of conceptual symbolism, “i.e., the expression of an idea by a literary form in which the concept is the important element while the vehicle or symbol is . . . secondary” and never fully visualized.<sup>13</sup>

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intends it to be explanatory of *invisible*. Its first meaning is “having no material existence.” But when applied to art, it means “not representing things pictorially,” even though the elements of such a representation are, of course, visible. Actually, this second meaning would seem to be closer to what Ignatius means by *invisible*, as we shall see.

<sup>12</sup> Rev. 20:13–15 (New Revised Standard Version).

<sup>13</sup> William G. Heidt, O.S.B., *The Book of the Apocalypse* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1962), 20.

The concept is clearly the important element in what Ignatius proposes: to consider one's soul imprisoned, as it were, in one's corruptible body, not unlike Hopkins's "Caged Skylark."

As a dare-gale skylark scanted in a dull cage  
 Man's mounting spirit in his bone-house,  
     mean house, dwells . . .  
 . . . both droop deadly sometimes in  
     their cells  
 Or wring their barriers in bursts of fear or rage.

And then the whole self in exile, as it were, among brute animals, not unlike Christ in the desert, tempted by Satan "among the wild beasts" (Mark 1:13).

There is one passage that Hugo Rahner calls "the most vehement and unrestrained" in the whole of the *Exercises*. Ignatius, he says, "usually so taciturn, becomes all of a sudden extremely poetic, if that is the right word."<sup>14</sup>

This is an exclamation of wonder and surging emotion, uttered as I [a sinner] reflect on all creatures and wonder how they have allowed me to live and have preserved me in life. The angels: How is it that, although they are swords of God's justice, they have borne with me, protected me, and prayed for me? The saints: How is it that they have interceded and prayed for me? Likewise, the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the elements; the fruits, birds, fishes, and animals. And the earth: How is it that it has not opened up and swallowed me, creating new hells for me to suffer in forever? (no. 60)

While this passage contains much that is potentially visible, it is imagined but not visualized. The "exclamation of wonder" is uttered "as I reflect on all creatures." There is no way of visualizing "all creatures." One can imagine but not visualize that "no men or all men have red hair . . . , but there is no imagery for . . . 'all,' or 'none.' . . . Imagery is confined to the copyable and the picturable, but imagination is not."<sup>15</sup>

All creatures—that is, all the angels and saints; the heavens and all the heavenly bodies; all the elements: earth, fire, water, and air; and everything that grows and dwells upon the earth: fruits, birds, fishes and animals—none of these need be, though some may be, pictured. What is paramount is the concept: why have all these things tolerated me? sinner that I am, why have they let me live? To some extent, the climactic close is

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<sup>14</sup> Hugo Rahner, S.J., *Ignatius the Theologian* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 82.

<sup>15</sup> Id., *The Language of the Imagination*, 90.

picturable: the earth opening to swallow me up, but even here the concept goes beyond the image: the earth opening up to create new hells for me. This is a striking example of what Ignatius means by the contemplation of the invisible.

### Contemplation of the Visible (and the Aural)

In the contemplation of the visible, “the composition consists of seeing in imagination the physical place where that which I want to contemplate is taking place. By physical place I mean, for instance, a temple or a mountain where Jesus Christ or Our Lady happens to be, in accordance with the topic I desire to contemplate” (no. 47). How detailed is this mental image supposed to be? C. S. Lewis thought that St. Ignatius meant it should be visualized “in the fullest possible detail,” and for that reason he felt that such an exercise was not for him. One of the English followers of St. Ignatius, he says, “would even have us look up ‘what good Authors write of those places’ so as to get the topography, ‘the height of the hills and the situation of the townes,’ correct.”<sup>16</sup> But this is a misconception. True, if one has been to the Holy Land, memory is bound to bring certain images to mind. If one has seen the Sea of Galilee, quite arguably the most beautiful in all the world, one cannot help but see it in imagination if called for. When St. Ignatius went to the Holy Land, he wanted to remember everything to the last detail, and he could have provided the exercitant with more or less accurate descriptions of one place or another. But he did not. In the composition of place for the Nativity, for instance, he would have one “see in imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Consider its length and breadth, whether it is level or winds through valleys and hills. Similarly, look at the place or cave of the nativity: How big is it, or small? How low or high? And how is it furnished?” (no. 112). In other words, it is not a question of being historically accurate; it is more a matter of bringing enough things together in the mind to provide some setting for the scene and at the same time free the mind of distractions.

As the *Official Directory* warns, “care should be taken not to dwell excessively on constructing the representation of the place,” because the “composition of place is not the primary fruit of the meditation but only a way and an instrument toward it.”<sup>17</sup> C. S. Lewis expressed the fear that if he

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<sup>16</sup> Lewis, *Prayer*, 86.

<sup>17</sup> *The Official Directory of 1599*, in *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises*, trans. and ed. Martin E. Palmer, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 315. All citations from the *Official Directory* are taken from this volume.

started with the composition of place, he would never reach the meditation: "The picture would go on elaborating itself indefinitely and becoming every moment of less spiritual relevance." However, he recognized the important part images play in prayer.

I doubt if any act of will or thought or emotion occurs to me without them. But they seem to help me most when they are most fugitive and fragmentary—rising and bursting like bubbles in champagne or wheeling like rooks in a windy sky: contradicting one another (in logic) as the crowded metaphors of a swift poet may do. Fix on any one, and it goes dead. You must do as Blake would do with a joy; kiss it as it flies. And then, in their total effect, they do mediate to me something very important.<sup>18</sup>

I would think that if I followed Lewis's advice, I would be doing what Ignatius intends by the composition of place. Ganss notes how in his spiritual diary Ignatius, after struggling with distractions, wrote, "I compose myself" for Mass. "This chance remark has turned out to be a commentary which clearly shows the purpose of his *composición*."<sup>19</sup> Joseph A. Tetlow, S.J., agrees when he refers to the composition of place as an "act of centering, or self-concentration."<sup>20</sup>

One is ready now for the contemplation of the scene itself, for which three points are given. Though there are two earlier exercises in the Second Week, both of which call for extensive use of the imagination, I propose to remain with the contemplation of the Nativity, because it is the first of many throughout the Second Week, and subsequently the Third and Fourth Weeks, which use the imagination in the way that Ignatius describes as the contemplation of the visible, all of them having to do with scenes in the life of Jesus.

First of all, the contemplation of the visible in a scene always includes the aural as well, for the simple reason that in every scene contemplated I am imagining persons, hearing what they say and seeing what they do. The first point of the contemplation for the Nativity is, in part, "to see Our Lady, Joseph, the maidservant, and the Infant Jesus after his birth"; the second point is to "observe, consider, and contemplate what they are

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis, *Prayer*, 87f. William Hewett, S.J., while recognizing the energizing power of the imagination, proposes that the rules for temperance (nos. 83f.) might well be applied to it, "in the sense that we must not let it run riot" ("The Exercises: A Creative Process," in *The Way Supplement*, no. 42 [Autumn 1981], 11).

<sup>19</sup> *Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, no. 34 (p. 155).

<sup>20</sup> Joseph A. Tetlow, S.J., *Ignatius Loyola, Spiritual Exercises* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 72.

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saying”; and the third, “to behold and consider what they are doing” (nos. 114–16)—and in all three, to reflect upon myself and draw some profit. The purpose of the first point, obviously, is to see, before all else, what persons are involved in the scene I am contemplating, but it does not mean that I see them as in a still photograph or like statues; rather, I see them already in action, in the initial action that the scene requires. And before I contemplate what they are saying, I hear them say what they have to say in the midst of action.

So what is the use of the third point, “to behold and consider what they are doing,” if I have been doing that all along? One answer, of course, is that I have been doing it only to some extent, and now I am asked to take it further and more fully, to reflect on the significance of the action as such. But another answer is that I am invited to see the action of the scene as part of a larger picture. “[F]or example,” Ignatius says in the third point for the Nativity, consider how Joseph and our Lady are “journeying and toiling, in order that the Lord may be born in greatest poverty; and that after so many hardships of hunger, thirst, heat, cold, injuries, and insults, he may die on the cross! And all this for me!” (no. 116). Ignatius here seems to be breaking one of his own rules. In the notes for the Second Week, he says that “for this and the following weeks . . . I should read only about the mystery which I shall immediately contemplate” and avoid reading about any other. Why? In order “to keep the consideration of one mystery from interfering with that about another” (no. 127). But here I have moved from our Lord’s Nativity to his Passion and Death. Maybe this is just an exception. Actually, though, I have not really moved *from* it; I am considering it rather as part of a larger picture, seeing it for what it is but also how it came to be and what is yet to come of it.

There is another highly important element that Ignatius includes in the first point; I did not mention it above precisely because it deserves special consideration. It is very much a part of what he understands by contemplation of the visible. “I will make myself a poor, little, and unworthy slave, gazing at [the persons], contemplating them, and serving them in their needs, just as if I were there, with all possible respect and reverence” (no. 114). Enter the scene, he says, and interact. Objection: “It’s bad enough trying to imagine what actually happened, but to put myself there—that’s fantasizing! How is that in the service of truth? How is that in pursuit of reality?”

## Contemplating with Fantasy

I am well aware that the word *fantasy*, like *myth*, is often used in its pejorative sense, suggesting something so unreal that it cannot be trusted. But, like *myth*, it has a strong positive sense as well, which Anthony de Mello, S.J., defends when he notes how fantasy has become

a tool that many modern psychotherapists are using to very good effect. They are beginning to realize that the world of fantasy is not quite as “unreal” as it seems to be, that far from being a world of escape and unreality it reveals realities as deep or even deeper than those grasped by our mind and so is a very effective tool for healing and growth.<sup>21</sup>

In fantasizing, as Tetlow succinctly puts it, we “imagine things that have not really happened and perhaps cannot happen.”<sup>22</sup> Then “we let the Spirit of Life—who surely imagines infinitely more than we—open our minds and hearts to truths and realities that we may have been defending ourselves against by the ordinary and the conventional.” Anthony de Mello concurs: The scene “is all made up.” It is “obviously not true historically.” But it “contains a truth, not of history, but of mystery.” And the fantasy “will help bring out the truth of the mystery, which is far more important than the truth of history. The fantasy will put us in touch with Jesus Christ.”

In this connection, de Mello recounts a story about St. Francis of Assisi, how he went to Mount Alvernia and had a vision of Jesus on the cross.

[A]nd he lovingly took him down from the cross. Now St. Francis of Assisi was no fool; he was quite aware, at least as we are today, that Jesus, having once died, dies no more. And yet, while he lovingly took him down from the cross and stood by him in his suffering, a deep mystery of love was being enacted, fantasy notwithstanding, before which the rational mind . . . must stop in silent incomprehension.<sup>23</sup>

The idea of entering the scene contemplated became a part of Franciscan meditation. A book called *Meditationes vitæ Christi*, formerly attributed to St. Bonaventure, but in fact composed by an unknown Franciscan of the thirteenth century, provided material for the Carthusian Ludolph of Sax-

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<sup>21</sup> Anthony de Mello, S.J., *Contact with God* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1991), 175.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph A. Tetlow, S.J., *Choosing Christ in the World* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1989), 150, 122.

<sup>23</sup> *Contact with God*, 177f.

ony's *Vita Iesu Christi*.<sup>24</sup> Ludolph's work was "translated by the Franciscan poet, Archbishop Ambrosio de Montesinos, and published in a deluxe edition of several volumes of fine Gothic type."<sup>25</sup> Echoes of it are to be found in Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*—the statements, for example, that "Adam was created in the plain of Damascus" (no. 51), that Mary was "seated on a burro" and was accompanied on her way to Bethlehem by "a maidservant" (no. 111), that the Risen Christ "appeared to the Virgin Mary" (no. 299)—a tradition that probably goes as far back as the second century.<sup>26</sup>

Ludolph is very prolix in his descriptions of events and in the lessons to be drawn from them, but once in a while he will include a statement that draws one into the scene. "Do thou stand with [Mary] by the Cross, and grieve for the Lord who died for thee. We ought to stand by the Cross willingly, and rather in mind than in body, keeping in memory our Saviour, as He was hanging on the Cross." And later, after our Lady returns to "the house of John," he writes, "At last John, exhorting her to cease weeping, comforted her to the best of his power. Do thou also strive thy utmost to console and strengthen her, and induce her to eat a little. . . . Try to make things ready for her, and wait upon her, and afterwards, having received a blessing from her . . . , thou mayest depart."<sup>27</sup>

Ignatius, on the other hand, never specifies what one might do upon entering a scene. The closest he comes is the suggestion to serve the persons "in their need" (no. 114). He leaves it rather to the one contemplating. Here is how one exercitant entered the scene in his contemplation of the Eighth Apparition (no. 306) on the shore of the Sea of Galilee:

I sat around the charcoal fire with the other disciples and Jesus gave me a piece of bread and fish. Then he drank from a jug of water and called me over and told me to drink and then pass it around to the others. I drank from the jug and then passed it around, exchanging a glance with each of the disciples as I did—except Peter. He drank but did not look at me, he kept his eyes lowered, until Jesus said, "Peter, do you love me?" I think I felt the force of that question for the first time.

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<sup>24</sup> Godfrey O'Donnell, "Contemplation," in *The Way Supplement*, no. 27 (1976), 27-34. "Perhaps," he says, "the writer was a Tuscan Franciscan named John de Caulibus."

<sup>25</sup> José Ignacio Tellechea Idigoras, *Ignatius of Loyola, The Pilgrim Saint*, trans. Cornelius Michael Buckley, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1994), 120.

<sup>26</sup> See Gerald O'Collins, "St. Ignatius Loyola on Christ's Resurrection," *America*, March 30, 1991, 360.

<sup>27</sup> Ludolph the Saxon, "The Hours of the Passion," in *The Life of Christ*, trans. H. J. C. (London: Burns and Oates, 1887), 300, 422.

The exercitant went on to say that he was moved to tears. Through fantasy he encountered the reality of the risen Christ and experienced the truth of his love.

Ignatius invites us to pray with fantasy in at least two other ways. The way we have just seen has us fantasize in the context of contemplating the visible, more specifically, an event recorded in the Gospel. Another way is closely related because Christ is indeed a central figure, but the context is not a recorded event and it may contain elements of the unpicturable. As examples we can cite the contemplation of the Kingdom of Christ, in which we are asked to imagine a temporal king speaking to "all his people" (no. 93) and then "to gaze upon Christ our Lord, the eternal King, and all the world assembled before him" (no. 95); and the meditation on Two Standards, in which we are led to imagine "the leader of all the enemy" seated on a throne of fire and smoke in the great plain of Babylon, summoning "uncountable devils" and dispersing them "throughout the whole world" (nos. 140f.), and then, "in contrast," to "gaze in imagination on the supreme and true leader, who is Christ the Lord," taking his place in a great plain near Jerusalem, calling "so many persons" and sending them "throughout the world" (nos. 144f.). Still another way of fantasizing is best described as the Imagined Situation; it will be taken up later in connection with the Election, that choice or decision which is at the heart of the Exercises.

## The Application of the Five Senses

The fifth contemplation of the first day of the Second Week "will be an application of the five senses to the subject matter of the first and second contemplations" (no. 121). Even though the five senses were already applied in the meditation on Hell (nos. 66-70), Ignatius does not name the exercise until now. Why not? I assume it is because the application, or the use, of the imaginative senses in the First Week is different, limited to that one meditation on Hell. In the Second Week (and in the Third and Fourth), one applies the five senses in the context of contemplating the "visible," whereas in the First Week it is in the context of meditating on the "invisible," the unpicturable, more specifically, on Hell. Another difference is apparently in the desired effect of the exercise. Each point in the exercise as presented in the Second Week ends with a variation of this sentence: "And I will draw some profit from this"; but the profit I am meant to draw is very different from what it was during the First Week. In that single meditation of the First Week, the desired effect is one of revulsion—revulsion at the horror of sin; in all the contemplations of the Second Week, on the other hand, the effect is one of pleasure—pleasure in "the sensible qualities of things: sights, sounds, and the like" relating to events in the life of Christ.

“[T]hese it enjoys and takes delight in,” as the *Official Directory* says (322). Another difference is that the application of the senses in the Second Week is to subject matter already contemplated, whereas the application of the five senses is the only method prescribed for the meditation on Hell.

It seems to me these differences between the two applications are worth noting, but as far as I can tell they either go unrecognized or are not adverted to. The *Official Directory*, for instance, says nothing about the application of the senses in the First Week, and nothing of what it says about the application of the senses in the Second Week is relevant to the First.<sup>28</sup>

Let us first consider the application of the senses in the First Week. The first prelude to the meditation on Hell is “to see in imagination the length, breadth, and depth of hell” (no. 65). Imaginable, but, in its totality, not imageable! David L. Fleming, S.J., offers a useful analogy: “St. Paul speaks of our being able to grasp the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ’s love and experiencing this love which surpasses all knowledge (Ep 3:18–19). At its opposite pole, I try to experience the breadth and length and height and depth of hell,”<sup>29</sup> to experience “the pain suffered by the damned, so that if through my faults, I should forget the love of the Eternal Lord, at least the fear of those pains will serve to keep me from falling into sin” (no. 65).

And then, point by point, I am asked to apply each of my senses to this experience. To a certain extent it is true that Ignatius “conceives imagining as an act of dismembering the senses by running them in isolation

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<sup>28</sup> The only early directory that has something to say about the application of the senses in the First Week is that of Gil González Dávila, who was “one of those chiefly responsible for the composing of the official *Directory* to the Exercises” (Palmer, *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises*, 234). “The application of the senses in the 5th exercise,” he writes, “is easy, and a great help in meditating the torments of hell. From this meditation the mind conceives the horror of sin” (no. 75 [p. 247]). That effect is very different from taking delight in the sensible qualities of things, but for some reason the difference goes unnoted. On the other hand, James Walsh, S.J., did note the difference in a letter he wrote to David M. Stanley, S.J. “The application of the senses to the state of spirit-existence called hell is different in kind. We seek the truth of damnation by applying the interior senses to . . . an admixture of ‘sensible’ and metaphorical descriptions, which Ignatius believes will give an approximation to the truth and reality of hell” (David M. Stanley, S.J., *“I Encountered God!” The Spiritual Exercises with the Gospel of John* [St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986], 21).

<sup>29</sup> David L. Fleming, S.J., *Draw Me into Your Friendship: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 59.

through the image being made,"<sup>30</sup> but it is important to distinguish between bodily senses and senses of the mind. The first point would have me "see with the eyes of the imagination the huge fires and, so to speak, the souls within the bodies full of fire" (no. 66). The phrase "so to speak" has been added by the translator, obviously in an attempt to suggest that one does not "see" souls in bodies on fire in the same way that one sees huge fires. It is all by way of metaphor. This is clearly the case in the fourth and fifth points: "By my sense of taste I will experience the bitter flavors of hell" (no. 69); "by my sense of touch, I will feel how the flames touch the souls and burn them" (no. 47).

I think both the "dismembering" of the senses and their metaphorical application can be seen in one of Hopkins's "dark sonnets," in which he compares the experience of his anguished self to that of the lost in hell.

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.  
 What hours, O what black hours we have spent  
 This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you  
     went!  
 And more must, in yet longer light's delay.

With witness I speak this. But where I say  
 Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament  
 Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent  
 To dearest him that lives alas! away.

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree  
 Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;  
 Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the  
     curse.

Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see  
 The lost are like this, and their scourge to be  
 As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

The sense of *touch* is first: "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day"—the dark surrounding him like the pelt (the fell) of a beast, oppressing him as if it were no pelt but the beast itself. Then *sight*: "what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!" In his long-retreat notes on the meditation on Hell, Hopkins remembers something in St. Teresa's vision of hell, "to this effect: 'I know not how it is but in spite of the darkness the eye sees there all that

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<sup>30</sup> Antonio T. de Nicolas, *Powers of Imagining: Ignatius de Loyola* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 42.

to see is most afflicting.’”<sup>31</sup> *Sound*: “And my lament is cries countless”—but no answer comes from “dearest him that lives alas! away.” *Taste*: “I am gall, I am heartburn.” *Taste and smell*: “Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours.”<sup>32</sup> By running each of his senses separately through the image being made, Hopkins constructs a metaphor of hell: “I see / The lost are like this . . . / . . . but worse.”

As noted earlier, the application of the five senses is the only method prescribed for the meditation on Hell in the First Week, but in the Second Week, where it is named for the first time, it is the fifth contemplation, to be made “before the evening meal” (nos. 128f.). Two of the senses, however, have already been applied in the first and second contemplations (on the Incarnation and the Nativity, respectively), the first point of which is to see the persons and the second to hear what they are saying; and the third and fourth contemplations are repetitions of the first and second. Is the fifth, then, just another repetition? Obviously not, since three other senses are added: touch, taste, and smell. But what about sight and hearing? Do I just repeat what I have done before?

First of all, it should be noted that Ignatius adds something in his points on sight and hearing. Besides seeing the persons, I will contemplate “in detail all the circumstances around them” (no. 122), and besides hearing what they are saying, I will listen to what they “*might* be saying” (italics mine). This introduces, of course, elements of fantasy. But not, I venture to say, for the first time. These are circumstances and sayings that have already surfaced in the previous contemplations and repetitions.

I say this because Ignatius recommends that the fifth contemplation be “before the evening meal,” which suggests that it should be less taxing and more relaxed. The *Official Directory* offers this explanation:

The application of the senses differs from meditation in that meditation is more a matter of intellect, involves more reasoning, and is altogether higher. Meditation reasons about the causes and effects of the mysteries and traces out the attributes of God in them, v.g., his goodness, wisdom, love and the like. The application of the senses, on the other hand, is not discursive, but merely rests in the sensible qualities of things: sights, sounds, and the like; these it enjoys and takes delight in, to its spiritual profit.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Christopher Devlin, S.J., ed., *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 138.

<sup>32</sup> This analysis is taken from my *Uttermost Mark* (New York: University Press of America, 1990), 97.

<sup>33</sup> *Official Directory*, no. 156 (p. 322). It should be noted that, in its commentary on the exercises of the Second Week, the *Directory* always uses the word *meditation* where

At this point let me note that the *Directory* presupposes only one interpretation of the application of the senses, a mode of prayer whose aim, as Hugo Rahner puts it, is “to make the events of salvation ‘present’ in the mind, and thus to attain that direct experience of love and savouring of divine consolation which is the ultimate purpose of the whole *Spiritual Exercises*.”<sup>34</sup> As the *Directory* reads,

The 5th exercise, the application of the senses, is quite easy and beneficial. It consists in using our imagination to see the persons, to hear their words or any other sounds, to touch or kiss places or persons (this latter should be done with due reverence, modesty and fear). The sense of smell is applied by our Father Ignatius to smelling the soul’s fragrance from God’s gifts, and the sense of taste to tasting its sweetness; both of these betoken a kind of presence of the reality or person we are meditating, joined with a relish and heartfelt love for them.<sup>35</sup>

We can agree that the application of seeing, hearing, and touching are “quite easy,” but not so the application of smelling and tasting (taken together as the Third Point)—for the simple reason that the application is not direct but by way of metaphor. Hopkins offers a striking illustration when he applies the combined senses of taste and smell to his own consciousness and self-being: “that taste of myself,” he says, “of *I* and *me* above all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf or camphor.”<sup>36</sup>

## The Imagined Situation

The *Spiritual Exercises* is an instrument designed precisely for the purpose of discovering God’s will. The name of spiritual exercises is given to “any means of preparing and disposing our soul to rid itself of all its disordered affections and then, after their removal, of seeking and finding God’s will in the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul” (no. 1). Karl

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Ignatius uses *contemplation*. Ignatius calls all the exercises of the First Week meditations, but in the Second Week only the Two Standards and the Three Classes of Persons are so called. Meditation is discursive, employing the mental powers of memory, intellect, and will. Contemplation “is viewing or gazing and it stimulates reflections and emotions. Since this method leads to reflections it can be and often is discursive mental prayer. Ordinarily, however, it is an easier and more affective kind of prayer” (Ganss, *Spiritual Exercises*, 154f., 162).

<sup>34</sup> *Ignatius the Theologian*, 194.

<sup>35</sup> *Official Directory*, no. 154 (p. 321f.). Ignatius, by the way, doesn’t say “kiss places or persons”; he says rather “kiss the places where the persons walk or sit” (no. 125).

<sup>36</sup> *Sermons and Devotional Writings*, 123.

Rahner would even like “to risk the assertion that they are actually the first and so far the only detailed attempt” at providing a systematic method for doing this.<sup>37</sup> Everything, therefore, is at the service of the “Election,” of the making of a vital decision—all the meditations, all the contemplations, all the rules. Ignatius says as much in his introduction to the Election, first, pointing out how the contemplation of Christ’s life gives us examples of various states of life, and secondly, how “[w]hile continuing our contemplations of his life,” we “begin simultaneously to explore and inquire: In which state or way of life does the Divine Majesty wish us to serve him?” (no. 135). We have already seen various ways in which the imagination enters into all this.

There is still another way, more directly related to the Election, a form of fantasy, as I mentioned before, which can be described as the Imagined Situation. This use of the imagination is an attempt to discover one’s true feelings about something by imagining a certain situation and seeing oneself in, or related to, that situation. Karl Rahner, in a long footnote, elaborates:

[T]here is before the actual decision a make-believe of putting oneself into some situation: How would it be if . . . It is not a case of “thinking it over,” that is to say one is not analysing the object of possible choice in factual, rational considerations. One is trying out in a sort of make-believe or even play-acting experiment, whether one can discover in oneself in regard to the object of choice a certain global “connaturality” (to use Aquinas’ term . . . ), which is not susceptible of further explicit analysis.<sup>38</sup>

Ignatius proposes several exercises in this regard. Three of the rules he gives for Making a Sound and Good Election (according to the Second Method) are about imagined situations. The second rule is as follows: “I will imagine a person whom I have never seen or known. Desiring all perfection for him or her, I will consider what I would say in order to bring such a one to act and elect for the greater glory of God our Lord and the greater perfection of his or her soul” (no. 185). The other two rules situate the exercitant “at the point of death” (no. 186) and “on judgment day” (no. 187). In the same footnote Rahner says:

It is always a matter of a person’s putting himself in a certain situation, possibly with the help of the device of putting himself in someone else’s place, in order to mobilize the actual real centre of his own nature in relation to the situation, so as to bring into full awareness how the person

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<sup>37</sup> Karl Rahner, S.J., *The Dynamic Element of the Church*, trans. W. J. O’Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 115.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 161 n. 43.

he really is (which may be hidden from him) reacts to some possible object of choice.

The prime instance of this use of the imagination is the meditation “On the Three Classes of Persons,” which St. Ignatius explicitly says is “to aid one toward embracing what is better” (no. 149). One imagines a situation in which three persons, “each typical of a class,” has acquired a considerable amount of money, “but not purely or properly for the love of God,” and yet each “desires to save his or her soul and to find God our Lord in peace” (no. 150). All three desire to get rid of their attachment to the money, but they proceed in three very different ways. When I put myself in the place of each of these persons, how do I feel about the way they proceed? Clearly, the hope is to discover in myself feelings similar to those of the person typical of the third class, who

desires to get rid of the attachment, but in such a way that there remains no inclination either to keep the acquired money or to dispose of it. Instead such a one desires to keep it or reject it solely according to what God our Lord will move one’s will to choose, and also according to what [one] will judge to be better for the service and praise of the Divine Majesty. (no. 155)

Note the future tense. I am not yet making the Election (the choice or decision); I am still in the realm of the imagination, attempting to bring myself “into full awareness.” As William Hewett, S.J., observes, I “gradually come to realize that the Exercises are tantalizingly incomplete; and necessarily so,” as Ignatius beckons me to find, even as he did, the way that I must take to Christ and enter into it.<sup>39</sup>

## The Dramatic Imagination

In an interview, John English, S.J., calls the *Spiritual Exercises* “a classic work of literature. Like a Shakespearean play it is always being interpreted and then reinterpreted, changing and adjusting to different cultures and times.”<sup>40</sup> And the poet Robert Duncan has said that he considers the *Spiritual Exercises* to be “a great dramatic poem,” though he does not give his reasons why.<sup>41</sup> I think it is safe to say that it is not because of language. I am using the word *language* in its ordinary sense; but Roland

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<sup>39</sup> William Hewett, S.J., *The Exercises: A Creative Process*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Cited by Douglas Letson and Michael Higgins in *The Jesuit Mystique* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), 82.

<sup>41</sup> Cited by James Torrens, S.J., in “The Epic Imagination: A Comparison between the *Exercises* and Dante’s *Commedia*,” *The Way Supplement*, no. 42 (Autumn 1981).

Barthes insists that Ignatius of Loyola is the founder of a new language, “obviously not linguistic,” and he berates those Jesuits who speak of the *Exercises* as “literarily impoverished.” What he means by “new language” is not easily defined, but it would seem to be a language constructed of “so many image units (or ‘points’).”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, James Torrens implies that Duncan called the *Exercises* “a great dramatic poem” because of the way in which Ignatius calls the imagination into play: “Perhaps the most poetic mark of all in the *Exercises*, by which Ignatius calls each one’s imagination into fullest play, is the predilection for contemplating Jesus in his earthly life, the invitation to enter into, one after the other, what Ignatius calls ‘the mysteries of the life of Christ.’”<sup>43</sup> According to Hugo Rahner, “Ignatius turns the contemplations of the life of Christ into a genuine dramatic representation”; and this “*dramatization of the mysteries*, with its highly individual order of presentation, can only be properly appreciated in the light of the Election to which it is leading” (italics in the original).<sup>44</sup>

Rahner’s unabashed use of the word *dramatization* makes me more confident in giving my own reason for calling the *Exercises* a great dramatic poem. The *Spiritual Exercises* does, in its overall structure, what a drama does. In a drama the protagonist shapes his desire and pursues it; that shaping and pursuit constitute the action of the play. As Hopkins says, in a dramatic poem “the story springs from, and is, its motive.”<sup>45</sup> “Motive” is another word for “desire.” “A motive could be defined,” according to Magda Arnold, “as *a want that leads to action*” (italics in the original).<sup>46</sup> Hamlet’s motive or desire is to avenge his father. Part of the play has to do with the shaping of that desire and the rest with its pursuit.

From the very beginning Ignatius urges the exercitant “to ask God our Lord for what I want and desire” (no. 48). What I ask for, he says, should be in accord with the subject matter. In the Second Week, for instance, one asks for “an interior knowledge of Our Lord, who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more

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<sup>42</sup> Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 3, 54. “This [image] unit is not immediately anecdotal; alone, it does not necessarily make up a complete scene, mobilizing as in the theater several senses at one time: the image (imitation) can be purely visual, or purely auditory, or purely tactile, etc.”

<sup>43</sup> “Epic Imagination,” 32f.

<sup>44</sup> *Ignatius the Theologian*, 103.

<sup>45</sup> Claude Colleer Abbott, ed., *Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and R. W. Dixon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935, 1955), 79.

<sup>46</sup> Magda Arnold, *Story Sequence Analysis* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1962), 33.

closely" (no. 104). As the knowledge and love of the Lord deepen and expand, the following of him begins to assume particularity. How do I follow him? This is clearly the shaping of desire. And it will culminate in the Election I feel called upon to make. Once, while doing the Exercises and feeling himself much exercised, an exercitant woke up in the middle of the night and heard these words, or rather it was these words that woke him up: "My grace is to make you want what I want." Indeed, the hope is that what I choose to do will be God's will for me.

Imagination is an essential element of hope, which William F. Lynch, S.J., defines as "a sense of *the possible*."<sup>47</sup> Says E. Edward Kinerk, S.J., "We cannot hope if we cannot imagine possibilities."<sup>48</sup> As Emily Dickinson writes in one of her poems, "The Possible's slow fuse is lit / By the Imagination."<sup>49</sup> Sally Ann McReynolds puts it all in context: "Without imagination that remembers the past, projects possibilities for the future, and shapes human desire, there can be no action."<sup>50</sup>

Once we have shaped our desire, in accord with God's will, one hopes, and made our choice, the action of our life's story is in place. It is confirmed and deepened in the Third and Fourth Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises, when we enter into contemplation of Christ's Passion and Resurrection, and it continues into what William J. O'Malley, S.J., calls the Fifth Week, the unfolding of our life in the world.

Our life's story is supposed to be another telling of Christ's story. As one of the guidelines for contemplating the Gospel scenes, Gerard W. Hughes, S.J., states, in italics: "*Whenever and whatever we read of Christ in the Gospel, we are also reading our own self-portrait, for Christ is what we are called to be.*" By contemplating him with all the powers of our imagination, Hughes explains, "we begin to catch glimpses of what God has called us to become before the world was, namely, other Christs."<sup>51</sup> Indeed, as Walter J. Ong, S.J., observes, quoting Hopkins, the human person is not diminished in Christ but rather grows into a "[n]ew self and nobler me." All the decision making in the *Exercises*, he asserts, "resolves itself . . . in relating

<sup>47</sup> William F. Lynch, S.J., *Images of Hope* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1965), 32.

<sup>48</sup> E. Edward Kinerk, S.J., "Eliciting Great Desires: Their Place in the Spirituality of the Society of Jesus," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*, 16, no. 5 (November 1984): 10.

<sup>49</sup> "The Gleam of an Heroic Act," quoted by Maxine Greene in *Releasing the Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995), 22.

<sup>50</sup> *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, s.v. "Imagination."

<sup>51</sup> Gerard W. Hughes, *God of Surprises* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 113.

one's own self personally to God through and in Jesus Christ," and because decision making "ultimately comes to deciding for and with Christ, its end result is the free holistic self-giving in the prayer of the 'Contemplation to Attain the Love of God' that concludes the *Exercises*":<sup>52</sup>

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will—all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord. All of it is yours. Dispose of it according to your will. Give me love of yourself along with your grace, for that is enough for me. (no. 234)

## Conclusion

My intent from the beginning has been to name and distinguish what I perceived to be the various uses of the imagination in the *Spiritual Exercises* and to show how Ignatius meant them to contribute to the aim of the Exercises, the shaping of desires and the making of a decision. I have been imagining, if you will, the ideal situation, that of a person making the Exercises in full in order to make "a good and sound election" (no. 178). But not every one makes the Exercises in full, and even if one does, it may not be for the purpose of making an election. From the time of the first Jesuits, as John W. O'Malley, S.J., points out, people had different reasons—"to learn how to pray, to receive more intense spiritual counsel, to move further in their spiritual lives, to reform their lives within their station, and, of course, to make an 'election' about a new station." And because of this diversity of goals, "as well as for other reasons, commentaries insisted that the person guiding the *Exercises* get to know the individual as best he could so that he might accommodate the *Exercises* to that person's particular needs and desires."<sup>53</sup>

In the "ideal situation," as I described it above, the role of the director is undoubtedly important, especially insofar as it involves the use of the imagination. John English, a pioneer in the resurgence of personally directed retreats, reminds us of what Ignatius suggests in the Presupposition (no. 22), that if a person is having difficulty with some aspect of the Exercises, then the director or guide should dialogue with the person to benefit

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<sup>52</sup> Walter J. Ong, S.J., *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 87f. The Hopkins poem from which he quotes is "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe."

<sup>53</sup> John W. O'Malley, S.J., *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 131.

them both. The guide might find it enlightening, English says, to approach the discussion by discovering what the person is imagining.

The direct link between imagination and affectivity suggests that discussion on this level is more beneficial than theoretical dialogue in improving communication between the guide and the retreatant. Therefore, Ignatius's words in the Presupposition, "How do you understand it?" would become "How do you imagine it?"<sup>54</sup>

When all is said and done, may both guide and retreatant give glory to God, "who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:16-20).

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<sup>54</sup> John English, *Spiritual Freedom*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1995), 245.



## SOURCES

### The Learned Father, the Enterprising Scholastic, and the Lovely Garden

#### The Vocation of Antonio Arias, S.J.

*The author of this charming vignette, Antonio Arias, was born in 1548 at Bejar de el Castañar near Palencia in Spain. He studied at the Jesuit college at Alcalá and entered the Society on April 24, 1566. He was first sent to Rome and then to Poland, where he taught theology at Vilna (now Vilnius in Lithuania). Later he was named Latin preacher at the royal court in Poland. He died on March 2, 1591, at the age of 43. Extant is a formal sermon given by Arias at the Synod of Gniezno in October 1589. Taking his inspiration from the words from Scripture "Attendite vobis et universo gregi," the preacher dealt with the twofold responsibilities of bishops.*

*Arias's brief career affords a good example of the ease with which Jesuits could be sent from one end of Europe to the other because of their facility in Latin, the common tongue of educated discourse. Another such instance was Edmund Campion; he was born in England, lived in Rome, and taught in Prague before returning to England.*

*This translation, the work of the late Martin E. Palmer, S.J., is based on the original found in *Vocationum liber autobiographicus Poloniae provinciae proprius* (1574-80), edited by Joseph Warszawski, S.J. (Rome, 1966), 207-12.*

I had just about finished my philosophy curriculum in 1466, when I went to the college of the Society at Alcalá during Lent to go to confession. I was sent—not without God's providence—to a father who was as learned as he was spiritual. After hearing my confession and giving me absolution, he asked me to sit down on his bed (he had heard my confession in his own room close to the door of the college) and began asking me who were my professors in philosophy and what part of the course I was studying. I told him, and he went on to inquire what I was currently taking in class. I answered that we were getting lectures on the *De anima* and that one of the topics being handled was the immortality of the soul. He immediately started a long conversation on the topic with me. This discussion completely won me over: nothing could have been closer to my heart or more agreeable to me. I

thought to myself: "Look how learned these fathers are, how they enjoy scholarly discussion, what a kind and friendly reception they give their visitors: they are so affable and urbane that they can move straight from confession into an intellectual conversation." Actually, I was at that time so wrapped up in metaphysics and so far from any interest in spirituality or religion that nothing else could have produced in me an attraction towards the Society's institute as much as a discussion of this kind. So I altogether dropped my unfavorable opinion of the fathers (I had considered them gloomy souls who never talked about anything but devotion and spirituality) and started coming more often to the college—though I still had no thoughts of entering the Society.

A few days later, a scholastic of the Society—a fellow-classmate of mine in

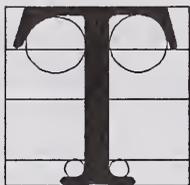
philosophy—invited me to come for a conversation with him about my spiritual state. So I came; I accompanied him into the Alcalá college garden. There I noticed some scholastics walking around; I observed the trees and the stream and I carefully noted how pleasant the garden was. As I did so, I began having thoughts like these: "Look, these Jesuits you thought were so melancholy and reclusive: they don't just study, they also take time for recreation, strolling in their garden, which is really quite lovely. Wouldn't it be nice to serve almighty God in an order like this?" I casually asked the scholastic a few things about the Society's way of life. He answered me in detail. The more I thought about the Society's advantages, the more attracted to it I felt. And so I could not restrain myself from immediately letting the scholastic know my feelings. I admit my motives were excessively materialistic and childish, as is obvious from what I have said. But these motives would never have led me to embrace the Society's institute if I hadn't for some time been aware of the Society's excellent reputation and the fine example of the fathers and scholastics. The scholastic tried to spark my desire still further; and so, as far as I can tell, it was on that very day—there in the garden—that I first conceived a desire to enter the Society. After telling the scholastic my wishes, I asked him to explain my intention to my confessor, the one I have already mentioned. The scholastic agreed and I left.

I had earlier agreed on a day when I would visit my confessor. So I went home; and now King Herod made an effort to slay the newborn Christ in me. For a day and a night I was so gloomy and depressed, so full of disquiet and objections—stemming mainly from love for my parents—that I almost gave up

my resolution. This is what I thought: "Should you have been so thoughtless as to make a commitment like that after just a brief conversation with that scholastic in the college garden? Doesn't a decision of this importance need a lot more time? Should you have made up your mind in such a rush? What will your old father say? What will your brothers say? It will be the most tragic news they could possibly hear." My mind was buffeted on every side by violently disturbing thoughts like these. I was unable to find any rest, either in the house or outside. "What am I going to do?" I said; "I let the Jesuits know what I was thinking and told them I wanted to enter the Society. If I draw back now, I'll never be able to face them again. I'll have to avoid them for the rest of my life."

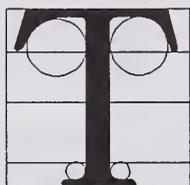
I came very close to changing my mind altogether. But the merciful Lord, who gives calm after a storm, soon scattered this darkness with his heavenly light. On the feast day I went to hear the sermon at the college. I went very reluctantly, almost dragged there, and by no means settled on my vocation. But when the sermon was over, my thoughts and eyes turned towards my confessor's window. He was watching the crowd leave, and I had the impression that he was staring straight at me. So I went to see him and told him about the darkness in my mind. He talked for a long time and helped me overcome my hesitations, and all my objections completely evaporated. And so it was that, with the help of God's grace, I went home happy and cheerful, returning to the college two or three days later to be admitted.

And this took place for the glory of him who enabled me to overcome all my anxieties. ■



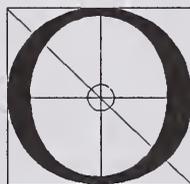
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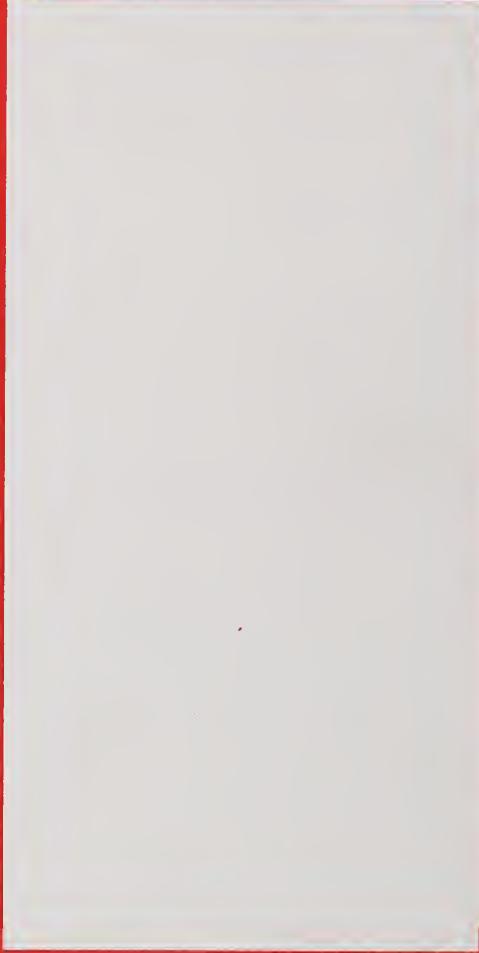
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