



STUDIES

IN
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

Listen with Your Eyes

Interpreting Images in the Spiritual Exercises

RICHARD A. BLAKE, S.J.



THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

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Richard A. Blake, S.J.

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Of all things . . .

The authors and editors of STUDIES try to make sure that whatever appears in this periodical is reasonably clear. A subject may of its nature be abstruse and its treatment may be appropriately dense. But we hope that you know what we want to say, even if at times it may require a mite of perseverance on your part to do so. Thus, it is with a sort of perverse joy that we came across what *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has called “a strong contender for our Worst Prose of the Century Prize.” Robert Louis Stevenson, in his story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, described a fire in a grate and a lamp on a shelf lit while “even in the houses the fog began to lie thickly.” A practitioner of narrative theory says that this description is

a deliberate “poetics of misdirection,” in which the reader’s interpretative energies are turned away from the hermeneutic, semic and symbolic patterns which would be expected to sustain a “cultural” code (in Barthes’s sense of a social referent or message” of fin de siècle social decay and hypocrisy). Instead, the play of narrative identities and code manipulation compels the reader’s interpretative energies elsewhere, in the continual seeking of the moral flaw proscribed by the narrative’s over-subtle but persistently suggestive signs.

So there! Sometimes you may have been tempted to think we were obscure. But if ever contributors do in their prose rise to such sublime heights, please let us know.

More seriously, in the light of the proliferation of “New Age” religions, it may be salutary to recall, as Peter Steinfels, a religion writer for the *New York Times*, noted, that “any list of the world’s major religions in the year 2000 looks very much like the list of the world’s major religions in the year 1000.” It is true that there have been some dropouts, religions that have disappeared or radically declined, such as the Norse Pantheon or the Meso-American religions or Zoroastrianism. And some regional faiths, such as Shinto or Jainism, existed then and exist even now. But “there have been no new [worldwide] contenders.” A thousand years ago the major religious families of today were already major religious families—Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. They have all undergone a variety of changes and splits, but they are still recognizable as the same faiths. New religions do mushroom, of course—everything from Scientology to Sheilaism (the personal religion of a particular young woman named Sheila). But so far experience bears witness that unless in some way they attach themselves to or are absorbed by one of the great long-lasting religious traditions, they eventually disappear. As Steinfels says, “Logically, there seems to be no reason why this must be so. But a pattern of more than a thousand years standing cannot be ignored.” For us Jesuits all of this lends more urgency to the words of General Congregation 34 calling upon us to consider interreligious dialogue a prime characteristic of our apostolic work now and in the future.

From overarching considerations to down-to-earth particulars: Sometimes each of us is so caught up in his own work that he is unaware of what is happening in other apostolates. Nothing world shaking, but here are a few such particulars about Jesuit secondary education in the United States, an apostolate of extraordinary challenge and effectiveness. Of the 2,743 full-time faculty in the forty-six U.S. Jesuit

secondary schools, Jesuit priests, brothers, and scholastics total 219 (7.9%). Laymen are 1,752 (63.3%) and lay and religious women 746 (27.1%). All others total 26 (1.2%). Ethnic minorities among all teachers in the schools of all ten provinces constitute 8.42 percent. The province with the greatest number of ethnic-minority teachers is California, 63 out of 420. Hispanic-Americans with 111 teachers and African-Americans with 74 make up the two largest such groups in the forty-six schools. And finally, more than twenty-seven million dollars was given in financial aid to almost ten thousand students in those Jesuit high schools last year. For other such information and much more besides, look at the JSEA Bulletin, which regularly comes to each Jesuit community.

In the first sentence of the preface to his latest book, Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., writes, "An autobiography this is not." He is right; *Long Have I Loved You: A Theologian Reflects on His Church* is not, strictly speaking, an autobiography. But it is, as he says, the author reflecting on "realities and events, movements and changes, crises and quandaries, theology and spirituality, church and world." It is also, as one reviewer remarked, "a truly masterful combination of church history, history of theology and all its disciplines. . . . Anyone who wants to know anything about the church and theology in the last eighty years must read this book by one who 'has been there and done that!'" The men and women with whom Father Burghardt has reacted, either personally or vicariously through his reading and scholarship, range from St. Anthony the Hermit to Yves Congar, from Martha Graham to Irenaeus of Lyons, from Archbishop Jadot to Macrina the Younger, from Cardinal Spellman to Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, from Ignatius of Loyola to C. S. Lewis. Chapters such as "From Seminary to University: Theology Yesterday and Today," "From Manresa to El Salvador: Jesuit Spirituality," "From Cain to Anti-Christ: Social Injustice and the Just Word," "From Eve to Mary to . . . ?: Women in the Church," and "From Hippocrates to Kevorkian: Catholicism in the Medical Profession" give a sense of the flavor of the book. For those who experienced the Church before Vatican II and then during the council, when "bliss was it in that dawn to be alive," the book will summon up extraordinarily powerful memories. But by no means is it a nostalgic tour of the past. Fr. Burghardt may start with the past in each of the chapters, but in every one of them he moves with assurance up to the present circumstances within which the Church finds itself. A very good read!

And from the past: Three hundred and fifty years ago, in 1650, the Ninth General Congregation had to deal with postulata that complained of teachers "said to waste time on useless questions . . . and treat their subject matters in jumbled order," and with other postulata "seeking relief against some . . . professors who neglected the useful and more necessary questions and pursued the less useful and the less necessary." The congregation was too wise to tackle the problem head-on. It referred to the *Ratio studiorum* and commended the problem to the "vigilance of provincials and rectors."

John W. Padberg, S.J.
Editor

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A NOTICE OF IMMEDIATE IMPORTANCE

On p. 179 of the *Catalogue of the American Assistency* for the year 2000, the telephone and fax numbers of the Institute of Jesuit Sources are incorrectly listed. We retain our customary numbers:

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LISTEN WITH YOUR EYES

Interpreting Images in the Spiritual Exercises

Introduction

Presound Comedy

Charlie Chaplin runs into a crowded restaurant, slips on some soapy water on the floor, and lands spectacularly on his posterior analytics. Marie Dressler, her ample frame filling the screen and providing the customary foil for the diminutive clown, rushes to his aid, hits the same slippery spot, and crashes down on him like a mighty sequoia falling on a chipmunk. This scene from *Tillie's Punctured Romance*, a Mack Sennett masterpiece from 1914, might be considered funny; but if Chaplin, Dressler, and Sennett were looking at the rushes with a class of undergraduate film students today, they might conclude that Charlie should quit the movie business and take up a more promising career, like selling floor wax, soap powder, or collision insurance. No one in the class dares to desecrate the silence of the screening room with laughter.

Anyone hearing this story would readily conclude that their reaction is, of course, predictable. Classrooms, no less than churches, represent serious space; and serious students, like serious churchgoers, carefully insulate themselves from anything potentially enjoyable. (Homiletic humor is more than an oxymoron; it is blasphemy.) This explanation makes sense, but it does not stand up to the empirical data, as serious scholars in the serious disciplines would say. When the Chaplin clip runs a second time,

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this time with the sound on the dubbed track turned on, even the most serious you've-got-to-give-me-an-A-in-this-course-or-my-life-will-be-ruined students will giggle, titter, or guffaw.

The more accurate explanation, I've concluded, is that students—and their parents and teachers, for that matter—cannot “see” a joke. They need audio cues, like the tinkling piano music of the chase, the drum role and cymbal crash of Charlie's slip-and-fall, and the bass drum thud of Marie's impact, before they realize that they are watching something funny. Television sitcom producers understand this principle quite well. They have mastered the art of adding laugh-tracks to the tapes to tell viewers when something funny has happened on the screen. The electronic laughter provides the same effect as music for silent film (or sound film as well), and it has the advantage of being cheaper than a studio orchestra.

The sad fact, I believe, is that several centuries of literacy have robbed us of the ability to see. We are children of word and concept; we are

*Often the creative process
can be quite mysterious,
even to the film makers
themselves.*

uncomfortable, or at least insecure, with silent images presented on canvas and marble, screen and stage. We don't even know when to laugh unless someone gives us a proper signal on the sound track. As my gallant brigade of serious and not-so-serious silent-movie students march through Porter, Griffith, Chaplin, Keaton, Murnau, and Flaherty, my relentless exhortation ripens into a mantra. “Inhale: listen with your eyes; exhale: listen with

your eyes.”

Does this analysis bear the scent of heresy? It may. For several decades now, common-sense orthodox doctrine has affirmed that television addiction at an early age explains the decline in reading and writing skills among even very bright students. It seems to make sense. The corollary asserts that since the one-eyed monster first appeared in the living room, children have moved directly from the teething ring to the remote as the toy of choice. As a result, in this “postliterate” age young people today handle images with much more facility than they can handle words, as though print literacy and image literacy appear in inverse proportions within a fixed quantity of interpretive ability. Unfortunately, this commonly proposed and rarely substantiated thesis does not bear up under scrutiny. Children of the television age, like my Chaplin critics, are not particularly adept at seeing the forms and interpreting images they see on a screen before them. People have to learn how to read pictures and movies just as they progress pains-

takingly from letters, to words, to sentences, to literature. To maintain the opposite—that is, the orthodox position—is to propose some insupportable theory of infused knowledge.

To accept my observations as worthy of reflection is to stare down the barrel of paradox. Who can deny that this past century has gradually but irresistibly enshrined the image? At millennium's end, a goodly proportion of us in the industrialized world spend hours each day staring at television screens and computer monitors. Newsweeklies and newspapers alike have become more lively visual experiences, with photographs, icons and graphs replacing good, solid, gray *Times*-text. In this regard, *USA Today* has become more trendsetter than pariah. Simply put, my point is that in many contemporary cultures images communicate a great deal of information, but at the same time most of us have given little thought to understanding what they do and how they work. But what does all this have to do with prayer?

Postliterate Prayer

By way of coming attractions, in the latter sections of this essay, I hope to use several key ideas from the literature of film criticism to develop a series of analogies—some obvious, others a bit of a stretch—that might provoke some reconsideration of the purely visual elements in the Spiritual Exercises.

First, in creating an image for the screen, film makers select and position items within the frame, devise movement and sound down to precise detail and move their cameras according to careful, predetermined choreography. Occasionally, when a shot is particularly effective, one may call it "inspired." Analogously, in prayer the painstaking process of creating an image to contemplate can be undertaken in an attitude of humble acceptance of God's grace. God "inspires" us to construct the image in one way and not another, just as one can say God "inspires" us to select and fix upon one word or phrase of a Bible text.

Second, often the creative process can be quite mysterious, even to the film makers themselves. In interviews and statements, they can be maddeningly vague about why they chose one image over another and what the image means and what effect is intended. Many find it difficult to verbalize their "inspiration." Interpreting the film and articulating its dynamics in a public and communicable language is the work of the critic. After careful interpretation, the film critic can attempt to judge its meaning and effectiveness on the basis of interior factors, like craftsmanship, and exterior factors, like social relevance. Similarly, after an image or series of images has been contemplated in prayer, a form of criticism—like reflection,

discernment, and conversation with a spiritual director—takes place to unearth the meanings and evaluate their import. This is scarcely novel. Retreatants routinely jot down in a journal or discuss with a spiritual director the passages in Scripture that spoke to them, and try to work out what God is saying to them at a particular point in their lives. Simply stated, contemplated images, the films we prayerfully construct in our minds, no less than the words of Scripture, demand the same careful work of analysis and appreciation that a film critic performs in a screening room.

In the pages that follow, I'd like to suggest that this observation might stimulate a few ideas about interpreting, making, and directing the *Spiritual Exercises* in an age of images. My remarks are intended to supplement and perhaps reinvigorate the more traditional, text-centered approach to retreats, not to replace it. If we expend some effort in creating, pondering, and interpreting the many pictorial images suggested in the text of the *Exercises*, then we also discover a different style of prayer, a different language with which to engage in our ongoing dialogue with God.

Scripture's Benevolent Hegemony

The question under consideration here is not whether the Bible scholarship of the last half century has succeeded in opening the riches of both the Scriptures and the *Spiritual Exercises*—most emphatically, it has—but whether its undoubted success has caused the other forms of prayer proposed in the *Spiritual Exercises* to be undervalued and neglected. I would suggest, then, that both the experience of St. Ignatius in composing the *Spiritual Exercises* as recalled in his “autobiography” and the text of the *Exercises* suggest that the nonverbal elements in prayer were central to the prayer of Ignatius and his followers in his day and that they also provide an important supplement to the current practice of purely scriptural prayer.

More precisely, in no way should my comments be construed as an attempt to compromise the primary role of Scripture in prayer. Like most American Jesuits, I have filled the oversized margins of my own red, dog-eared copy of Puhl's 1968 edition of the *Spiritual Exercises* with Scripture references.¹ Each year I add a few more. As director, I draw upon these key

¹ *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, Based on Studies of the Language of the Autograph*, trans. Louis J. Puhl, S.J. (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press). Originally published in a standard-size cloth edition, this work was reissued in 1970 in paperback form by Loyola Press of Chicago, then called Loyola University Press. This edition

texts to provide suggestions; as retreatant, almost unconsciously I evaluate directors on their ability to provide previously unfamiliar texts or original spins on the old favorites. For me, the *Exercises* and Scripture are inextricably joined, and in all probability they will remain so.

This was not always the case. Reliance on Scripture for the private prayer made during a retreat marks an enormous change from the old-style preached retreat so common in the preconciliar period of this century. Not to be confused with today's "guided" retreats, during which conferences often prepare a group for their own individual private reflections on Scripture, these earlier styles of retreats given for religious as well as lay people routinely consisted of a series of exhortations, conferences, and sermons, where the success of the experience was frequently measured by the rhetorical skills of the retreat master. In some instances, little time for personal prayer was anticipated after the oral presentation, and reading a good spiritual book rather than weighing the words of Scripture filled the rest of the day.

Building on the enormous advances in Bible scholarship in the preceding years, the Second Vatican Council changed the way Catholics regarded the Bible, and consequently the way we made retreats. Fortuitously, the widespread development of the directed-retreat movement and other forms of more personalized prayer occurred in harmony with the council's unequivocal message about Sacred Scripture:

[L]ike the Christian religion itself, the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power of the word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of the spiritual life. . . .

Easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful.²

In a note to this paragraph, R. A. F. MacKenzie, S.J., the prominent Scripture scholar chosen to do the introduction to the text of the document, refers to this statement as "most novel." He continues, "Not since the early centuries of the Church has an official document urged the availability of the

features wide margins.

² "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei verbum*)," chap. 6, nos. 212f., in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (New York: Guild, 1967), 125f.

Scriptures for all.”³ Not only did this new attitude toward Scripture as a privileged source of God’s revelation transform the Sunday sermon into a homily on the readings of the Lectionary, but it also changed the content and style of the Spiritual Exercises. In the years immediately following the council, the times of private reflection on the texts of Scripture became more central to the retreat experience than the presentations of the retreat master or other devotional practices.

The Exercises and the Word

At this point the decades of scholarship invested in revitalizing the study of Scripture that preceded the council’s endorsement of the primal role of Scripture in the life of the Church bore extraordinary dividends for the Spiritual Exercises. To cite one arbitrarily selected but obvious example, as early as 1967 David Stanley, S.J., published his splendid study *A Modern Scriptural Approach to the Spiritual Exercises*. In its pages, he illuminated key Scripture texts with the light of contemporary Bible scholarship and applied the newly understood meanings to the appropriate exercises. In his introductory comments, he echoes the theme of the council by explaining Scripture as a privileged form of God’s self-revelation.⁴ As the title of the book indicates, Stanley is using Scripture as the most important and perhaps the only way to approach the Exercises, and his and other similar approaches have been considered normative ever since.

Despite his heavy reliance on Scripture, by no means does Stanley suggest that making the Exercises can be reduced to a technique of literary analysis. One engaged in prayer, he explains, must involve the whole person to grasp God’s message in its entirety. As a result, contemplation and the involvement of the senses help one to grasp the full meaning of the text. “The Ignatian contemplation,” he writes, “aims at showing the exercitant how to integrate himself into the dialogue between God and man in his own era and culture.”⁵ (Stanley’s use of noninclusive language marks him as a person of his own era and culture.) He develops the argument by continuing the analogy between prayer and human dialogue. At the risk of oversimplifying his point, we could interpret Stanley as assuming the primacy of the language in prayer. In this view, nonverbal avenues of prayer, like images, while useful, become mere access roads that eventually lead to

³ Ibid., 126 n.50.

⁴ David M. Stanley, S.J., *A Modern Scriptural Approach to the Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: The Institute of Jesuit Sources and Loyola University Press, 1967), 8.

⁵ Ibid., 5f.

the interstate, which is Scripture-centered prayer. Of necessity scriptural prayer originates in words and leads to dialogue, which by its nature consists in words.

Although I may overstate the case a bit to point out the emphasis on verbal communication and linguistic analogies that have become commonplace in today's thinking about the Exercises, Stanley's position is neither narrow nor prescriptive. He merely writes from his own perspective and expertise, which is language. In fact, twenty years later, in *I Encountered God! The Spiritual Exercises with the Gospel of St. John*, he criticizes nineteenth-century Jesuits for speaking "almost exclusively of 'meditation' to the neglect of the abundant variety of 'ways of praying' indicated in the Ignatian text itself."⁶ In this later study he reveals extraordinary perceptiveness on the use of the senses, especially vision, in the text of John's Gospel (25-29). Stanley explains the extent to which John relied on the senses to recount the signs of Jesus' self-revelation that he includes in his Gospel. In subsequent chapters, he demonstrates that Ignatian contemplations, of course, invite a re-creating of John's vivid narrative through the powers of the imagination. He argues persuasively that the visual imaginations of John and Ignatius complement each other effectively in a retreat situation.

Although Stanley's reflections ascribe enormous importance to the senses, for him the written text of Scripture remains supreme. Significantly, he entitles one section of this chapter "The Senses in the Service of the Gospel." This is perfectly consistent with his understanding that "meditation" precedes "contemplation" as a form of preparation. One begins by meditating on a text and at some moment marked by grace reaches a point of contemplation, when the prayer becomes a more personal encounter with God; and this in turn leads to a deeper appreciation of the text. In the Ignatian language, this deeper, more personal grasp of the words and concepts can be called "consolation."⁷ As he carefully explains through the words of Ignatius, this "consolation" must be understood with the proper realization of "receiving the gifts, of their origin 'from above'" (16). It seems reasonable to conclude that human activity is confined to meditating upon texts, either Scripture or the *Exercises*, while contemplation requires a gift from God.

⁶ David M. Stanley, S.J., *I Encountered God! The Spiritual Exercises with the Gospel of St. John* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986), 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

Varieties of Contemplation

Since I will be using the term “contemplation” with a much more earth-bound sense, as I believe Ignatius does, a distinction is important at this point. In his supplementary notes to *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, a comprehensive study of Jesuit spirituality by Joseph de Guibert, S.J., the editor, George E. Ganss, S.J., draws a clear line between “infused” contemplation, also called “mystical prayer,” which is a pure gift from God, and “acquired” contemplation, which “is the result both of the person’s activity and of grace. He [the human subject] can take a certain initiative.”⁸ Ganss cautions, however, that “there is not as sharp a division between these forms of mental prayer as the unwary might suppose.” As an example of the ambiguity in the term, he cites Ignatius, who in the meditation on the Incarnation seems to use contemplation to mean simply “seeing in the imagination.”⁹ As such it can be discursive, the result of reasoning, or affective, the personal response to what is being viewed.

As I use the term “contemplation,” I do not mean anything particularly extraordinary. On the contrary, I will stress almost exclusively the role of human activity in struggling with visible pictures in the imagination, just as Stanley and the rest of us who make the Exercises regularly wrestle with the words of a text in the intellect. Constructing a scene, or doing a “composition of place,” as Ignatius quite frequently invites the retreatant to do, need not be merely a brief stage setting or prelude to the meditation. It can be a rewarding, illuminating form of prayer in its own right, as it seems to have been for Ignatius himself.

The Manresa Experience

Although his conversion began with words, first reading romances and then the lives of Christ, St. Francis, and St. Dominic during his recuperation at Loyola, Ignatius almost immediately converted what he read into the stuff of fantasy. Some of these fantasies were decidedly secular in content and possibly obsessive. He writes in his autobiography, “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

⁸ Joseph de Guibert, S.J., *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972), 606.

⁹ *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, ed. and trans. George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), nos. 101–17 (pp. 56–59). Subsequent references to the *Spiritual Exercises* in this essay are made to this edition.

certain lady" (6).¹⁰ On one occasion, he recounts his recollection of an image that did not seem to be the result of any deliberate daydreaming on his part, but rather an unprovoked phantasm: "[H]e saw clearly an image of Our Lady with the holy Child Jesus" (10). The sight of this likeness, he continues, led him to feel "such loathing for his whole past life, and especially for the things of the flesh, that it seemed to him that his spirit was rid of all the figures that had been painted on it." As a final experience of his conversion period, he describes being so moved by passages from a life of Christ that he copied out these passages in inks of various colors; but in the next sentence, he remarks, "The greatest consolation was gazing at the sky and the stars, which he often did and for long, because he thus felt within himself a very great impulse to serve Our Lord" (11).

The narrative presents clear evidence of an enormous variety in Ignatius's experiences of visual prayer during this period. Fantasies about doing great deeds like those of St. Francis and St. Dominic obviously "arose from the things he read" (7). Similarly, the fantasies about serving a noble lady had their roots in the romances, and the vision of the Blessed Mother and Child was no doubt suggested by reading the life of Christ. His contemplation of the heavens, however, seems spontaneous and without being suggested by readings. Some arose from such intense effort that only when "he tired of it [he] put it aside and turned to other matters" (7), while others seem to have taken him quite by surprise. In reference to the appearance of our Lady, for example, he writes simply, "[I]t may be considered the work of God" (10). Some seemed to fit into a pattern of ongoing reflection, while others led directly from visual experience to a change in his life. Thus the sight of Mother and Child freed him from images of "offenses of the flesh," and gazing upon the heavens led directly to a desire "to be serving our Lord."

The narrative presents clear evidence of an enormous variety in Ignatius's experiences of visual prayer during this period.

During the months at Manresa the following year, 1522, Ignatius continues to find great consolation and strength from his visual experiences, which by this time clearly fall into the category of "infused" contemplation,

¹⁰ *A Pilgrim's Testament: The Memoirs of St. Ignatius of Loyola As Transcribed by Luis Gonçalvez da Câmara*, trans. Parmananda R. Divarkar, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995). Here and later, numbers enclosed in parentheses following texts written by Ignatius indicate the paragraph numbers of the document cited; in citations from other books, they indicate page numbers.

that is, a gift from God communicated spontaneously without planning on the part of Ignatius. During a stay in the local hospital, he saw “something” that “seemed to him to have the form of a serpent with many things that shone like eyes, though they were not. He found great pleasure and consolation in seeing this thing” (19). At the same time, images brought disquiet. After resolving to abstain from meat, he recalls, “edible meat appeared before him as if he saw it with his ordinary eyes” (27). Although his confessor believed this image might be a temptation, Ignatius was certain that it was a sign that he should eat meat.

At the conclusion of this homey story about his dietary strategies, Ignatius composes a list of five “points,” as he calls them, each of which involves an instance of illumination, and each of which occurs to him in the form of some visual representation.

1. As he was at prayer, he saw the Trinity “in the form of three musical keys” (28). As a result, he continues, “the effect has remained with him throughout his life of feeling great devotion while praying to the Most Holy Trinity.”

2. He reached a profound understanding of God’s creating the world when he saw “something white from which some rays were coming, and God made light from these” (29). He adds, “He did not know how to explain these things.”

3. While attending Mass, “he saw with the interior eyes something like white rays coming from above. Although he cannot explain this very well after so long a time, nevertheless what he saw clearly with his understanding was how Jesus Christ our Lord was there in that Most Holy Sacrament” (29).

4. At prayer during this time, he frequently “saw with interior eyes the humanity of Christ. The form that appeared to him was like a white body, neither very large nor very small, but he did not see any distinction of members” (29). He adds an intriguing comment: “[H]e has often thought to himself that if there were no Scriptures to teach us these matters of faith, he was resolved to die for them, solely because of what he had seen.”

5. Sitting on the banks of the Cardoner, Ignatius experienced an illumination—not a vision, he insists—that enabled him to see and understand “both spiritual things and matters of faith and of scholarship” (30).

Ignatius frustrates his readers with these recollections. Not only are the descriptions of the images extremely vague, but the conclusions he draws from them are nonexistent. As Ganss and de Guibert both point out, Ignatius and his followers were extremely reluctant to speak of gifts of

infused contemplation.¹¹ The reasons they offer are complex. Ignatius realized clearly that such prayer is simply a gift from God, and he could do little to explain it. In his autobiography, he simply and modestly mentions that “something” happened. The best he can offer is a description in some detail about the observable circumstances surrounding it. For example, in describing the event at the Cardoner, he recalls that he was going to a church possibly called St. Paul’s, about a mile distant from Manresa. The road ran close to the river, and he sat facing the water, which was deep at this point. After recounting these circumstances carefully, he says of his experience that “everything seemed new to him. The details that he understood then, though there were many, cannot be stated” (30).

In recalling the months at Manresa, Ignatius feels perfectly free to recount minute personal details of his digestive disorders and personal hygiene, like cutting his hair and nails, his diet, and the length of time he spent on his knees in prayer. The moments of personal intimacy with God, however, seem beyond words for him. The contrast with the account of his earlier Loyola experience is also striking. He cites the books he read during his recuperation, what thoughts they provoked in him and how he acted upon what he read or imagined as a result of his reading. He is willing to communicate a great deal about texts and concepts, as have his commentators through the centuries, but much less about the images that seem to have been equally important in his ongoing dialogue with God.

This apparent emphasis on texts and external details in Ignatius’s own writings and in his later commentators, coupled with their reluctance to treat in detail many “visions,” should not lead to a conclusion that he thought images were superfluous in prayer. As I hope to show, the reverence for visual images that Ignatius developed during the period in which he felt God speaking to him most vividly in nonverbal signs leaves clear traces in the *Spiritual Exercises*, which he was composing during his months at Manresa.

Image and Conversation

Even though he is reticent about his own visual prayer, and his development of visual imaginings receives relatively little attention in more recent Bible-centered experiences of the Exercises, Ignatius’s actual reliance on scriptural and non-scriptural images in the pages of the *Spiritual Exercises* is quite extensive. From the perspective of today’s world of readily available and generously annotated Bibles, the frequency and importance of imaginary

¹¹ Ganss, *Spiritual Exercises*, 165; de Guibert, *Jesuits*, 562.

situations seems quite remarkable. As people of words and concepts, we look upon polychrome, illustrated Bibles and prayerbooks as somewhat suspect. We might generously explain Ignatius's frequent use of these images in the context of his times. One would be tempted to attribute it to the historical period in which printed Bibles were less accessible and some prospective retreatants could be expected to be illiterate.¹² As Europe worked its way out of the medieval world and into the Renaissance, stained glass and didactic paintings on the walls of churches filled the ordinary believers' need for spiritual nourishment and inspiration. It was quite reasonable that Ignatius should include the kinds of visualizations that the devout would be accustomed to.

This explanation may be too facile, however. In years immediately after Manresa, the *Exercises* became more than a private spiritual journal and set of personal reflections. Ignatius soon began to use his notes to lead others step by step to greater levels of commitment and intimacy with God, and the mode of transmission was conversation. In these exchanges between director and retreatant, words, texts, and concepts more easily lend themselves to the discernment process and election than do detailed descriptions of pictures that develop in the imagination. No doubt these visualizations made the conversations between director and retreatant more difficult, and an astute editor using feedback from the field would suggest minimizing them. Ignatius certainly realized that images are sloppy, inconclusive, and—if his own writings are any indication—all but ineffable. Nonetheless, in his roles of author, editor, and practitioner he continued to include them. Fantasies and visual images had played an important role in his own life, and he believed they could be useful in helping him lead others to God.

Surely, Ignatius did not expect many of his retreatants to experience the gifts of “infused” contemplation that he had received, and just as surely he knew that he could not presume to lead anyone to that point. What he did seem to expect is that those making the Exercises would routinely find God speaking to them as they labored to construct detailed pictures of, for example, the “Temporal King,” whose call contrasts with that of the “Eternal King” (91–97). In the book of the *Exercises*, it should be noted, these imaginary scenarios by themselves provided the prayer for the entire day. Today, commonly, these imagined scenes would be used to suggest a theme to be explored in a series of Scripture passages. For example, on the pages that contain the Meditation on the Two Standards (136–48), my own copy

¹² In the Introductory Explanations of the *Exercises*, no. 18, Ignatius explicitly makes provision for those who are illiterate.

of the Puhl edition of the *Exercises* contains fourteen texts listed in the margins, from Kings and Isaiah through Matthew, the Epistles, and Revelation.

In his remarkable essay "Loyola," Roland Barthes offers a series of helpful reflections on the nature of this kind of prayer of imagination.¹³ In presenting his various contemplations and visual meditations, as Barthes accurately notes, Ignatius composes only the vaguest of suggestions. To establish his case, Barthes chooses the example of the meditation on hell to show that the images in the *Exercises* are "banal, skeletal" in comparison to other ascetical writers of the period, who piled detail upon detail to make their images of hell ever more frightening. One could also note at this point that Barthes's observation is quite congruent with Ignatius's reluctance to offer any details about his own visual experiences in his autobiography. In both cases he offers only a lapidary hint about what he has seen.

Barthes believes that Ignatius regards the imagination as an intellectual cipher. He does not ask retreatants to draw the images either from vivid descriptions given orally by the director, from the printed page, from paintings, or from their own "reservoir" of images drawn from memory. The imagination must be given free rein to operate completely on its own, with total originality. Everything that distracts from the subject of contemplation must be eliminated, so that the resulting construction of an original visual picture in the imagination takes place exclusively through the collaboration between the exercitant and God.

Barthes's observation suggests two further reflections. First, the one making the contemplation deliberately empties the mind of past images, like a favorite painting, statue, or pictures derived from the words of Scripture, from poetry, or ascetical writing; thus the retreatant begins with a blank canvas, and the process of filling it provides the opportunity for "the Father in heaven [to meet] His children and [speak] with them," much as God does with the words of Scripture. In other words, creating the images from nothing without adapting prior material can, under the guidance of grace, become an experience of divine inspiration. This principle was clearly enunciated in the second of the Introductory Explanations, when Ignatius cautions the director to offer "only a brief or summary explanation. For in this way the person who is contemplating, by taking this history as the authentic foundation, and by reflecting on it and reasoning about it for oneself, can thus discover something that will better bring understanding or a more personalized concept of the history—either through one's reasoning or insofar as the understanding is enlightened by God's grace" (2). The

¹³ Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 50, 52.

personal, private image created under God's inspiration clearly holds a greater value than the image recollected and reconstructed from external sources.

Second, the human effort involved in the act of the individual imagination becomes totally liberated from precedent. It is free to create without restriction from external realities. This is important, since we children of the current century are victims as well as beneficiaries of the age of science. C. S. Lewis, for example, writes that if he tried to re-create the scenes of the Gospel stories, he would be distracted by his modern sense of archaeology: "I'd know I wasn't getting them right."¹⁴ Surely, he is not alone in his reluctance to free his imagination from the academics' compulsion for accuracy. And although we can all point out the disastrous effects of a misguided imagination in creating bad religious art, I might suggest that the problem for Lewis and for the rest of us probably lies in precisely the opposite direction. Rather than risk creating images poorly, we are content not to create them at all. This freedom of the imagination to form its own image resonates easily with the current practice of reading Gospels more as a series of illuminating stories about Jesus than as a biography composed to meet today's criteria for scientific historical accuracy.

What is the scope of the liberated imagination at work on the blank canvas? It is limitless, and thus not bound by historical or archaeological reality. For example, rather than trying to picture the clothes and utensils Jesus used, the look of his face (as suggested from prior experience of a painting, perhaps), and the sound of his voice (speaking the American English of a fine actor or radio announcer), it may be just as "accurate" for the purposes of contemplation to see Christ in the face of a loved one, in the wasted body of an AIDS patient or in the African or Asian features of those we join in ministry. Perhaps, too, the school or parish or prison may provide a more suggestive setting for meeting the Lord than Galilee as presented in the pages of the *National Geographic* or as reproduced in biblical movies. A modern

In privileged moments of grace, the creative imagination, freed from literal truth, can approach God in the most unlikely guises in the most surprising settings.

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), 84. This particular essay is cited in Ernest C. Ferlita, "The Road to Bethlehem—Is It Level or Winding? The Use of the Imagination in the Spiritual Exercises," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 29, no. 5 (November 1997): 9.

artist like Georges Rouault (1871–1958) never felt the need for scientific accuracy as he created extremely moving portraits of Jesus outlined in thick, black brush strokes. When casting his *Jesus of Montreal* (1989), the Canadian film director Denys Arcand found his Jesus in an out-of-work actor living in contemporary Montreal; and when preparing *La Strada* (1954), the Italian Federico Fellini found him in a circus clown played by Richard Basehart. In privileged moments of grace, the creative imagination, freed from literal truth, can approach God in the most unlikely guises in the most surprising settings. In such moments as these, prayer is the poet’s revenge on the theologian.

A Note of Caution

Ignatius and his followers have been understandably cautious in dealing with contemplations for fear of “illusions.”¹⁵ This caution is particularly appropriate in the case of possible “infused” contemplation; but since there is continuity and overlapping between the gift of mystical prayer and more ordinary forms of contemplation currently under discussion, this hesitation deserves a moment of reflection even as we consider the type of contemplation more familiar to most of us. The warning is not frivolous. The visual imagination, no less than the intellect, provides fertile ground for self-delusion. In prayer, a person may construct a mental image that may be just as misleading as a skewed interpretation of a Scripture passage. A self-induced hallucination can be as disruptive of efforts to serve Christ as an eisogetic, idiosyncratic, and wrong-headed reading of a Gospel passage. Both can lead to inappropriate conclusions.

The same safeguards are available in both cases, however. Within the text of the *Exercises*, Ignatius provides an extensive list of rules for the discernment of spirits (313–36). Two are particularly pertinent. First, the role of a director can be helpful (326). While the contemplation itself is personal, almost ineffable, as Ignatius’s own writings testify, still the effort to describe an image with some particularity and weigh its various meanings and consequences with a sensitive director can help peel away possible self-deceptions. A practical question should be raised at this point: Are many directors prepared to try to co-imagine with their exercitants? Most of us are more versed in discussing texts, concepts, and, in the context of a retreat, feelings, the “various motions that are caused in the soul” (313), than they are in examining the images of a contemplation. The retreat journal or “light book” routinely provides the basis for these conversations about meanings

¹⁵ De Guibert, *Jesuits*, 563.

derived from texts. My experience is admittedly limited, but I have never yet heard of anyone's using a sketch pad for the same purpose. Given the variety of presenting the Exercises today, some probably do; but unless I am quite mistaken, they certainly form a small minority.

Second, Ignatius encourages exercitants to recollect their experiences in an atmosphere of tranquillity (333), tracing their origin and aftermath. Surely the same method of reflection can be applied to visual images. If, for example, in the meditation on sin in the First Week, a retreatant endeavoring to see Christ crucified will in all probability reflect on the traditional image of a crucifix. If, however, the Christ in the imagination is not the familiar icon, but a vivid image of a homeless person stretched out on a ventilation grate, then clearly the image itself calls for inquiry. If the image is disquieting, it may strike a retreatant with an awareness that his or her own sinfulness consists in a lack of compassion for the marginalized. It may signify the work of "the good spirit," who "stings their consciences with feelings of remorse" (314). Having resolved to become more conscientious in the service of the poor, the exercitant may derive great consolation from the same image of the downtrodden Christ (as he does in the Second Week), interpreting it as an affirmation of the person's intention "to grow and rise from what is good to what is better" (331). If the image continues to disquiet the exercitant at this point, it may well be a temptation to abandon one's resolution as unrealistic or even repulsive.

Image without Scripture

Aware of the benefits of contemplative prayer and with these safeguards in mind, Ignatius filled the pages of the *Spiritual Exercises* with all sorts of imaginative forms of prayer, and in many instances he proposed these forms of visualized prayer without any explicit reference to the Bible. Reading straight through the text of the *Spiritual Exercises* with this in mind and without looking at the Scripture texts penciled into the margins can be a revealing experience. The point is obvious after a moment's reflection. The composition of place figures prominently in all the exercises as the first prelude, during which the exercitant "see[s] in imagination the physical place where that which I want to contemplate is taking place" (47). Ignatius insists on making this act of visualization at the start of each of the exercises: "All the

Surely, in making the Contemplatio, re-creating the vivid detail based on personal experience holds the key to the result Ignatius intends from the reflection.

that which I want to contemplate is taking place" (47). Ignatius insists on making this act of visualization at the start of each of the exercises: "All the

contemplations or meditations ought to be preceded . . . by the two preludes, which are sometimes changed in accordance with the subject matter" (49).

Even beyond the prelude common to each reflection, Ignatius constructs all the key meditations either explicitly around a visualized scenario or proposes a series of reflections that can profitably be made with a strong visual component. None of these have a scriptural element as presented in the book of the *Exercises*. Among the key meditations explicitly based on non-scriptural imagined scenarios are the Kingdom (92–95), the Incarnation (106–8), the Two Standards (140–46), and the Three Classes (153–56). Others invite the use of the visual imagination without the use of Scripture to augment the proposed reflection. Among these could be listed the Principle and Foundation (23), the meditation on the Sin of the Angels (50), on the Sin of Those Already Condemned (52) and their associated colloquies (54), and on Hell (68–71). By way of exception, the Sin of Adam (51) is based on the Genesis narratives, although even in this instance the emphasis seems to lie in the aftermath of the sin, which is an extrapolation from a scriptural text, "They lived out their whole lives in great hardship and penance." This kind of suggestion readily prompts the construction of an imaginative, postlapsarian scenario.

Finally, in the Contemplation to Attain Love (234–37) Ignatius encourages a series of reflections on images of concrete, visual realities, but in characteristically schematic fashion. As in so many instances, he provides stark outlines, like drawings in a coloring book. He expects the exercitants to color in the details from their own favorite collection of oils, water colors, or Crayolas. Exercitants are instructed to pass from abstraction and generality: "the gifts I have received—my creation, redemption, and other gifts particular to myself," that is, "all my possessions" (234)—and then proceed to more concrete reflections on plants, animals, and human beings (235), indeed, to "all creatures on the face of the earth[:] elements, plants, fruits, cattle, and all the rest" (236). Finally, Ignatius exhorts the exercitant to "consider how all good things and gifts descend from above . . . just as rays come down from the sun" (237). Ignatius's failure to supply concrete details, once again corresponds to his reluctance to speak in any detail about his own visual experiences in prayer and is consonant with his own directive in the second Introductory Explanation, which encourages the director to provide "only a brief or summary explanation" so that "the person who is contemplating, by taking this history as the authentic foundation, and by reflecting on it and reasoning about it for oneself, can thus discover something that will bring better understanding or a more personalized concept of the history" (2). Surely, in making the *Contemplatio*, re-creating

the vivid detail based on personal experience holds the key to the result Ignatius intends from the reflection.

Similarly, the contemplations that Ignatius provides as the core of the Second, Third, and Fourth Weeks presuppose a visual reconstruction of episodes from either the Gospels or a life of Christ (262–312). The role of the written text of the New Testament in the genesis of these exercises is somewhat problematic, however. These contemplations are based on scriptural material, with a few exceptions, like the first apparition of the Risen Christ, to His Mother (299), and the twelfth apparition, to Joseph of Aramathea, “as may be piously meditated and as we read in the Lives of the Saints” (310). Ganss speculates that the initial form of this supplementary material was probably composed in its initial form while Ignatius was still at Manresa in 1522, before he learned Latin. Spanish translations of the Gospels were rare before 1569. The series of contemplations that Ignatius compiled in this early period follow the form and sequence of the *Life of Christ* by Ludolph of Saxony. The references to chapter and verse, common to editions of the *Spiritual Exercises*, were taken from the Latin Vulgate. Ganss suggests that these contemplations were refined and the modern chapter-and-verse Scripture references were added when Ignatius had access to the Latin Bible after his university studies in Paris.¹⁶ We face the startling conclusion, then, that Ignatius quite probably collected his fifty-one contemplations on the “mysteries” of the life of Jesus with little direct reliance on the words of the New Testament.

The anomaly becomes even more striking when we, who generally make the Exercises with a copy of the Bible before us at all times, realize that our practice was not always the case when Ignatius and his followers began their retreat ministry. As he describes the early Jesuits’ gradual acceptance of the use of small, portable Bibles in the vernacular, despite their Protestant origins, John O’Malley, S.J., suggests that it is “mere surmise” to assume that audiences had a text in hand when they attended the popular sacred lectures on the Bible.¹⁷ His research on the use of Bibles during retreats at this time is also inconclusive. He continues thus:

¹⁶ Ganss, *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 261, n. 136 (p. 188). A fuller account of the composition of the contemplations is provided in Santiago Arzubialde, S.J., *Ejercicios Espirituales de S. Ignacio: Historia y analysis* (Bilbao-Santander: Mensajero, Sal Terrae, 1991), 559–61.

¹⁷ John W. O’Malley, S.J., *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 258.

The *Exercises* were for the most part based on the Gospels and specifically recommended that they be read, which some people surely would have to do in vernacular translations. Nonetheless, in keeping with the tradition of the *Devotio Moderna*, the *Exercises* did not so much confront the individual with a text as with an image or scene. Although persons might read parts of the Gospels while making the *Exercises*, they could just as well read a “life of Christ.”

The early practice of giving the *Exercises*, no less than that of delivering sacred lectures, utilized an oral medium, with the director “describing” the contents of the day’s contemplations to persons who may or may not have access to a Bible, and if they did, may or may not have read it in conjunction with a particular exercise. In any event, the text of the *Exercises* was intended for use by the director only, and not the exercitant.¹⁸

Printing and Writing

Technology soon changed the role of the printed page and writing in the ministry of the *Exercises*. The *Spiritual Exercises* themselves were first printed in 1548, while Ignatius was still alive. Around the same time vernacular Bibles started to appear throughout Europe. By 1593 Nadal’s version of the Gospels appeared with 153 copperplate illustrations to help a reader meditate on the events related in the texts used in the liturgy or during the *Exercises*.¹⁹

The *Directory of 1599*, a handbook of suggestions for those leading others through the *Exercises*, provides several recommendations that seem to imply an increasingly widespread use of written materials. The *Directory* assumes and even encourages the practice of reading during the time of retreat, listing books suitable for use during the *Exercises*: portions of the Gospels, *The Imitation of Christ*, and the lives of the saints.²⁰ With regard to Scripture, the authors of the *Directory* prescribe that “[i]n reading the Gospels, also, the exercitant should only read the mystery upon which he is

¹⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹⁹ Gauvin Alexander Bailey, “The Jesuits and Painting in Italy, 1550–1690: The Art of Catholic Reform,” in *Saints and Sinners: Caravaggio and the Baroque Image*, ed. Franco Mormando, S.J. (Chestnut Hill, Mass.: McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College [distributed by University of Chicago Press] 1999), 153. See also, O’Malley, *First Jesuits*, 164.

²⁰ “The Official Directory of 1599,” in *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599*, trans. and ed. Martin E Palmer, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), no. 29 (p. 296f.).

formed about the various agitations and thoughts which the different spirits stir up in the retreatant. For then, in accordance with the person's greater or lesser progress, the director will be able to communicate spiritual Exercises adapted to the needs of the person who is agitated in this way" (17). According to Ignatius, the director should first listen to the exercitant's account of the prayer of the previous day and then propose reflections based on what he had heard. In a relatively short period of time, less than half a century after the death of Ignatius, the *Directory* seems to condone the practice of handing a retreatant a piece of paper, which could probably be prepared in advance of listening to anything the retreatant had to say. If this was indeed the case, it would appear that an enormous change had taken place in the way Jesuits gave the Exercises.

Why did this change take place so rapidly? As those of us can testify who have at first reacted angrily against the Internet and then struggled to learn how to use it well, technology can bring about change only if people are willing and ready to use it. While Europe was moving from a medieval oral culture to a modern print culture, the Jesuits were moving into the schools.²¹ From the early 1540s, Jesuits had been lecturing in theology at the universities. Although some had been teaching reading, writing, and catechism in Goa as early as 1543, the opening of the first "Jesuit" school in Messina in 1548 is generally considered the beginning of the order's commitment to general education, that is, reading and writing, grammar, and languages, as well as to the ecclesiastical disciplines. Just as professors and teachers today find themselves immersed in a world of computers and web sites, the Jesuits in the latter half of the sixteenth century, modern men that they were, were inundated with books, all kinds of books to use in their teaching. Books and writing quickly became their normal and probably preferred media of communication.

Another practical consideration enters the picture, and another comparison is instructive. American Jesuits who entered the novitiate before, say, 1970 can surely remember the huge community retreats "preached" in the chapels of virtually every house of studies each summer. Within a very short period of time, the numbers of scholastics declined rapidly while the people entering religious life became a quite diverse population. Because of this unrelated combination of trends, the individually directed retreat, a practical impossibility in huge houses of studies before the 1970s, quickly replaced the older "house retreat." A scholastic today cannot even imagine the earlier style.

²¹ In "The Schools," chapter 6 of his book, O'Malley documents the Jesuits' rapid movement into the ministry of education.

Conversely, in the latter half of the sixteenth century, as more Jesuits began giving the Exercises to greater numbers, the use of print and writing became a practical necessity. The use of books and written notes frequently replaced the more personalized but time-consuming process of interpersonal dialogue. A text of the *Spiritual Exercises* and a directory could provide a one-size-fits-all outline for the director, and a copy of the New Testament, with or without illustrations, placed in the hands of a retreatant, increased efficiency enormously. It simply takes less time to give a Scripture reference than to take the time to describe an incident orally.

The more extensive use of written materials, however, does not altogether explain the relative neglect of visual images. Three additional factors might be considered.

The first is the central role of the Election in the Exercises. Ignatius provides for “three times” for making a choice during the time of retreat. The first is “an occasion when God our Lord moves and attracts the will in such a way that a devout person, without doubting or being able to doubt, carries out what has been proposed” (175). This occurs rarely and may be compared to St. Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus. The second involves “sufficient clarity and knowledge” from discerning “consolations and desolations” (176). The third demands a decision-making process that is essentially a logical, conceptual process of weighing options. The second method, based largely on affections, should be tested by the third, which is the more rational and thus more open to discussion and testing with the help of a spiritual director. Ganss comments that the second and third “supplement each other.”²² In the practice of giving or making the Exercises, the Election could not be trusted until it was subjected to the test of the intellect. Images and affections on their own were scarcely sufficient to ground a valid election, which was considered the central point of making the Spiritual Exercises.

But is it really? In the same section of his commentary on the Election, Ganss notes, “The main structure of Ignatius’ *text* chiefly concerns a person deliberating about election of a state of life.”²³ Of course. The outline of the *Spiritual Exercises* grew out of Ignatius’s own conversion experience at Manresa. As directors became more reliant on the printed text, the consideration of the Election remained a core chapter in the book they were using, even though most people making the Exercises—priests or religious making their annual retreats, for example—no longer entered the period of prayer in order to choose a state of life. In these circumstances the

²² Ganss, *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 176, n. 96 (p. 177).

²³ No. 170, n. 94 (p. 176), emphasis added.

simple “loving gaze” of contemplation might be a perfectly sufficient, rewarding form of prayer. A sensitive director, feeling free to adapt the Exercises without excessive dependence on the text, could respond to the needs and desires of the individual, experienced exercitant by encouraging this form of prayer. Taken in its literary form, however, the book, as it came to be used as a substitute for dialogue, continues to propose weighing logical conclusions reached from considering texts and concepts that support a decision or election. With this as an underlying principle, the workings of the imagination can be considered a less desirable and riskier form of prayer than clear, analytical reason. In these early years, with the memory of the founder still vivid, only with some hesitation would a director take it upon himself to omit one of the key chapters in the book of Master Ignatius.

De Guibert deals extensively with this apparent discrepancy between the way Ignatius actually conceived of using the Exercises with people who were not making an election on a state of life and the rigidity of the

text as it was interpreted and used by his followers.²⁴ He observes that in the very last month of his life, July 1556, Ignatius made this point in reference to giving the Exercises to Jesuits, and in the previous year he made a similar point about religious women. The Election need not mean what the text implies. The book, de Guibert concludes, “is in fact dominated by the thought of a choice of life,” but this “choice” takes many forms other than those of a fundamental option for a state in life. The election can be “an election of service . . . which can bear not merely on the choice of a state of life, but also on the reform of that life and on many others things.”²⁵ As I understand his teaching, de Guibert seems to find fault with directors whose rigid interpretation of the text of the *Exercises* leads them to a limited understanding of its dynamics for exercitants not choosing a state of life.

A second factor arises from a mistrust of imagination that literate people, like the early Jesuit schoolmasters, frequently manifest. In discussing the active use of the imagination encouraged in Ignatius’s meditation on the Incarnation and Nativity, the influential French commentator Alexandre Brou, S.J., asks: “How is it, then, that this activity is laid aside almost completely in the oft republished collections of the old-time Jesuits? . . .

²⁴ De Guibert, 125–27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

*Being surprised in prayer
is a frightening prospect.*

Doubtless it is because the imagination is not under absolute control, that each one has his own, and that it is not easy to take over that of others."²⁶ Brou's response to his own rhetorical question makes two points. First, a free imagination may lead one in unexpected directions beyond the "control" of either the director or the exercitant. While some may see this as dangerous, one could just as easily make the case that this is precisely what happens in an instance of inspiration when "the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks to them." Being surprised in prayer is a frightening prospect. Second, the images are so personal that they are difficult to share. Again, ideas and conclusions based on texts lend themselves much more easily to rational conversation and logical conclusions. On the other hand, the difficulty in sharing images may result from a lack of technique and vocabulary for speaking about images. Here, the language of film criticism can help us construct an elementary dictionary for discussing this kind of prayer.

Pablum for the Soul?

Finally, while "infused" contemplation is thought to be an extraordinary gift, the routine kind of contemplation suggested in the *Exercises* is often dismissed as prayer of a lower order. Brou offers two different points of view to illustrate the common belief that ordinary contemplation is inferior to meditation. In a letter, Nadal admits that he was able to pray by reading Scripture and then engaging in "a simple, prolonged gaze on what was written."²⁷ Nadal adds: "This method is very simple. We may use it even when the intellect finds it hard to make an effort, even in illness." In the next paragraph, however, Brou provides the warning of St. Francis de Sales, who argues that contemplation is of little use for those who are well "advanced on the mountain of perfection." For those "who are still in the valley," St. Francis continues, "I think it would be best to use all our tricks."²⁸ The *Directory of 1599* concurs in accepting this hierarchy of modes of prayer. In its discussion of the imagination in the section devoted to the application of senses, it notes: "Meditation is more a matter of the intellect [than the application of senses], involves more reasoning, and is altogether higher. . . . The application of the senses, on the other hand, is not discour-

²⁶ Alexandre Brou, S.J., *Ignatian Methods of Prayer*, trans., William J. Young, S.J. (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1949), 138.

²⁷ Brou, *Ignatian Methods*, 140, quoting Nadal. See *Epistolæ P. Hieronymi Nadal*, vol. 4 (Madrid, 1905), 682. This is vol. 47 of the *Monumenta historica Societatis Iesu*.

²⁸ Brou, *Ignatian Methods*, 140, quoting St. Francis de Sales, *Oeuvres* xiii, 162.

sive, but merely rests in the sensible qualities of things: sights, sounds, and the like.”²⁹ The paragraph concludes, almost grudgingly: “These it enjoys and takes delight in, to its spiritual profit.” In other words, the prayer of the imagination is spiritual pabulum, fine for children but to be used by adults only in time of illness.

St. Francis de Sales, like the authors of the *Directory*, offers a limited acceptance of the prayer of imaging in some circumstances, but only as long as it is kept under strict control. While Ignatius cautions the director about going into detail in making a presentation to the exercitant, St. Francis goes quite a bit further in addressing his remarks to the exercitant: “If you make any considerable use of the imagination, you ought to be reproved. But if you do it briefly and simply, merely to bestir your mind to attention and recall its powers to the meditation, I do not think that there will be any need of giving it up altogether.”³⁰ In the same paragraph he warns of going into particulars in using images: “We should not go into too great detail, as to think of the color of our Lady’s hair, the shape of her countenance, and similar things.” He, too, concedes that the imagination may be used as a springboard to prayer of the higher faculties, but he insists that it is not an end in itself.

Brou effectively challenges the twin notions that contemplation is either an “easy” form of prayer to be used only by beginners and the infirm or that it is inferior to a more rational form of meditation.³¹

First, although Brou admits that the belief that contemplation is easy is “the common opinion,” he points out that, contrary to this assumption, many exercitants have “broken their heads over it.” No form of prayer is easy or difficult in itself. Some, he believes, are not suited for this kind of prayer and expend enormous amounts of energy trying to achieve a goal for which they have little talent. Others, blessed with vivid imaginations, lose themselves in fruitless fantasy and fail to move beyond their images. These points bear particular weight in the present age. Paradoxical as it seems, contemporary people, immersed as we are in images in daily life, can find the construction of images “head-breaking” because our literary, Bible-centered prayer has kept us from developing the necessary skills to construct and savor images on our own. We are like would-be athletes who admire the skills of long-distance runners on television and realize with some regret, as

²⁹ *Directory*, chap. 20, [156] (p. 322).

³⁰ Brou, *Ignatian Methods*, 140, quoting St. Francis de Sales, *ibid.*, 183.

³¹ Brou, *Ignatian Methods*, 148–58.

they sit on the sofa watching television and munching potato chips, that they have neither the talent nor endurance to run a marathon themselves.

Second, without challenging the notion of higher and lower faculties of the soul, which automatically ranks the prayer of the intellect (the superior faculty) above prayer of the imagination (the inferior faculty), Brou finds that "imagination leads more quickly and more directly than does the intellect to the affections, and for all we know, even to the threshold of contemplative prayer" (156). He concludes then: "In so far as it is an exercise of the imagination, the application of the senses is inferior to discursive prayer, just as the faculty brought into play is inferior. But because it can issue in a real intellectual contemplation, it partakes of the superiority of the contemplative act over the reason" (158). It would seem, then, that the prayer of the imagination could be understood as providing an entrance, not to intellectual considerations—the Election, for example—but to a direct, personal relationship with God.

*No form of prayer is easy or difficult
in itself.*

Distinctions between "higher" and "lower" surely do not preoccupy the contemporary mind.³² The discussion serves a purpose here in providing some context for the relative neglect of imaginative, visual prayer in the literature of the Exercises and consequently in the common experience of retreats in recent years.

Redeeming Images

Even the most casual reading of the text of the *Exercises* leaves little reason to doubt that Ignatius structured his handbook in large part around a series of visual experiences for the exercitant. His own subtlety in dealing with images can be intuited in his outline for days devoted to the contemplations of the Second, Third, and Fourth Weeks. According to his instruction, after making two contemplations the exercitant

³² Barthes points out that the primacy of the spoken word was assumed in theological discourse in the medieval period. In the fifteenth century, he maintains, Ignatius "attempts to situate the image (or 'interior sight') in orthodoxy as a new unit of the language he is constructing" (*Sade*, 65). To continue Barthes's line of reasoning, as the process continued after the death of Ignatius, "sight" of printed words dislocated the role of aural discourse.

is to repeat both together in two periods of repetition (118–20). A fifth hour of prayer is devoted to applying the senses to both exercises, starting with the sense of sight (121f.). After working through the subject matter of each contemplation, whether taken from Scripture or from some life of Christ, the retreatant revisits it three times in the normal sequence of the day.

Surely, if Ignatius considered the prayer as repeating precisely the experience of the previous hour, his prescription would lead directly and inexorably to tedium. On the other hand, he might well have been aware that images and a person's reaction to them might change through repeated study over a period of time. The changing emphasis of one detail over another from one prayer to the next through the day may be as revealing of God's "speaking" to the exercitant as one's verbal responses in the colloquy. These subtle differences can be all-important, if one develops the skill to notice them.

Literary creatures that we are, we engage in this critical process routinely when we deal with the printed word. One does not read "God's Grandeur" once and consider its meaning exhausted. We may read it sequentially several times at one sitting and then go back to savor individual phrases and allusions. Reading the poem again and again at different periods in our lives, in different circumstances, allows the words of Hopkins to speak to us in ever new ways. It opens rich meanings in the poem that we did not and could not grasp on previous readings. Surely, such repetition reveals as much about the reader as it does about the poet.

Most of us have had the experience of returning to a milestone book or film from our undergraduate days, hoping to relive the initial excitement of discovery. We can't. More often than not, such rereading of old favorites results in profound disappointment. As a student in the 1960s, I thought Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1956) should replace Sophocles' *Theban Trilogy* as the cornerstone of Western civilization. Now it strikes me as a work of unrelieved pretension. Like most film students of that era, I once despised cowboy movies. Now that I understand the Western film genre and American cultural history a little better, if drawn into a best-of-all-time selection process, I would put John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) as one of the finest examples of twentieth-century American art in any medium. Yes, I'd put Ford right up there with O'Neill, Fitzgerald, and Frost. The works haven't changed, but I have; and once I take the time to think about it, my response to the works helps me understand how I have changed as a critic through the past several decades.

The Point of Repetition

Sometimes these changes in perception are minute and can occur not over years but within a very short period of time. Actors understand well how a tiny shift in inflection can change the impact of a line. For example.

To be or not to be; that is the question.
To be **or** not to be; that is the question.
To be or **not** to be; that is the question.
To be or not to **be**; that is the question.
To be or not to be; **that** is the question.
To be or not to be; that is the **question**.
To be or not to be; that is **the** question.
To be or not to be; that is the **question**.

Each reading of the line renders a different meaning, and in the hands of a skilled actor can reveal a different nuance in the state of the character. It is the perceptive actor and listener who are sensitive to such changes.

A very similar process of discovery takes place in prayer. At time of retreat especially, different texts emerge as holding rich meaning, and texts that at one time in the past provided moments of intense consolation now offer little inspiration. Within a familiar scriptural phrase, even minute variations of emphasis can provide a series of alternative meanings. Some provide little attraction; others can be deeply moving. In what might possibly be considered a variation of the Second Method of Prayer of St. Ignatius (252), one need only switch emphasis from one word to the next to uncover an entirely different message within the same line. For example,

The **Lord** is my Shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
The Lord is my Shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
The Lord is **my** Shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
The Lord is my **Shepherd**; there is nothing I shall want.
The Lord is my Shepherd; there **is** nothing I shall want.
The Lord is my Shepherd; there is **nothing** I shall want.
The Lord is my Shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
The Lord is my Shepherd; there is nothing I **shall** want.
The Lord is my Shepherd; there is nothing I shall **want**.

Each change of emphasis in the line offers a somewhat different meaning and thus a somewhat different invitation to prayer. In the period of reflection and in discussion with a director, evaluating the meaning of the text and any perceived variations in emphasis may be helpful in understanding God's call at the moment.

If the meaning shifts within a series of repetitions during the day, the change might indicate a significant movement of grace. So, for example, if the retreatant stresses “Lord” in the first meditation, and gradually adopts “Shepherd” as the key to the psalm, then he or she may be experiencing an alteration in the relationship with God from one of power to one of nurture. Or if the sense of time shifts from the present “is” to the future “shall,” then one is moving from a sense of God rooted in personal history, what has brought one to a current state, to one based in hope for the future; from experience of God’s fidelity up to this point to the courage to undertake a daunting challenge in the future, confident that the Lord will guide the project as a shepherding presence.

Surely, very little of this comes as a surprise to experienced directors. The point of repeating these familiar points of reflection in some detail is merely to provide background for a suggestion that one can address the same level of minute observation and careful analysis to the images that Ignatius provides. And it is worthy of repetition in this context that he often suggests images and visual dramatic scenarios without reference to words, scriptural or otherwise. As a result, retreatants can use the analysis of images as they do the analysis of words, to gain insight and understanding of God’s efforts to communicate with them during times of prayer. The reflections that follow are intended to help the reader develop creative tools and critical vocabulary to become as comfortable in dealing with the pictures in the imagination as with the words in the intellect.

The Elements of Cinema

More than “pictures” are involved with the contemplations of the Exercises. With his continual insistence on considering “persons, words, and actions” (106–8, for example), Ignatius in fact frequently provides the equivalent of a treatment for a screenplay. Although he was certainly familiar with devotional paintings and sculptures in churches and engravings in books, his presentation to the exercitant is remarkably cinematic. It is almost eerie how Ignatius’s insistence on the numerous repetitions looks forward to a day in which a director may do several “takes” of a scene, weigh the subtle shadings in each one, and finally, with the assistance of an editor (who may be something like a retreat director, depending on the relationship between the two artists), selects the scenes that most effectively embody the meaning of the story. It is conceivable that as they look at the dailies and catch a spontaneous moment on the screen, their conception of a character or relationship may change significantly. Together they reflect on what they and the actors have done in moments of unpremeditated inspira-

tion. Through a process of repetition and discernment they let the meaning of their work evolve.

Dealing with cinematic images is an extraordinarily complex business, and it is no less complex in the context of imaginative prayer. The French semiologist Christian Metz (b. 1931) conceived of film as a series of signs through which meaning is communicated over five different channels. Unlike many of the earlier film theorists who find that film is a moving photographic image to which other effects were added, Metz insisted on considering the five channels as parts of one unified experience.³³ His position is understandable, since he was born four years after the popularization of the sound film and never lived through the silent era and the "advent of sound" that dislocated prior forms of film aesthetics in 1927. His five channels are:

1. The photographic image, which is multiple and moving.
2. Graphic traces, like written text appearing on the screen. Intertitles provided a great deal of information during the silent period. Today, films still occasionally use text to supply transitions, like "Ten years later." While today's films rarely employ devices like spinning newspaper headlines to provide information, the use of text on computer screens remains a common device, as, for example, when the hero is trying to trace the identity of a suspected terrorist.
3. Recorded speech, including that of both the synchronized speech of actors on screen or various voice-over sources, like narrators, commentators, and reactors.
4. Recorded music. (The modifier "recorded" is significant in this context. Movies were never truly "silent." The musical accompaniment in the silent era included everything from a single upright piano to symphony orchestras, and the scores could be anything from a series of set pieces, like "chase" or "romance" to elaborate orchestral settings like the compositions Arthur Honegger did explicitly for Abel Gance's *Napoleon* [1927]. For Metz, music must be pre-recorded on film—rather than stand as an independent performance—to be considered part of the film experience.)
5. Finally, recorded noise or sound effects, which can be either synchronized with the action on the screen or at times can be used to comment on an action, usually for comic effect, like cheering crowds during an actor's heroic daydream or a siren when he finally gets up the courage to kiss the heroine.

³³ J. Dudley Nichols, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 218.

In the construction of an “image” for contemplation, the retreatant might deliberately and self-consciously utilize each of these channels in turn. Similarly, in periods of reflection, the exercitant might find this scheme a useful tool for uncovering the meaning of the prayer experience. Briefly and in order of their enumeration above, these categories for film criticism evolved by Christian Metz show a remarkable suitability to the contemplations provided in the text of the *Exercises*.

1. Photographic images form the core of a visual contemplation, naturally, but these are necessarily multiple and moving. Ignatius leaves no doubt about this. The effort to gaze upon a still image, as though the imagination were engaged in creating a still photograph or painting, can be a highly effective form of contemplation. Ignatius, however, includes “actions”

In the silence of the imagination, God may also speak through strains of music recalled imperfectly in fragments.

as part of the exercise (108), thus seeming to indicate that the persons pictured are in motion themselves, are moving from place to place “within the frame.” In addition, the imagination can also shift from one detail to another in a series of different individual but related pictures of the same scene. The text of the *Exercises* does not include this explicitly, but it seems a necessary correlate to contemplating the “actions.” For example, in a process similar to

editing, one can try to picture a miracle story by shifting from Jesus to the healed person, to the disciples, to those who stand in amazement, to hostile Pharisees. The attraction of one image over another should provide entry into an analysis of the prayer. Later in this essay, we will discuss the use of a shifting point of view in greater detail in the context of the Contemplation on the Incarnation.

2. Graphic traces need not be limited to imaging words on a printed page, although some people may find this useful. Frequently enough in these days when most exercitants closely associate the Bible and the Spiritual Exercises, a text of Scripture seems almost integral to the contemplation. Words, perhaps repeated vocally in the imagination, can include more than those given in the pericope from the New Testament that provides the current subject for the contemplation. Other readings—psalms, prophets, ascetical works, fiction, the words of the *Exercises*, or even fragments from conversations recalled or imagined—may provide perfectly appropriate commentaries for the scene.

3. Recorded speech would include the words articulated by persons imagined in the contemplation, as opposed to texts and commentaries

included in "graphic traces." Ignatius explicitly includes dialogue in his contemplation by instructing the exercitant to "listen to what the persons on the face of the earth are saying" (107). The words of these anonymous persons do not exist in Scripture. By offering this directive, Ignatius invites the exercitant to become a scriptwriter, imagining dialogue from scratch. The persons pictured within the contemplation, whether it is based on Scripture or on one of Ignatius's own imaginary scenarios, may address the exercitant directly, or discuss among themselves the meaning of the incident they have participated in. Their expressions are not limited to the text of the Scripture, any more than is the exercitant's response in the colloquy (109).

4. Recorded music appreciably heightens the emotional intensity of any scene in the movies, as we can all attest. Some spiritual directors would probably object to the use of recorded music to set the mood for a contemplation, as might Ignatius himself had the technology existed in his day. The sensory deprivation of a retreat, especially silence, is intended to allow the exercitant to listen to God's communication without "noise" or "static" from other sources. However, in the silence of the imagination, God may also speak through strains of music recalled imperfectly in fragments. To cite an obvious example, a few bars of the Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" could provide a helpful background for a contemplation of the Resurrection.

5. Recorded noise or sound effects in film is integral to a sense of realism. In a literal reading of the text, Ignatius seems at first to neglect the power of sound, since in the preludes and points of each of his contemplations, he instructs the exercitant to listen to the words the people speak to each other (107 or, for the Third Week, 194). Limiting the listening to "words" only, may be deliberate, but it is probably merely an oversight. In the context of other exercises, like the Application of Senses, where Ignatius tries to involve all the senses in recreating the scene, it seems strange that he would not want an exercitant to listen, for example, to the sound of lash and hammer during a contemplation of the Passion.

Techniques of Film Making

Utilizing the elements of cinema to best effect is the role of the director. A major part of the creative process during the production phase involves a judicious placement of the camera, since what it sees is precisely what the audience will see. When the work is done well, most people in the audience scarcely realize that the lens has shifted position and is telling a story from a particular point of view. In most films, the narration unfolds in a simple, objective sequence of events related by the all-seeing, third-person

camera. This fact should not lead to a hasty conclusion that the events on the screen are a matter of objective “truth,” and that the director merely positions the camera in a convenient location to provide an unencumbered view of the action.

In filming a simple conversation between a man and a woman, for example, the director uses the tools of his art form not only to record the words and gestures of the event but also to give it significance in the context of the film as a whole. Here are only a few of the many options for a camera setup, the first three of which are ostensibly “objective,” the last two decidedly “subjective”:

1. A long-distance shot, placing both actors full figure in frame at enough distance to show the setting as well. If they speak in the visiting room of a jail with heavy iron bars in the background and on the right and left margins of the screen, the dialogue is quite different from an exchange of similar words in a florist’s shop or a sunny suburban garden. The setting becomes the silent actor on the screen.

2. A medium shot (from knees or waist up) of both actors together, where the mass of their image fills the screen and forces attention on them alone. If it is a friendly exchange, such crowding of the frame might suggest the intimacy of the couple. If they are arguing, the tight screen can provide an uncomfortable, claustrophobic effect, as though they sense unbearable tension in each other’s company. They want desperately to put some distance between each other, but the frame holds them in.

3. A close-up, over-the-shoulder shot includes a portion of the back of the head and shoulder of the person speaking at the side of the screen, while the bulk of the frame is filled with the face of the person who is listening to the words of the speaker. In this shot, either one may be speaking, and the camera frequently switches position to focus on one and then the other. It creates the illusion of objectivity, however, by making the audience a nonparticipating but close observer of what is perhaps an intimate exchange.

4. A close-up of the speaker’s face casts the audience in the role of the listener as though the words are being addressed, not to an off-camera partner in the dialogue, but to each person in the theater audience watching the screen. These observers then enter the action as listeners, taking the place of the listening actor who is no longer pictured on screen.

5. A close-up of the listener (a reaction shot) in which the actor on screen is silent but shows by facial expression some emotional response to the speaker, who is delivering the lines off-camera. In this shot, the audience identifies with the speaker and weighs the effect of the speech on the listener. It savors the pain the speaker intended to inflict when it sees the

listener wince at the words "And I never did love you." Conversely, its highly emotional involvement allows the audience to experience relief and delight when the words "I've always loved only you" bring a smile to the lips of the listener.

Routinely skillful film directors will change the point of view several times during such a conversation. By reviewing the series of retakes they will select the perfect sequence from among the five (or more) possibilities in order to create the most effective scene. On occasion, the concept of the scene will shift during this process. For example, the director might have intended to show the woman in the most sympathetic light, but discovers during the editing process that the scene becomes more powerful if the fragility of the man and the coldness of the woman become clear to the audience.

Careful observation of details during the many repetitions of an Ignatian contemplation similarly challenges one's initial assumptions about the mystery. Like a film director, the retreatant at prayer searches through different possibilities until one "feels" right. One searches for "inspiration" from God in the same way that a film maker searches for artistic inspiration. At the end of the day, the exercitant, like a film maker, reviews the rushes with a perceptive critical eye. In private reflection and in conversation with a retreat director, the retreatant tries to grasp the meaning of the scene in its varied forms, choosing the variations that seem to express most poignantly the "meaning" of the scene and its place within the context of the Exercises.

Scripting the Incarnation

The complexity of determining "camera" placement and point of view becomes apparent in a "visual" reading of Ignatius's most detailed set of instructions for contemplating the Incarnation (101-9). This is the most "cinematic" of the exercises, and yet one of the most difficult to imagine because the author mingles without distinction two quite different scenes: first, the cosmic vision of the Trinity surveying all humankind and then the simple setting of the Annunciation narrative from Luke's Gospel.

By stuffing the scene in this way, Ignatius makes coherence and continuity a nightmare. In the prelude, he describes a panoramic view of the "Three Divine Persons" as they "gaze upon the whole surface or circuit of the world" (102), a notion he repeats in the first point (106:3). In the prelude, he wants to narrow our focus to "the house and rooms of Our Lady, in the city of Nazareth" (103), a scene that he similarly recalls in the first point (106:4). Clearly, the exercitant, like the film maker, will have to take

one element of this contemplation at a time, and see if they eventually come together in the interlocking sequence Ignatius seems to prescribe. Before one can even begin envisioning points of view, the scenario as a whole must be disentangled.

Ignatius seems to want to provide a macrocosmic and microcosmic consideration of the mystery at the same time. The two parts can either be treated sequentially or can be intercut through a process called parallel editing. In practice, taking the parts individually first and then together becomes the most practical option. The technique of parallel editing, employed in fusing the two parts of this contemplation, involves envisioning two (or more) distinct scenes taking place at the same time in different locations. The scenes appear alternately to show that they are occurring contemporaneously. A most common example of parallel editing is the ever popular chase scene used in silent-movie melodramas: Shots of the hero's riding to the rescue are intercut with the heroine's rising panic as the racing train approaches the spot where she has been tied to the tracks. Three shots—the hero, the train, and the heroine—appear repeatedly on the screen, and generally in increasingly rapid succession to heighten the excitement. A really hammy fourth shot would include a reaction shot of the villain twirling his mustache in glee as he anticipates the results of his knavery.

In what appears to be the major focus of the exercise on the Incarnation, Ignatius invites the exercitant to construct an imaginative, non-Scriptural scenario of the Three Persons as they gaze upon the “circuit of the world.” He insists on particularity, but characteristically he provides little by way of concrete suggestion on how this is to be accomplished. He instructs the one making the exercise to see particular objects and persons, but he gives only the most general indication of what they are. As usual, retreatants are forced to rely on their own resources as animated by God. Even the selection of a point of view is left vague, so that as a result the exercitant is free to determine both the observer who will constitute the core of the contemplation and the scene this observer beholds.

A visually sensitive retreatant can adapt one of four distinct points of view, with each observer able to direct attention to any one of the other three. Thus in constructing the contemplation, one begins with these possibilities:

The Creator	gazes upon	The Son, the World, or the exercitant.
The Son	gazes upon	The Creator, the World, or the exercitant.
The World	gazes upon	The Creator, the Son, or the exercitant.
The exercitant	gazes upon	The Creator, the Son, or the World.

Even in creating this scheme from the text of Ignatius, the imagination faces several problems and enjoys several possibilities. The exercise calls for taking some liberties with the text and engaging in creative improvisation. Ignatius does not mention "Creator" or "Son." He uses the abstract terms "Three Divine Persons" and the "Second Person," and later the "Eternal Word made flesh" (109). He refers to "our Lord" only in the third prelude in conjunction with the Nazareth scene. Yet, given his insistence on a concrete, visual reconstruction of an imaginary scene, it seems not only expedient but necessary in the spirit of this type of prayer to forgo striving for theological accuracy in Trinitarian formulations and turn the attention directly to a visualization. Simply, one cannot visualize "Three Divine Persons." One can, however, put form, tint, and texture to a Father/Mother image as "Creator" or to a human form of "the Son." Christian iconographers have traditionally pictured the Holy Spirit as a dove or "tongue of fire," but such a visualization poses difficulties to the proposed dialogue the Persons engage in.

The last two possible elements listed above, the world and the exercitant, offer possibilities for extraordinary variation in the contemplation when considered either as observing subject or observed object. Ignatius recommends seeing "the world" in terms of its diverse peoples (106). A visualizing imagination must render this abstract notion, "diverse peoples," in concrete terms based on individual experience, perhaps in the ministry. Thus the "sick" or the "dying" (106)

Ignatius seems to want to provide a macrocosmic and microcosmic consideration of the mystery at the same time.

must be seen and heard in terms of an institutionalized parent suffering from Alzheimer's disease or an AIDS patient whose deathbed one frequently attended. Photographic realism demands the concrete, the actual, the particular. In turn, each of these specific persons, imagined or recalled to memory, can look back at the Creator, the Son, or the one making the contemplation. Their gaze emanating from individual persons, real or imagined, with or without the accompaniment of words, can speak surely and poignantly.

Finally, the exercitant can enter the scene quite easily at any point as a participant observer. Despite the structure of the text, which seems to suggest that one become involved only in the colloquy at the end of the contemplation (109), one need not sit passively on the fringes of the action until the visual prayer turns to verbal prayer in the final movement of the exercise. One can, for example, employ the analogical equivalent of an over-

the-shoulder shot to see through the eyes of the Creator a world ruined by sin, or through the eyes of the Son a world in need of redemption. And indeed, exercitants could reasonably interject themselves into the action. For example, one could see oneself in a reaction shot, searching for the appropriate response to the gaze of those varied people in “the circuit of the world” who gaze out from the midst of their need. And so on.

The second section of the exercise offers similar possibilities. Mary and the Angel Gabriel gaze upon each other and exchange words. The scene is certainly familiar through art, but these familiar images of gauzy robes and feathery wings may pose an obstacle for people trying to reach the heart of this very “tough” contemplation. Recall Barthes’s suspicion of the “reservoir of images.” This contemplation challenges the creative imagination to invent its own images. For example, in *Hail Mary (Je vous salue, Marie)* (1985), the great French director Jean-Luc Godard portrayed Mary as an ordinary French teenager who plays on a girls’ basketball team (she has a deadly jump shot from the line) and pouts about having to help out by pumping gas in her family’s filling station. Gabriel appears as a cab driver with heavy, dark-rimmed glasses, a long shabby overcoat, and a sinister three-day growth of beard. Evangelicals and conservative Catholics boycotted the film (unfairly, I thought), but even Godard’s most severe critics would have to concede that he did provide a refreshingly different take on this most familiar mystery.

Regardless of the imagery used, this scene stands on its own as a subject for contemplation. But since Ignatius mentions the Annunciation in connection with the “cosmic” scenario in each of the three points as well as in the first two preludes, he seems to suggest intercutting the two scenes in the contemplation and its repetitions. Alternating between the big picture of

At the end of the Contemplation on the Incarnation, however, one expresses a desire to serve Christ precisely in serving the needs of the world.

the entire world in all its complexity and “the house and rooms of Our Lady, in the city of Nazareth” (103) can challenge the most intrepid imagination. The task becomes somewhat more tractable by keeping in mind the importance of the personalized point of view. The exercise as a whole, then, gains in cohesion if any one or all of the previous four points of view are incorporated into the Annunciation scene. The two discrete parts of the exercise gain a thematic unity if, for example,

one first moves from “the big picture” of the Creator’s gazing upon a sin-filled world and engaging in an imagined Trinitarian dialogue with the Son, who assents to become the Redeemer, then moves on to “the small picture”

of the Creator's gazing upon one apparently insignificant human being, an unknown girl in a small village, accepting a similar invitation to serve the world in whatever way she can. Again, those individuals suffering "in the circuit of the world" can look alternately from the Creator as they pray for relief from their pain, to the sign of hope they see in the Nazareth scene.

The colloquy that Ignatius suggests as a conclusion to the contemplation (109) mentions both scenes together, as though the exercitant had conflated both and were expected to respond to both as he would if they were parts of the same exercise. The challenge becomes less daunting, however, if in the course of the day the exercitant has not only endeavored to mingle "points of view" from both sections but also to enter personally both scenes repeatedly, as participant observer and actor. The Colloquy including a response to both the macrocosm and the microcosm then develops naturally from contemplating both scenes together.

The possibilities for arranging and rearranging these basic elements in the contemplation are mathematically staggering. Through the repetitions several combinations can be tried and several different meanings may emerge and lead the exercitant to an intensely personalized colloquy.

In the movement of the Exercises as a whole, this colloquy in response to the Contemplation on the Incarnation provides a striking advance over the colloquy suggested at the end of the previous exercise, the Kingdom. At the end of the earlier exercise, one responds by expressing a desire to serve Christ simply because he is the Christ, the ideal king. In the Kingdom, Ignatius invites the exercitant to interiorize the prayer that he provides to enable the exercitant to express a "desire to imitate [Christ] in bearing all injuries and affronts, and any poverty actual as well as spiritual" (98). Although one responds generously to the call of the King simply because of who he is, the objective of the call is left deliberately vague. The eternal King says, "My will is to conquer the world and all my enemies, and thus to enter into the glory of my Father" (95).

At the end of the Contemplation on the Incarnation, however, one expresses a desire to serve Christ precisely in serving the needs of the world. Rather than providing a prayer that any Christian could recite—a desire to know, love, and serve God by imitating Christ—as in the Kingdom, at the end of exercises on the Incarnation, he merely instructs the exercitant "to think over what I ought to say to the Three Divine Persons, or to the World made flesh or to Our Lady" (109). The prayer then becomes extraordinarily personalized as one has contemplated particular needs to bring God's saving grace to the world of one's own particular experience.

More Than Reportorial Accuracy

Many factors in addition to the selection of persons, words, and actions with a determined point of view shape the full meaning of an image. Film makers and critics alike understand that the creative process does not merely reproduce the outline of a picture, but shades and colors it for maximum impact. More important, the success of the process calls for injecting an artistic vision into the work through careful attention to details. In prayer, as in film making, this shading can be called inspired, and it is rarely consistent. Occasionally a film artist will hit upon the “inspired” detail that makes a scene truly memorable. More often than not, a harried director will be satisfied to move the story along without losing the plot line. Likewise, at times an “inspired” detail may make a contemplation exceptionally powerful, but by its very nature such inspiration is not routine.

The position of a spotlight, for example, can transform a subject on the screen from an accurate representation of a “reality” to an interpretation. Light from above often suggests inspiration or moral strength, while light from below casts ominous shadows on the face, as it does, for example, when children hold flashlights under their chins to frighten the neighbors on Halloween. A beam of light directed to the hair of an actress frames the face in a shimmering halo, and for that reason it is called “Hollywood” or “glamour” lighting.

Very few people can expect to recognize that level of detail in the imagination, but the principle remains valid. Does the scene unfold in darkness and shadow, or in bright light? Is one imagined subject in shadow, while the other appears in sunlight? Does the contrast between light and shadow change during the repetitions of the day? Does the scene as a whole become lighter or darker, or does one character emerge from the shadows while another slips into the background?

Another set of observations about the scene emerges from attention to the viewing angle. A high-angle shot, in which the camera is placed above the object and seems to push it into the floor, generally diminishes a human character. A low-angle shot with the camera looking up at the subject, generally increases stature. If a low-angle shot places the subject against the open sky, it may even introduce the quality of the mythic or supernatural into a character. If, however, a low-angle shot is coupled with both a lens of long focal length (which diminishes distance in perspective) and a ceiling, the character will appear to be crushed by the weight of the interior. This shot is routinely used in Westerns, when a cowboy comes from the great outdoors and enters the cramped cabin of a settler’s family. He appears courteous and even delighted to accept the social conventions imposed by “women-

folk," but the camera angle and lens—not words and not special images—reveal his sense of claustrophobia. He seems to like having coffee and fresh-baked biscuits while he sits hatless at a table covered with a tablecloth, but the ceiling presses down on him. He can't wait to get back to his horse.

Again, one would scarcely be expected to identify the focal length of the imaginary lens used in a contemplation, but the principle holds some relevance as one reflects upon the visual patterns of prayer. The beautiful incident of the Samaritan Woman at the Well (John 4:7-42) provides an excellent narrative to illustrate this cinematic commonplace. After picturing an "establishing shot" to set the scene and provide some visual context for the exchange, most people would want to move in more closely for a series of closer images of the dialogue. Who (the woman, Jesus, or the observing exercitant) looks up or down on whom? From what distance? If the angles change, how and when? Does the woman first appear in low angle against the sky, to suggest her sense of arrogance? Does the eye of imagination gradually move upward to a high-angle position that crushes her into the ground as her sinfulness becomes known? Is there a time when she and Jesus appear eye to eye as equal partners in the exchange? As the conversation continues, does the lens increase or diminish the distance between them? Are they pictured together or separately in the frame of the imagination? Have they become more intimate through their honesty with each other, or does her realization that she is a sinner and he a prophet open a gulf between them? When? Why? And again, the key question in the context of the Exercises is whether these images change through the series of repetitions.

Images in cinema comment on one another by their deliberate juxtapositioning. In the famous experiments of Lev Kuleshov at the State Film School in Moscow in the 1920s, the face of an actor, repeated in identical strips of film, takes on different meanings when placed in sequence with a little girl playing with a doll, a dead woman in a casket, or a bowl of soup.³⁴ Variouslly called editing, montage, juxtaposition, or (more recently through the influence of semiology) syntagmatics, this linking of images is considered by most theoreticians to be the essential element of film art. Again, most people making a contemplation would rarely plan a "shooting script" for prayer with such details in mind, but if they do occur, they certainly add nuance to the scene. To return to the previous example, the author of the Gospel implies clearly that the Samaritan woman carried some kind of vessel to draw water from the well (4:7). Placed next to her, the object increases her power; next to Jesus, his need. Is she wearing jewelry?

³⁴ David A. Cook describes these and other experiments that led to the principles of film editing in *A History of Narrative Film* (New York: Norton, 1995), 137-39.

That fact would add some notion of vanity to her character, but if seen in conjunction with the eyes of Jesus, the ornaments would reveal something of his assessment of the woman. As one passes through the repetitions, perhaps the jewelry will disappear altogether and the two, and the exercitant with them, will move beyond the need for external, superficial cues about each other's personality.

Finally, "mise-en-scene," the placement of images within the frame, provides the basic building blocks of film making. Each individual frame can be isolated and its contents observed, much as one would study a painting or still photograph. A critic must ask what is in foreground and what in background, and what "mass" dominates the frame. Generally, the object's significance is proportionate to its mass or size on the screen. As a shot continues, the mise-en-scene often shifts. As one at prayer gazes at the episode from John's Gospel, the attention may switch from the Samaritan woman to Jesus. At the outset, she may dominate the scene, a huge presence in the foreground, but may gradually recede into a tiny, insignificant player in the background as the personality of Jesus begins to assert its moral strength. At this point, the exercitant may enter the picture, replacing the woman altogether as a partner in dialogue.

Beyond Serendipity

Most of this cinematic analysis would make as little sense to Charlie Chaplin, Marie Dressler, and Mack Sennett in 1914, when *Tillie's Punctured Romance* was released, as it would to St. Ignatius of Loyola in 1548, when the *Spiritual Exercises* were first printed. All four of them were gifted with extraordinary imaginations and developed their visual images with uncanny and unfailing brilliance. They took a great deal for granted in the rest of us. Most of us find our talents somewhat more limited than theirs. We're like Salieri in the movie *Amadeus*, looking in wonder at the prodigy Mozart and realizing that he can never duplicate his successes.

Sennett was deliberately playful in this regard. Years after he left the motion picture industry, when asked to explain his comic genius, he wrote, tongue-in-cheek perhaps, "We made funny pictures as fast as we could for money."³⁵ He tries to establish his case by offering the example of a one-reel

³⁵ Mack Sennett, "Cloud-Cuckoo Country," excerpted from his *King of Comedy*, as told to Cameron Shipp (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954), 86–90. This was reprinted in Richard Dyer MacCann, *Film: A Montage of Theories* (New York: Dutton, 1966), 160–164.

comedy he improvised with his brilliant comic actress, Mabel Normand. Scouting out locations with his film crew from Keystone, he ran into a Shriners' parade coming down Main Street. He set up his only camera on the corner. Without any script or concept, he handed Normand a baby doll and a shawl, and told her to run into the parade, screaming that she was searching for the father of her "baybee." The distinguished and highly disconcerted community leaders fell over each other in their attempt to get away from the hysterical woman—and the dangerous misunderstandings that could arise from her antics. Chaos ensued. The Los Angeles police waded into the mêlée to restore order and, true to their tradition of professionalism that persists to this day, they only add to the confusion. In the twinkling of a shutter, the Keystone Kops are born. A great comic scene is put on film, and not one of the film makers had any idea of what would happen when they started. It was all done on instinct.

Instinct served quite well for these extraordinarily talented artists working with a brand-new medium. Instinct has its limits, however. Sennett had the greatest eye for spotting talent in the history of the medium. He started virtually all the giants of silent comedy on their way to stardom: Buster Keaton, Fatty Arbuckle, Harry Langdon, and Harold Lloyd, as well as Chaplin, Normand, and Dressler. Add to the list the director Frank Capra. Sadly, as their talents developed, they all left him, every one, and by the mid 1920s Sennett's reputation as the "King of Comedy" was in unmistakable decline. Serendipity could not carry him into the next generation of film making.

As the years passed, the others honed their professional skills and developed new facets of their talent. Dressler made the transition to sound and won an Academy Award for *Min and Bill* (1930); she achieved lasting fame as the eponymous heroine of *Tugboat Annie* (1934). Chaplin, of course, became Chaplin. Gradually outgrowing the beloved tramp figure and exploiting his talents as writer, director, music composer, and conductor, Chaplin mastered every detail of the production process and continued to make memorable films into the 1950s, even though his politics brought a decline in his mass-market appeal.

The lives of these early film artists can be instructive for the practice of Ignatian prayer. Sennett relied on good luck, and his comic talent soon withered. The others, however, were not afraid to learn the techniques of the new and rapidly developing medium, and their comic gifts became constantly enriched. The point of these pages has been to suggest that contemplation, a form of prayer that many of us may have come to regard as possible only through an extraordinary gift from above, can become more accessible through an awareness of some of the basic techniques commonly

used by film makers and critics. Passively waiting for extraordinary, gifted moments in prayer does not seem to be what Ignatius had in mind when he proposed this form of prayer for one who is actively engaged in making “exercises.” The relatively young art form of the motion picture offers a set of concepts to enable the imagination to engage in a meaningful form of visual prayer, whether or not the extraordinary gifts are present.

To attempt contemplation without a sense of how images work is like sending Chaplin and Dressler onto a soapy floor or Normand into a Shriners’ parade just to see what happens. Sometimes the results are brilliant, but Sennett made a mistake by betting that he could keep finding gems in the chaos of his own untutored imagination. He thought he did not have to bother with planning or technique. The lesson is universal: In both the movies and in prayer, the Spirit blows where he listeth, but sometimes he could use a little help.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In the September 1999 issue of STUDIES I took a leaf from Jivan, a publication of the Jesuits of South Asia, and asked what challenges you as a Jesuit at the end of this millennium and the beginning of the next. "Give us a personal reply, . . . not a bookish answer, but please be brief." By the November issue we had received no replies. In January 2000 we published four thoughtful letters on the subject. Here, in this issue, are another five such letters.

JWP, S.J.

Editor:

I am a Jesuit in a diocesan parish and have been here in this work for about fourteen years. I preach almost daily at parish Masses. The fast pace of change in technology doesn't challenge me as much as the fast rate of change in beliefs.

The parishioners and I are on different pages! I cannot preach to them the things I believe. I read theology, they do not. They do not even want to hear such things. "It just confuses us," they say. One priest said to me recently, "It's too bad we and our audiences are not in the same church!"

My challenge is not so much to absorb the changes myself, **but rather to stand in the pulpit between two groups**—the Church of the year 2000 and the Church of the 1940s and try to do their souls some good!

John Bernbrock, S.J.

Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish
7655 E. Main St.
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

Editor:

In response to your request for comments on the challenge of 2000 for Jesuits, I would like to submit the fol-

lowing: God as Love and Justice empowers us to transform ourselves and the world. Herein lies our hope. . . . Faced with [our present] political and social realities, it is no wonder that some people look with anxiety toward the millennium. But it is not a question of the year 2000, or the year 3000, or whose calendar we are on. Perhaps the challenge of the year 2000 is twofold: how to maintain a vision of a different kind of society, one based on solidarity and dedication to the common good rather than on isolation and selfishness, and how to implement that vision politically and economically so that history really begins to change in the right direction.

Joe Mulligan

Colegio Centro America
Managua, Nicaragua

Editor:

What challenges me as a Jesuit at the end of another era with a view upon the next? I have had to watch my hopes and dreams in the Lord arise out of our history of the last two centuries. As a scholastic headed for a mission, I came to seek a life among the Tetons and Lakotas of the High Prairies. There I found my dreams associated with those of Pierre Jean De Smet, S.J., and with

one Catherine (whose full name I most probably will come to know only in eternal life). Meantime I have seen and heard it asked in numberless ways: What is the solution to the "Indian problem?" And as the millennium was rushing to an end, I saw Father Eugene Buechel, S.J., master of and entirely conversant in the Lakota Sioux language, pass to eternity. Along the way, then, I heard a mission director say, "Why not take and publish Buechel's collection of thirty thousand Siouan words?" That day forward a door stood open to fitting myself to that work and to the translation of archival texts. At the same time, we saw four of Red Cloud School graduates assist the tribe to build new homes, and five years later four others institute the Lakota Community College. Then came graduates to colleges throughout the country. And the future of this third millennium? As usual, the joys and sorrows of a growing family/tribe will be with us. Work and problems too will be there. But in the bigger picture, as long as we learn to pray well, faith and hope will be challenged in us all. We shall recall those recent days when we saw the first American Indian seek and become a deacon, and heard him preach the Word of God. We have seen another in Rome walking across Saint Peter's piazza and shaking hands, pipe in hand, with Pope John Paul II. Yes, we shall continue to "come and see," and hear.

Paul Manhart, S.J.

Our Lady of Sorrows Church
Kyle, SD 57752-0398

Editor:

"What challenges me as a Jesuit at the beginning of the new millennium?"

My greatest challenge as a Jesuit at the beginning of this millennium is to continue to grow in relationship to God, others, self and nature. Additional important challenges: I feel sad as I see some of my elder brothers decline in health. I'm wondering how to speak of our falling numbers and smaller entrance groups. The word "diminishment" does not, in my view, adequately express the seriousness or immediacy of the situation. It might be too threatening to hypothesize that we are dying. In what ways can I support our younger men in their hopes and hardships? I need to acknowledge my own aging process as it affects my life and ministry and to let go of certain productivity expectations.

My life has never been threatened because of my involvement with the poor. What do the murders of Jesuits in El Salvador, India, Rwanda, and in other countries say about the significance of my advocacy? I wonder whether and how to raise the issue of emotional literacy as a formation- and renewal-of-apostolic-community-life concern. I feel a desire to go out to Muslims and other religious and ethnic groups with whom I am unfamiliar. I am committed to increasing my ability to use computer technology as a tool for apostolic effectiveness.

Jim Radde, S.J.

Georgetown Court
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Minneapolis, MN 55432

Editor:

What challenges me as a Jesuit at the beginning of the millennium?

A big challenge that I feel and am growing in awareness of is discovering

how to share the earth and the fruits of it more fully with our brothers and sisters in the Third World and the poor everywhere. We have so much and they have so little. Most refugees do not even have a home; many poor barely have a home, food, clean water, medical care, normal security, all of which we take for granted.

Along with the above, I am challenged to live more simply and am uncomfortable in some of our houses. In

this regard, I think of the condition of the poor that live around us, both here in Kentucky and in most of our cities. I ask myself: How can I help change our culture so that those who have more will share with those who have less?

John L. Kieffer, S.J.
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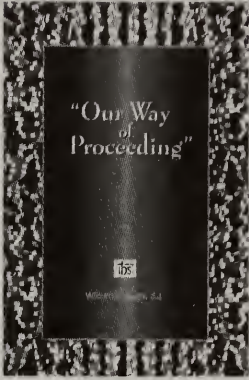
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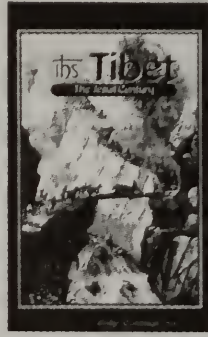


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