







# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

Jesuit Spirituality  
for the Whole of Life

WILLIAM A. BARRY, S.J.

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# THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

The Seminar is composed of a number of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

It concerns itself with topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially United States Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces through its publication, *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, and laity, to both men and women. Hence, the journal, while meant especially for American Jesuits, is not exclusively for them. Others who may find it helpful are cordially welcome to make use of it.

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JESUIT SPIRITUALITY  
FOR THE WHOLE OF LIFE

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William A. Barry, S.J.

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STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

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## *The first word . . .*

After several weeks of commuting from suburban Wimbledon to my dissertation work at the British Film Institute in London, I finally got a room at Farm Street, within walking distance of my office. Sunday was moving day. The visitors' welcome sheet served notice that on Sunday evenings the community gathered for an informal buffet supper in the recreation room. It seemed the perfect opportunity to mingle and introduce myself to the group I would be living with for the next several weeks.

Reliable guides from this side of the Atlantic warned me about the use of proper titles. For the first evening anyway, I was dressed in regimental blacks and would be known as "Father Richard Blake," not "Dick." Feeling on the brink of an intercultural triumph, I pushed my luck a bit too far by asking one of the more grave personages, "And what do you do, Father?" Sputtering in disbelief at my cheekiness and recoiling as though he had just received a Tysonesque blow to the midsection, he gasped, "I'm confessor to a bishop." He spun on his heel, clerical wings flapping over the trifle tray, never again to join in conversation with me.

My first thought was ironic: It must be quite a bishop who has to employ a confessor full time. The second was simply uncharitable: This must be one of those Jesuits who chose a ministry of leisure before the oils of ordination had dried on their palms. He's probably annoyed and embarrassed that someone dared raise the topic of work with him. The third thought, which occurred to me several days later, came as a bit of self-discovery. As an American, and an eager, ambitious graduate student at that, I believed that asking about one's work was the obvious and courteous strategy to show interest in someone. The dark side of this conversational ploy masks a tendency to think of persons in terms of their job, as though the two were indivisible. The man I had inadvertently insulted had grown up in a different culture, one that has traditionally had room for persons whose identity comes from birthright as well as occupation or achievement.

Asking, "What do you do?" offers us Americans a convenient way of placing people in categories, and then indirectly of assessing worth. In Martin Ritt's *The Front* (1976), a fine and disturbing film about the era of Red hysteria and blacklisting, a television scriptwriter played by Woody Allen visits a resort hotel in the Catskills. Spotting an attractive woman sitting alone at the bar, he tries to strike up a conversation. Her first question: "And what do you do?" Allen coughs, clears his throat and stammers with some note of pride, expecting to impress his quarry, "I'm a writer."

Her response: "I've got to be going now." Ever the optimist, he tries again with another unattached woman. She asks the same question. With wisdom born of defeat, he answers, "I'm a, y'know (cough), a dentist." "Really! How fascinating," says the young woman, smiling and fluttering her eyelashes, obviously interested in a man whose financial resources may be a bit more predictable than those of a writer.

Assessing worth in terms of occupation, achievement, and recognition becomes especially insidious when it shapes one's self-image. Several years ago, I remember a late-night conversation with a Jesuit high-school teacher who had just received approval for a sabbatical. Everyone who knew him realized that he was dying in the classroom and surely needed a break in his routine. Religious superiors and school administrators conspired in the plan. He didn't want it, felt he didn't need it, and as a result, even as the time drew near, he had no idea of what to do with the time. Perhaps he was simply afraid of several months with no classes and half sheets to fill the hours. Without a "job" to go to each morning, he might well have felt lost. As the group tried to encourage him that evening, some of us tried to suggest courses, perhaps even leading to a degree or certificate. He became agitated: "Hey, that's not part of the deal. I'm only a short-course man." He spent the year doing private reading without leaving his home city. I wonder how much his self-image and apostolic effectiveness had been warped by his having failed an oral exam in Scholastic philosophy in his early twenties. The "job" at least affirmed his identity, even if his low opinion of himself kept him from exploring opportunities to grow in it. He created a niche that he might not have liked, but whose security and predictability he was terrified to leave.

Isn't it ironic that we Americans so idealize work and accomplishment that some of us risk becoming less productive and less dedicated to the ministries we do serve? Remember the great exchange in *Chariots of Fire* (1981)? After the hero loses his first race, he tells his girlfriend that he will never compete again: "If I can't win, I won't run." Recognizing his self-pity, she replies, "If you don't run, you can't win." In the present context one might add that simply by running, doing what is possible even if one can't win all the races, one is a winner.

Pardon the terrible pun, but it may further these reflections. A Franciscan prays, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace." A Jesuit prays, "Lord, make me a piece of your instrument." In other words, God accomplishes what he wills through the instrument of the Society of Jesus, to which we have committed our lives. Not everyone is manufacturer, a fellow of a learned academy, or a famous preacher. Our specific "job" or our personal triumphs actually make little difference in the wider scheme of things. We contribute what we can to the best of our ability, and let God take care of the results. Simply put, our worth as persons and as Jesuits does not depend on our measurable productivity.



This is important to keep in mind, since each of us faces an inevitable decline in what we can expect to accomplish in a day. Does this mean we are diminished in worth, less Jesuit? In the article that follows, Bill Barry explores this highly sensitive and emotionally combustible question. Ever the reviewer, I won't reveal the ending of the plot, but I will sound a note of gratitude for Bill's honesty and insight about the present condition of the Society of Jesus in the United States at present. We've gradually become more candid about discussing issues related to the inverted age pyramid, with the veterans holding the place of majority in most of our communities and "younger" men (a category that now extends well into the fifties) in the distinct minority. Some would describe the pyramid more as a "goblet" shape, since the precipitous decline in vocations coincided with the extraordinary rate of departures in the 1960s and 1970s. As individuals and as communities, we just didn't seem very well prepared to deal with the profound changes in Jesuit life that we are currently experiencing.

We are, however, growing more at ease in confronting the practical issues, like planning for a retrenchment in apostolic commitments, for smaller active communities and larger retirement communities, for new financial realities, for medical insurance, and the like. The pages that follow provide a great service by moving the conversation to another plateau by first unearthing elements in Jesuit spirituality that frankly make this transition doubly painful for us work-oriented American Jesuits. At the same time, as Bill points out, our Ignatian heritage also contains the potential for accepting this new situation as an opportunity for growth, both as a religious community and as individual Jesuits.

This journal could provide a forum for responding to some of Bill Barry's challenging ideas. Letters are always welcome.

*Richard A. Blake, S.J.*

Editor

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A NEW BOOK

**THE EAGLE AND THE CROSS**

**JESUITS IN LATE BAROQUE PRAGUE**

by Paul Shore

Villains or heroes in the perspective of earlier writers, the Jesuits of eighteenth-century Bohemia, at that time ruled by the Hapsburgs, played a large role in its life. Headquartered in Prague, but working throughout the land, the Society directed schools and universities, gave the Spiritual Exercises, preached missions, promoted its Baroque aesthetic in architecture, sculpture, painting and drama. Based on primary sources, some never seen for two hundred years, this book details the accomplishments of Jesuits priests, brothers, teachers, scholars and scientists in the intellectual and cultural life of the kingdom.

Dr. Paul Shore is a member of the faculty at Saint Louis University in the Department of Educational Studies and the Department of History.

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# JESUIT SPIRITUALITY FOR THE WHOLE OF LIFE

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*Through the Spiritual Exercises and the Constitutions, Jesuits have thoroughly learned the lessons of apostolic spirituality. Both our lives and our communities serve the ministry. When age or illness limit involvement with the works, however, a Jesuit can feel a profound sense of loss. Revisiting certain key elements of Ignatius's thought can provide the basis of a vigorous apostolic life that continues throughout a Jesuit's life.*

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## Introduction

**T**he Society of Jesus, along with the public at large, is encountering a brand-new phenomenon, an unprecedented growth in the number and percentage of elderly members. The trend is not likely to end soon, according to researchers Jim Oeppen and James Vaupel. Since 1840, they note, the highest average life expectancy has risen by a quarter of a year every year with no end in sight. Centenarians may become commonplace within the lifetimes of people living today.<sup>1</sup> Can Jesuit spirituality help us to cope with this unprecedented situation of aging and its consequences?

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I am grateful to Ronald A. Amiot, S.J., John J. Banks, S.J., Robert G. Doherty, S.J., Marika Geoghegan, James M. Keegan, S.J., Robert E. Lindsay, S.J., Paul T. Lucey, S.J., James T. Sheehan, S.J., and Myles N. Sheehan, S.J., who read and made helpful comments on drafts of this paper.

<sup>1</sup>Reported by BBC News on the Internet, May 9, 2002.

On the face of it, the question seems to require a negative answer. After all, Jesuit spirituality is a spirituality of service; its heroes are men like Francis Xavier, Peter Claver, and even Ignatius of Loyola himself. What is extolled in the lives of these and similar

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*It seems that we would have to do violence to Ignatian and Jesuit spirituality to find within it a spirituality that would help us with the new phenomenon of longevity and its consequences.*

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Jesuits is their indefatigable zeal, their boundless energy, and their ability to overcome numerous obstacles in the pursuit of the "good of souls." Readers of lives of Jesuit saints and heroes may wonder whether some of these men ever slept. Just one example, admittedly from a tireless worker: It is related of Francis Xavier that "up and down the dreary, inhospitable land of Travancore he baptized in the course of a single month more than ten thousand persons. Taking a twelve-hour day, that would have come to about

one baptism every two minutes for thirty days consecutively."<sup>2</sup> We can presume that Xavier did more in a day than just baptize. Physical illness and the problems of an aging body are not given much play in the lives of men like Xavier. They were hindrances to their work.

Ignatius's own spirituality has been characterized as a mysticism of service, as distinct from a bridal or a victim-soul mysticism.<sup>3</sup> After noting that Ignatius suffered from ill health from the time of his excessive penances at Manresa, Harvey Egan writes as follows:

Nonetheless, Ignatius did not passively accept this ill health. Whereas suffering-servant mystics would have rejoiced in their infirmity as a way of sharing in Christ's sufferings, because of his service mysticism, Ignatius employed all human means possible to have his health restored.

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<sup>2</sup>James Broderick, *The Origin of the Jesuits* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1986; originally 1940), 124. Francis himself is the source of the numbers cited.

<sup>3</sup>See Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice: A Historical Study*, trans. William J. Young (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1964), and Harvey D. Egan, *Ignatius Loyola the Mystic* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1987).

For example, when Ignatius's doctors told him he would go blind unless he curbed his mystical gift of tears, Ignatius did so. St. Francis of Assisi angrily rejected the same advice.<sup>4</sup>

It seems that we would have to do violence to Ignatian and Jesuit spirituality to find within it a spirituality that would help us with the new phenomenon of longevity and its consequences.

In addition, our spirituality may pose an even more formidable obstacle for us as we face these consequences. The words of the *Formula of the Institute* are etched into our souls as our "pathway to God." A Jesuit

is a member of a Society founded chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of public preaching, lectures, and any other ministration whatsoever of the word of God, and further by means of the Spiritual Exercises, the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity, and the spiritual consolation of Christ's faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments. Moreover, he should show himself ready to reconcile the estranged, compassionately assist and serve those who are in prisons or hospitals, and indeed to perform any other works of charity, according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good.<sup>5</sup>

No place here, it seems, for ailing and aging bodies and tired spirits. Is it any wonder that Jesuits want to die with their boots on? In addition, most of the readers of *STUDIES* are citizens of the United States and thus embedded in U.S. culture. The spirituality that undergirds these words feeds the workaholic syndrome that sits deep inside the psyche of many North Americans.

Perhaps we should not expect a spirituality that arose in the sixteenth century to grapple with the twentieth- and twenty-first-century phenomenon of aging and its consequences. After all, people died young in those days. Few of the first generation of Jesuits, indeed of any generation until ours, lived into their eighties. Ignatius was, for his time, relatively old when he died at sixty-four.

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<sup>4</sup> Egan, *Loyola the Mystic*, 139.

<sup>5</sup> *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms* (St. Louis, The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), no. 1 (pp. 3f.). Hereafter this source will be abbreviated to *ConsCN* followed by the marginal number cited. As a convenience, the page number will be added in parentheses.

Francis Xavier died in his forty-seventh year. I recall being somewhat taken aback when, as a student contemplating my entrance into the Society, I noted the ages of the Jesuits buried at the College of the Holy Cross. There were very few old men buried in that cemetery in those days (1950). The main issue for a spirituality prior to our era was how to die well, not how to live well as one faced the inevitable diminishment of aging, an issue we face in this new age. So in the *Constitutions* Ignatius writes:

As during his whole life, so also and even more at the time of his death, each member of the Society ought to strive earnestly that through him God our Lord may be glorified and served and his neighbors may be edified, at least by the example of his patience and fortitude along with his living faith, hope, and love of the eternal goods which Christ our Lord merited and acquired for us by those altogether incomparable sufferings of his temporal life and death.<sup>6</sup>

In an age when death was expected at a relatively early age (at least, according to our reckoning) and debilitating sickness did not last long, there was, seemingly, no need to develop spiritual resources for the odd case of a lengthier life and a prolonged time of retirement from active ministry.

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*I believe that the spirituality we need for our present situation has to be continuous with the spirituality that has influenced our lives thus far.*

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Better diets and the advances of modern medicine and immunology have brought us to a new era where we may wonder whether a spirituality developed so much earlier can serve us. Most of us can expect to experience the effects of old age: the waning of our physical capacity, more frequent aches and pains, the inability to

get up and walk with ease, occasional incontinence, frequent urination at night, loss of sharp memory ("senior moments"). Some of us worry about living months, even years, debilitated by a stroke or by dementia or Alzheimer's disease. We can also expect to have to leave active ministry and, perhaps, to move to a retirement or nursing facility. We could sift the writings of Ignatius and the early Jesuits for crumbs that might serve our purposes. Often enough in popular

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<sup>6</sup> *ConsCN* 595 (p. 266).



writing one can find instances of this practice: A sainted founder in 1605, one might read, wrote to a sick brother and counseled him on how to bear his sickness; these counsels are then elaborated to become the founder's spirituality for our time. We could cite Ignatius, for example, who wrote in the *Constitutions*:

In their illnesses all should try to draw fruit from them, not only for themselves but for the edification of others, by not being impatient or difficult to please, but instead having and showing great patience and obedience toward the physician and infirmarian, and employing good and edifying words which show that they accept the sickness as a gift from the hand of our Creator and Lord, since it is a gift no less than is health.<sup>7</sup>

However, the question remains whether such *obiter dicta* flow from the intrinsic nature of the spirituality so that the same principles apply throughout life, not only during sickness. Do these words of the *Constitutions*, for example, flow from the essence of Jesuit spirituality? I believe that the spirituality we need for our present situation has to be continuous with the spirituality that has influenced our lives thus far. In some real way our aging and diminishment have to be part and parcel of the total package so that Jesuits can embrace sickness as no less a gift than health.

In this essay my main audience are those Jesuits still active in ministry. My hope is to present Jesuit spirituality in a way that will help us to approach active ministry and eventual retirement from active ministry in the same spirit. If the focus on aging seems to be a long time in coming, bear with me. I want to demonstrate my belief that a true Jesuit spirituality of active apostolic service can carry us through the whole of life, including into the later years. If what I write also helps those already retired from active ministry, I will be doubly happy. In addition, in this essay my main focus will be the individual Jesuit, not the corporate body. Hence, I use personal examples. I believe that Jesuit spirituality can also speak to us as a body, and I will make one suggestion in this regard later, but to demonstrate that belief would require a much longer development and may be beyond my ability.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 272 (p. 120).

## The Heart of Jesuit Spirituality

### Ignatius's Own Example

Where to start? Perhaps we should begin at the heart of Ignatian and Jesuit spirituality. Ignatius gave himself completely to the work of governing the nascent Society of Jesus, especially to setting in place those structures and ways of proceeding that gave the best guarantee that the Society would survive its shaky beginnings. He spent untold hours writing letters not only to his far-flung men who needed counsel on how to proceed but also to people who

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*In some real way our aging and diminishment have to be part and parcel of the total package of our Jesuit spirituality, so that Jesuits can embrace sickness as no less a gift than health.*

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might be able and willing to supply funds for the many institutions that this young Society was establishing throughout the world. He also gave himself wholeheartedly to the work of writing constitutions, as required by the papal bulls of institution, but also by common sense if the Society was to thrive as a new religious order. The first sentence of the Preamble to the *Constitutions* indicates the spirit with which Ignatius engaged in the work of writing them, but also shows how he engaged in all the other activities that made up his working day.<sup>8</sup> In it

Ignatius notes that God is the One who will preserve and direct "this least Society." Yet God wants our cooperation; hence, constitutions are needed because God wants the Society of Jesus to exist and to remain in being, but neither the wisest constitutions nor their strictest observance will guarantee the existence and well-being of the Society of Jesus. For such a guarantee Jesuits must count on God, who wants "this least Society" to exist. In fact, only if our observance of the *Constitutions* is permeated with such an absolute trust in God will the Society flourish.

We can see how Ignatius's own trust in God's designs worked itself out by examining an incident reported by Gonçalves da Câmara. In 1555 Ignatius heard that Gian Pietro Carafa had been elected

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 134 (p. 56).

pope and had taken the name Paul IV. When Ignatius was in Venice before the founding the Society, it seems that he had offended Carafa, the founder of the Theatines. Thus, Ignatius had reason to believe that the new pope would not be favorable to the fledgling Society. In addition, Carafa was known to have strong prejudices against Spaniards, many of whom were prominent in the Society's governance; he was known as well to favor changes in the Society's ways of proceeding that Ignatius considered essential to its very existence. Da Câmara notes that at the news of Carafa's election

the Father experienced a notable agitation and his face altered, and, as I knew later, either from him or from older Fathers to whom he recounted it, he felt shaken to the depths of his body. He got up without saying a word and entered the chapel to pray; and shortly afterward, he came out as joyous and content as if the election had been totally in accordance with his desire.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, Ignatius was shocked by the news of Carafa's election. It is likely that he feared for the very existence of the Society of Jesus as, he believed, God wanted it. But a few moments of prayer in the chapel seem to have restored him to his usual equanimity. This tells us something very important about Ignatius's spirituality.

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*God could move Ignatius to act  
in one way and others to act  
in a contrary way. He would do  
his part and leave the ultimate  
decision to events and to God.*

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Ignatius believed that God wanted the Society of Jesus to exist, with Ignatius himself at its head. The first words of the Preamble of the Constitutions testify to the first belief. The story of how he was almost dragooned into accepting the office of general superior testifies to the second. When the First Companions elected him, he refused the office and begged them to reconsider. Even after they had repeated the election with the same result, he refused until his confessor told him that to refuse would be to resist the will of God. Once he had accepted this judgment, Ignatius showed not a hint of hesitation in governing and, as we have already noted, gave

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<sup>9</sup>From the *Memoriale* of Gonçalves da Câmara, cited in *Ignatius of Loyola and the Founding of the Society of Jesus*, by André Ravier, trans. Maura Daly, Joan Daly, and Carson Daly (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 477.

himself heart and soul to nurture this small and very vulnerable religious congregation toward vibrant life, convinced as he was that God wanted it.

With the election of Carafa, I believe, he faced the real possibility that the Society of Jesus would be dismantled or, at the least, that the pope would alter what he considered essential to its life and purpose as God's instrument. Hence, the visible shock. But after a

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*"I do not see that there would be any contradiction, since the same Spirit could move me to this action for certain reasons and others to the contrary for other reasons, and thus bring about the result desired by the emperor."*

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few moments of prayer in the chapel, he became calm and happy again. Da Câmara may exaggerate when he writes that Ignatius acted as though the election were totally in conformity with his own desires, but he probably does not exaggerate the difference that the few minutes in the chapel made in Ignatius's disposition. How was this possible? If God wants the Society of Jesus to exist, then Ignatius—and all Jesuits—must do all in their power to assist God's initiative. But Ignatius—and all Jesuits—cannot control all the factors that impinge on the existence of the Society. They cannot control who is elected pope, for

example. So if God wants the Society to continue in existence, it is up to God to write straight with what seemed the crooked line that the election of Carafa as pope seemed to present.<sup>10</sup>

I am reminded of Ignatius's own description of his decision to spend his life in Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> Given his insistence on remaining in Jerusalem, even against strong pressure from the Franciscan provincial, one can argue, as does Leo Bakker, that when Ignatius made the decision to go to Jerusalem and to live and die there, he was

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<sup>10</sup> The reference is to a quotation placed as the frontispiece of his play "Le Soulier de Satin" by Paul Claudel. It is a Portuguese proverb that goes, "God writes straight with crooked lines."

<sup>11</sup> See *A Pilgrim's Testament: The Memoirs of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Parmananda R. Divakar (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), 61–63, nos. 46f. Hereafter this source will be abbreviated to *PilgTest*, followed by the paragraph number and, for convenience, the page number in parentheses.

making an election in the first time; that is, an election so clearly God's will that he could not doubt it.<sup>12</sup> But when threatened with excommunication by the Franciscan provincial, Ignatius concluded that "it was not our Lord's will that he remain in those holy places."<sup>13</sup> Ignatius continued for some years to believe that God wanted him to spend his life in Jerusalem, as becomes clear when we realize that twelve years later, now with nine companions, he spent two years in Venice trying to get passage to Jerusalem. Since the choice of living and working in Jerusalem came from God, it seems that Ignatius felt obliged to do all in his power to carry it out. Only when insurmountable obstacles blocked him did he decide that God meant something different for him.

A further incident tells a similar story. In 1552 Emperor Charles V presented the name of Francis Borgia, now a Jesuit priest, to Pope Julius III, recommending that he be given the cardinal's hat, and the pope was disposed to accede to his request. Ignatius wrote to Borgia an account of his own experience and his process of discernment as to what he, Ignatius, should do in this regard. After three days of some emotional turmoil and prayer, Ignatius came to the conclusion that he should do all in his power to stop the process. He writes:

I felt sure at the time, and still feel so, that, if I did not act thus, I should not be able to give a good account of myself to God Our Lord—indeed, that I should give quite a bad one.

Therefore, I have felt, and now feel, that it is God's will that I oppose this move. Even though others might think otherwise, and bestow this dignity on you, I do not see that there would be any contradiction, since the same Spirit could move me to this action for certain reasons and others to the contrary for other reasons, and thus bring about the result desired by the emperor. May God our Lord always do what will be to His greater praise and glory.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Leo Bakker, *Freiheit und Erfahrung: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen über die Unterscheidung der Geister bei Ignatius von Loyola* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1970). The reference to the election in the first time is from the *Spiritual Exercises*, no. 175. See George E. Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992). Hereafter this source will be abbreviated to *SpEx*, followed by the marginal number.

<sup>13</sup> *PilgTest* 63, no. 47.

<sup>14</sup> *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, selected and trans. William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 258.

Ignatius, it seems, had a remarkable trust in God even when events turned out differently from what he had, with much effort, discerned to be God's desire. But here we find a key notion. Ignatius had the humility to know that he was only one actor in an immensely complex set of actors and factors that make up the history of the world. God could move him to act in one way and others to act in a contrary way. Ignatius would do his part and leave the ultimate decision to events and to God. With these vignettes we come close to the heart of Ignatian spirituality and closer to an answer to our initial question.

### The Example of Jesus (an aside)

Over and over Ignatius begged for "an interior knowledge of Our Lord, who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely" (*SpEx* 104).<sup>15</sup> In contempla-

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*Jesus went forward [to his passion] in faith, trusting that his Father would write straight with this crooked line. Ignatius, in his life, tried to follow in his Master's footsteps.*

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tion Jesus revealed his heart and mind to Ignatius, who conceived of this "least congregation," as he called the company of Jesus, as analogous to the apostles gathered around Jesus. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus himself agonized over what he was about to do. He was a Jew, a member of the people chosen by God to be the light of the world, a people who prayed regularly for the coming of God's Messiah to make them the light of the world. Jesus grew up in a time of

great turmoil among a people whose expectations of the imminent coming of the Messiah were very strong. Jesus believed that he was the fulfillment of God's promise and of the fervent expectations of his people. God wanted him to be the Messiah, and God wanted his people to accept this Messiah. Jesus believed this and did all in his power to bring about God's desire. Now he faced the fact that his people would reject him and turn him over to the Romans to be

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<sup>15</sup>In this paragraph I use my own understanding of the historical Jesus and my own contemplation of the Gospels to make the point. I do not maintain that Ignatius had a modern consciousness of biblical studies and of the historical Jesus.

crucified. They would miss the “one-off” moment of their history as God’s people. Jesus could not, as a human being with a human consciousness, know how God would still save his people. No wonder he was in agony. It may have been not only an agony over the awful way of dying, but even more an agony about his people, his mission, and the future. But he was able to say: “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet not what I want, but what you want” (Mark 14:36). Jesus went forward in faith, trusting that his Father would write straight with this crooked line. Ignatius, in his life, tried to follow in his Master’s footsteps.

### Pray As If Everything Depended on Whom?

There is a saying often attributed to Ignatius that goes like this: “Pray as if everything depended on God; work as if everything depended on you.” In a long appendix to volume 1 of his analysis of the structure and dynamic of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Gaston Fessard traces the historical background of the saying.<sup>16</sup> A Swiss Jesuit some years after Ignatius’s death created some pithy sayings attributed to Ignatius (*Scintillæ* or “little sparks”). These were based on things Ignatius wrote and said and on his spirituality, but they were not direct quotations. Fessard argues cogently that the following Latin version in those *Scintillæ* corresponds to Ignatian spirituality. “Hæc prima sit agendorum regula: sic Deo fide, quasi rerum successus omnis a te, nihil a Deo, penderet; ita tamen iis operam omnem admove, quasi tu nihil, Deus omnia solus sit facturus.”<sup>17</sup> A rough translation: “Let this be the first rule of action: trust in God as though the success of the venture depended solely on you, not on God; at the same time give yourself to the work as though God alone were to do everything.” In other words, the saying means exactly the opposite of the usual one attributed to Ignatius. It should run, “Pray as if everything depended on you; work as if everything depended on God.”

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<sup>16</sup>Gaston Fessard, *La Dialectique des Exercices Spirituels de Saint Ignace de Loyola*, vol. 1 (Paris: Aubier, 1966).

<sup>17</sup>“Selectæ S. Patris nostri Ignatii sententiæ,” no. II, in *Thesaurus spiritualis Societatis Jesu* (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1948), 480. This thesaurus was given to all Jesuit novices in the days when Latin was the lingua franca of the Society.

If one lived by this spirituality, one would indeed do all in one's power to discover God's desire with regard to one's actions.

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*The usual version, "Pray as if everything depended on God, work as if everything depended on you," easily leads to an implicit worldview in which there are two spheres of activity—our ordinary world that goes on as though God had nothing to do with it—and a supernatural world where God acts and from which he occasionally intervenes in our ordinary world.*

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Ignatius did this repeatedly, as can be seen in the way he acted when he was elected general superior and when Borgia was threatened with the cardinal's hat. Then, having ascertained, to the best of his ability, what God desired, he could work with all his energy and élan to carry out this plan, while leaving it up to God how his efforts would turn out. Ignatius's Master was his exemplar. Again, Ignatius's words to Borgia attest to such an attitude, as does his demeanor when he heard of Carafa's election: after a few moments in the chapel, he regained his composure. With this "little spark," I believe, we are at the heart of Jesuit spirituality and have the clue that will enable us to see how that spirituality prepares us for the consequences of increased longevity.

In a conference given in Rome, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach made the bold statement that Ignatius was probably

the first person in the history of Christian spirituality to perceive the Trinity as God at work—as the God who continues to work, always filling up the universe and actively awakening the divine life in all things for the salvation of humanity. If the inspired monk contemplates, the inspired Ignatius works—adhering with all his heart to the designs of the Trinity, offering himself to act in synergy with the Trinity so that his work is for the Trinity's glory.<sup>18</sup>

This Ignatian insight is spelled out in the Contemplation to Attain Love, where exercitants ask to experience "how God dwells in creatures" (*SpEx* 235), "how God labors and works for me in all the creatures on the face of the earth" (236), "how all good things and

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<sup>18</sup>"Ignatius of Loyola: Experience of Christ," in *The Road from La Storta*, by Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2000), 23.



gifts descend from above" (237). Union with God, as Ignatius saw it, means union with God who is always active in this world. Anyone imbued with his spirituality wants his or her actions to be united with the Trinity's action, the Trinity's work, which is, among other things, world history. How does one attain this desire? By doing everything one can to let God choose one's life course. The election of the Spiritual Exercises is not first and foremost "my" election, but God's. In the Colloquy of the Two Standards, for example, I beg "that I may be received under his standard . . . , in the most perfect spiritual poverty; and also, . . . if he *should wish to choose me for it*, to no less a degree of actual poverty" (147).<sup>19</sup> I am asking God to elect me and to give me the grace to accept God's election.

Michael Buckley, commenting on the fifth of the Introductory Explanations (Annotations), writes thus:

I know of no spirituality . . . that encourages a person at the beginning of the journey to deal with the infinite mystery of God magnanimously. The effect of this liberality with God is a peculiar providence, the third stage of the annotation: God can accept the liberty and desires that have been offered, and this acceptance means that he can enter, dispose, employ, and pattern that life as he wishes. To offer God one's desires and liberty is in some way the equivalent of offering him "all his person and all that he has."<sup>20</sup>

In other words, I want God to shape my life for God's own purposes. Hence, I pray as if everything depended on me; that is, I want my actions to be one with God's action because how I act is important to God—for God's mysterious purposes. Once I have been chosen, "elected," I can act with great confidence because everything depends on God.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>20</sup> Michael J. Buckley, "Freedom, Election, and Self-Transcendence: Some Reflections upon the Ignatian Development of a Life of Ministry," in *Ignatian Spirituality in a Secular Age*, ed. George P. Schner (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984), 68.

<sup>21</sup> In his *Freiheit und Erfahrung*, Bakker makes a similar point. "The question is whether God will allow the exercitant, whether God will choose him, to take on the poor and humiliated slave's form which he has been contemplating in the earthly life of the eternal King" (255, translation mine).

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## The Implicit Worldview of the Usual Version

The usual version, “Pray as if everything depended on God, work as if everything depended on you,” easily leads to an implicit worldview in which there are two spheres of activity—our ordinary world that goes on as though God had nothing to do with it—and a supernatural world where God acts and from which God occasionally intervenes in our ordinary world. Most of us older Jesuits grew up with this version. Men brought up on such a spirituality could effectively live in two worlds that rarely intersect and, when they did, only by divine, supernatural intervention. I believe that I lived with such an implicit worldview before the recovery of a more authentic Ignatian spirituality.<sup>22</sup>

When I studied clinical psychology and later taught at the University of Michigan, I became a pretty good psychotherapist. None of my clients in psychotherapy ever talked about religious or spiritual matters, and I took it for granted that they would not mention such matters. At the same time I centered my daily life around a concelebrated Eucharist and a very close community of religious men and women. In the morning I would pray before or after breakfast and then head off to the university to study, teach, and engage in psychotherapy; late in the afternoon I went to the chapel of the local Catholic hospital, where a relatively large group of us celebrated daily Mass. The working day was, at it were, sandwiched between religiously meaningful events, but it had nothing to do with the “bread” of the sandwich, at least as far as my conscious life was concerned. If asked, I would have said that God is, of course, present in everything; but I did not live as though this were true. Even when a professor told me that his clients had begun to speak of religious matters spontaneously after he had come to terms with his own orthodox Jewish religious background, I did not make the connection with what was going on in my own life.

When I was assigned to Weston Jesuit School of Theology and began to do counseling with Jesuits preparing for ordination, nothing much changed. None of these men, in the final stages of preparation for the priesthood, ever talked about experiences of God in

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<sup>22</sup>In a recent discussion with tertians, we speculated that this implicit worldview might still govern the thought processes and actions of many Catholics, lay and clerical.

weekly or even twice-weekly sessions that touched on very intimate aspects of their lives, nor did I wonder at this. In fact, what my Jewish professor maintained was true of himself in his early years as a therapist may well have been true of me as well; namely, that my own unconscious expectation that religious issues had no place in psychotherapy communicated itself to my Jesuit clients in some way; thus they too imbibed the layer-cake spirituality that imprisoned me. I was still living in a two-layered world where natural and supernatural rarely intersected.

Only when we began training for giving the Spiritual Exercises to individuals did this layer-cake worldview collapse. I began to use the listening and counseling skills learned at Michigan to help people grow in their relationship with God and in the process began to find God in all things.

What still surprises me is that I had read Fessard's *Dialectique* while in theology, made such note of the appendix that it still stands in my memory more than forty years later, and yet had not made the connection to my lived life. The worldview I imbibed both before my entrance into

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*"Let this be the first rule of action: trust in God as though the success of the venture depended solely on you, not on God; at the same time give yourself to the work as though God alone were to do everything."*

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the Society and in my early years as a Jesuit had a life of its own that was not dented by theory. It only really shifted through paying attention to my own experience and to that of those who honored me by speaking of their lived relationship with God.

The older view showed itself also in 1969 in the way I approached my assignment after Michigan. It never occurred to me to pray for God's guidance when the provincial asked me to send my résumés to all the institutions of higher education in the province. From conversations prior to beginning my doctoral studies, I presumed that I would be assigned to Weston Jesuit School of Theology. So, though I did send off the résumés and was interviewed at Weston and at Boston College, I did not engage in an attempt at discerning God's will. I must have felt that the interview process would be a formality. Whether the provincial prayed for God's

guidance in his assignment I do not know. But I have my doubts, since he was probably operating from the same worldview as I.

What might have been my reactions if I had not been assigned to Weston, but rather to one of our universities? I am, by nature, relatively easily satisfied wherever I am. But I suspect that, at least at first, I would have been quite angry with that decision and would

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*With a more authentic version of Jesuit spirituality, I would have acted with a greater sense of indifference and freedom in accepting the decisions of superiors and the consequences of living in a complex world where God is actively at work.*

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have wondered about the provincial's wisdom. I would have tried to see the assignment as the will of God; but if it had not worked out well, that is, if I were unhappy and unsuccessful, I might well have been resentful that superiors had made this decision. I believe that the seeds of such resentment reside in the two-tiered worldview we imbibed as young Jesuits. Within that worldview, if something goes wrong in an assignment, there can be only two explanations. Either I am at fault or the superior is. If I am at fault, it is because I have not done enough to make the assignment work or am not talented enough to do what is expected; these conclusions quickly

engender self-doubt and depression. If the superior is at fault, on the other hand, then my resentment is justified; he failed to do his job wisely. Either way, praying as if everything depended on God is not much help.

What difference would it have made if I had been following what I consider a more authentic version of Jesuit spirituality—if, in other words, my life had been guided more by the spirituality that is expressed in the version of the Ignatian saying that goes, "Pray as if everything depended on you, work as if everything depended on God?" In the first place, I would have had a different view of God's relation of our activity. Second, I would have acted with a greater sense of indifference and freedom in accepting the decisions of superiors and the consequences of living in a complex world where God is actively at work. We turn now to some of the effects of living that more authentic Jesuit spirituality.

## A Hypothetical Example of Discernment in the Jesuit Manner

Can we approach life with the mind-set of Ignatius? I believe that we can, and that such an approach will provide the spirituality we need to face the challenges of the whole of our lives, including the challenges of living longer. Let's try to imagine a young Jesuit from a province on the East Coast who has cultivated the mind-set of Ignatius and is now approaching his first apostolic assignment as a formed Jesuit.<sup>23</sup> Like many of his fellow Jesuits, Joe is multi-talented. He has shown in regency that he is a good high-school teacher. During theology he has demonstrated aptitude for preaching, for directing the Exercises, and for mastering theology. With Joe's full concurrence, his provincial assigned him to pursue a doctorate in education at the University of Missouri after theological studies. This program would give him the option of working in the apostolates of secondary or higher education. During his studies he concentrated on curriculum development and teaching methodology, and did his dissertation on the curriculum suited to disadvantaged inner-city high-school boys and girls.

As his thesis progressed, he became excited by the possibility of working as a teacher or an administrator in an inner-city high school, and he had been approached about working with a group of sisters who planned to open a Cristo Rey-type of school in St. Louis in cooperation with the Missouri Jesuits. His provincial had sent Joe's résumé to all the high schools and universities of his own province, and Joe had been offered challenging positions in the province at a university (in the School of Education, which had a history of training dedicated teachers who commit themselves to teach in the cities) and at a prep school (as vice-principal in charge of revising the curriculum, a mandate of the school's board and of the provincial). The provincial had indicated his initial preference for the prep school over the university, because of the greater need at the moment, but had not closed the door to the possibility of his working at the new Cristo Rey-type of high school in St. Louis. He

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<sup>23</sup>The example is an imaginative exercise to illustrate a point. What is said of the university and the prep school and of a possible school in St. Louis is part of the imaginative exercise and is not based on any real situations. Nor does the exercise touch on all the complexities involved in an assignment.

advised Joe to spend some time in prayer and discernment before their next talk, after which the provincial would make the decision.

Joe wants to make an impact on the world because he is haunted by the words of Jesus, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few," and by Jesus' own love for suffering people. He feels impelled by the spirit of the decrees of General Congregation 34, especially "Our Mission and Justice," "Cooperation with the Laity in Mission," and "Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society." As he presents his choices to God in prayer, he feels strongly that the decision before him and the provincial is crucial, not just for himself but for others. No matter what assignment he receives, some people will be disappointed and deprived of his not inconsiderable God-given talents. Moreover, he would probably exert a significant influence upon the institution to which he is assigned, and he would be affected by interactions with these particular colleagues and students. He prays for guidance because, he feels, what he does is important to God's dream for a part of the world. In other words, he prays as though God's dream depends on him.

After a few days he realizes that he is most exhilarated and excited by the thought of working in St. Louis with the sisters; his mind brims with plans and dreams for this enterprise. When he envisions himself at the university in his home province, he feels some excitement and hope and finds himself working on some interesting ideas to test out with the teachers in training; but the excitement is notably more muted whenever he contemplates working in St. Louis. He finds it hard to imagine himself working at the prep school; he would enjoy teaching the students, but the thought of trying to convince the faculty of the need for curriculum change daunts him. After a few days he comes to the conclusion that God wants him to go St. Louis. In the spirit of St. Ignatius, Joe asks God for confirmation of this decision in the course of the next five days before he is scheduled to see the provincial. He remains convinced that his discernment is the correct one.

Joe sees the provincial, who asks him to talk about his reactions to the three possible assignments and about his experiences in prayer. Joe recounts the process he undertook and his conclusion. The provincial seems clearly disappointed, but tells Joe that he will take Joe's discernment into account in his own process. He also asks

Joe how he would react if the decision were to send him to the prep school or to the university. Joe replies that he would be disappointed, but would do what the provincial asks with as much openness and trust as he can muster. The provincial says that he needs to talk over the assignment with his staff and consultants. A week later the provincial calls to tell Joe that he is assigning him to the prep school because of the great need there and because of the prominent role this school plays in the province's future planning. During this conversation the provincial explains some of his own process that led to the decision and assures Joe that he took the latter's own account of conscience very seriously.

Joe is shocked and angry after the call and wonders whether the decision had already been made before he even talked with the provincial. He decides that he needs some time to let things cool down, to pray, and to discuss matters with his spiritual director. Over the next few days, he tells Jesus how he feels. He vents his anger, his suspicions, and also his confusion, because he had believed that God wanted him in St. Louis. In these conversations he feels that Jesus has heard him and senses that the Lord will be with him in his new assignment. As a result of these prayer sessions and his conversation with his spiritual director, he comes to some sense of peace about the assignment and decides not to make representation to the provincial. He goes to the prep school determined to do his best to fulfill the mission assigned by his provincial; in fact, he finds some consolation not only in the act of obedience but also in the work itself. Occasionally, especially when things get difficult, anger flares up, but he is able to speak openly with Jesus, his director, his friends, and his superior; and generally he regains inner peace. Thus, Joe shows that his identity is not tied up in the work he chooses, but rather in being a Jesuit. He can carry out his assignment as though the whole success of the enterprise depended on God, not on himself.

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*Most of us do not change spots  
when we grow old. We move  
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## Jesuit Spirituality for the Whole of Life

What do these stories have to do with the new reality of longevity? A great deal, I believe. As the twig is bent, so it grows. Most of us do not change spots when we grow old. We move into our elder years with the same personalities and the same lived spirituality that we developed in our active years. Thus, if Joe can deal creatively and honestly with the disappointment of being assigned to the prep school when he had hoped to work in a new Cristo Rey type of school in St. Louis, and if the spirituality that supported that response continues to unfold in his subsequent life, then he will be able to face the later diminutions that life brings with the same grace with which he faced this earlier disappointment.

### The Purpose of the Spiritual Exercises

How does one come to such a spirituality or worldview? I believe that we attain it by making the Spiritual Exercises and living

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*I am "indifferent," not in the sense of not caring for created things, but in the sense that they are only relatively desirable in comparison with the God who is my All.*

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out that experience. Ignatius states the purpose: "to overcome oneself and to order one's life, without reaching a decision through some disordered affection" (*SpEx* 21). As is well known, there have been two divergent interpretations of this purpose, the "electionist" and the "perfectionist." Those who hold the first interpretation maintain that the Exercises aim to prepare a person to make a wise election of a state of life in which to serve God best. Those who hold the second believe that the Exercises aim to help a person to union with God. One can, however, follow de Guibert's synthetic interpretation that sees these ends as complementary rather than contradictory.<sup>24</sup> For Ignatius, union with God is achieved by uniting one's own actions with God's action in the world. Thus, election means allowing God to place me where God wants me in the one action that is the world,

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<sup>24</sup> See *SpEx*, endnote 14 (p. 146 f.).



to use the language of John Macmurray.<sup>25</sup> In this way, I am united with God. One can only be free enough to give oneself in this way to God if one has been freed of inordinate attachments, attachments that hinder a person from letting God come close and from letting God choose one's way of life.

The Principle and Foundation expresses this radical freedom. Though written in somewhat dry and theoretical language, it is based on the experience of God as the absolute ground of our being, who creates us to be one with him in time and in eternity. God desires us into being as collaborators in the one action, which is the universe. This creative desire of God forms in the deepest recesses of our hearts a correlative desire for what God wants. At times we experience the welling up of this desire as a desire for "we know not what," as the "joy" which C. S. Lewis called the desire for God.<sup>26</sup> Ignatius distilled the inner meaning of that experience in the Principle and Foundation. Caught up in the experience of God's desire for me and my desire for God, I find everything else to be relative in comparison. Hence, I am "indifferent," not in the sense of not caring for created things, but in the sense that they are only relatively desirable in comparison with the God who is my All. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul makes a similar point. "Yet whatever gains I had [that is, as a Jew and a Pharisee] I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:7 f.).

While I am caught in this experience, I do not worry about my past failures and sins or about what the future might hold. I feel at one with the universe and as whole as I could possibly be. Moreover, the desire I experience is the deepest desire within me. That desire is in tune with God's desire in creating the universe and can become the ruling passion of my life if I let it. When I experience this desire, I am experiencing God's Holy Spirit drawing me into the

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<sup>25</sup> John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent; Persons in Relation* (Highland, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1978, 1979). I believe that Macmurray's philosophy of the personal fits rather nicely with Ignatian spirituality and have used it for a theological consideration of the practice of spiritual direction in my *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God: A Theological Inquiry* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955; originally 1939).

inner life of the Trinity, a life that is actively at work in this world. While I am in the power of this desire, everything else becomes relative before the absolute Mystery I desire. Moreover, we who have imbibed Jesuit spirituality experience, in faith, the Trinity as active, as working in this world; and we desire to live out our lives in harmony with God's working and to do whatever will more readily bring us into line with God's work. We make the full Exercises in order to let God remove all that hinders us from being in tune with his action so that he can shape us and our actions in accordance with God's purposes.

## Indifference

What does Ignatius mean by the indifference he mentions in the Principle and Foundation? That it does not matter what I do or whether I am healthy or not? Given the service mysticism of Ignatius, these cannot be correct. What I do and whether I am healthy

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*Ultimately all that really matters is that I am united with him in everything I do. What I do is secondary to that union with him in any action I undertake.*

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enough to do it matter a great deal because God is active in this world and wants me to be in tune with that action. Hence, I pray as if everything depended on me, that is, to know what God wants me to do. In order to let God shape me for God's work, I need to be free of all inordinate attachments, all addictions, all that will get in the way of God's shaping activity. Prior to knowing God's "election" for me, in other words, I want to be ready to embrace whatever God

wants. In this sense, I want to be "indifferent." I want to give God a free hand to use my freedom in line with God's action. (Joe, for example, prays that he will be really "indifferent" to any of the choices before him, so that God can choose him for the one God wants. But that does not mean that it does not matter what he does. If that were so, there would be no need to pray for guidance at all; he could just leave the whole thing to the provincial or to the flip of a coin.)

Once I have discerned God's election for me and have accepted it, I can give myself to that activity generously and with all my talent, doing everything to make a success of it. But if God's election does not work out as I had hoped, I trust that I will find consolation in knowing that I have done all that I could and left the rest to God. Included in leaving the rest to God are such things as how others will cooperate with me in the project, and events over which I have no control, such as accidents, my health, and its effect on the length of my active apostolate. Such Ignatian "indifference" is the fruit of the experience, in faith, of the absolute Mystery whom we call God.

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*The only pathway to the attainment of Ignatian indifference is a life-long commitment to prayer, to the relationship with God and to the examination of consciousness that will gradually supplant all our disordered inclinations with a growing love for God above all things.*

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Perhaps I can express the same thoughts in terms of the desire of the Second Week of the Exercises. Here I want to know Jesus more intimately in order to love him and to follow him more closely. In other words, I want to be united with Jesus in his mission, to continue his mission, to live my life in total trust of the Father as he did. Ultimately all that really matters is that I am united with him in everything I do. What I do is secondary to that union with him in any action I undertake.

## A Life-long Process

But only a bit of self-knowledge reveals to each of us how far from this ideal we are. The mere repetition of the words of the Principle and Foundation will not make us indifferent, will not make us willing to accept our lot in life when an unwanted assignment, failure to achieve our dreams, sickness, old age, and dying stare us in the face. The attainment of the ideal of Ignatian indifference is a life-long process. Moreover, willpower alone will not attain it; in fact, unaided attempts to attain indifference by willpower alone will only

bring us to despair or to a joylessness that is totally foreign to Ignatian spirituality.

### Another Example from Ignatius's Life

Ignatius himself grew into his mature spiritual self, as the following stories show. In his autobiography Ignatius describes three instances when he was threatened with death. The first occurred at Manresa when a fever brought him to death's door. He was convinced that he was about to die. He became terrified because, it seems, he had the thought that all was right between him and God. In anguish he tried, unsuccessfully, to get rid of the thought. When the danger of death passed, he began shouting to some women who visited him that "for the love of God, when they next saw him at the point of death, they should shout at him with loud voices, addressing him as a sinner."<sup>27</sup>

Contrast this experience, where Ignatius was still caught up in terror of God's judgment and fears of his own pride, with the next one he describes. He was on a ship from Spain to Italy on his way to the Holy Land. In a storm everyone on board was convinced that death was inevitable. "At this time, examining himself carefully and preparing to die, he could not feel afraid for his sins or of being condemned, but he did feel embarrassment and sorrow, as he believed he had not used well the gifts and graces which God our Lord had granted him."<sup>28</sup> Observe that Ignatius knows that he is a sinner and that this knowledge saddens him. But it does not frighten him as it did before. Because of his further experiences of God, he now trusts in the mercy of God. He seems now to believe that he is a sinner loved and forgiven by an all-merciful God. This experience reminds us of the description of the Jesuit from GC 32: "What is it to be Jesuit? It is to know that one is a sinner, yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was."<sup>29</sup>

Finally, Ignatius describes a time in the year 1550, just six years before his actual death, when he and everyone else were

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<sup>27</sup> *PilgTest* 44, no. 32.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 45, no. 33.

<sup>29</sup> Decree 2, "Jesuits Today," in *Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977), 401.

convinced that he was about to die of a fever. "On this occasion, thinking about death, he felt such joy and such spiritual consolation at having to die that he dissolved entirely into tears. This became so habitual that he often stopped thinking about death so as not to feel so much of that consolation."<sup>30</sup> Now Ignatius seems to be so in love with God that the thought of death and complete union with God overjoyed him. In fact, one gets a hint in this narrative that Ignatius now viewed his desire for death as a possible inordinate attachment that might hinder him from being wholly open to God's will. He says that he stopped thinking of death so as not to feel so much consolation. He still had work to do as the general superior of the Society of Jesus, and thus, one can surmise, he needed to be "indifferent" even to his much desired death. This desire, too, might hinder him from being prompt and ready to do God's will.<sup>31</sup>

### Jesuit Spirituality: A Summary

Ignatius came to believe that God is active in this world carrying out God's purpose in creation. In the Contemplation to Obtain Love, we ask to *experience* this activity of God, sustaining, guiding, informing all things. God wants all of us to be in tune with the intention God has in creation, to be one with God in our own actions. In order to be one with God, we must allow God to prune away those inordinate desires and attachments that keep us from being one with God in our actions. Such pruning will leave us "indifferent," or, as Tetlow puts it, "at a balance," with regard to all that is not God.<sup>32</sup> In the process of being pruned, we also fall pro-

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<sup>30</sup> *PilgTest* 45, no. 33.

<sup>31</sup> It could also be that Ignatius stopped thinking of death in order to slow the flow of tears of consolation that, according to his doctors, might ruin his eyesight. But again the argument returns. Ignatius gives up this consolation for the sake of something greater, namely, what he believed to be God's will.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Tetlow, *Choosing Christ in the World: Directing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola according to Annotations Eighteen and Nineteen: A Handbook* (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1989), 128.

gressively more in love with God and with God's Son, Jesus of Nazareth, and want to give ourselves totally to God's project and to our part in this project.

The "election" of the Exercises is really about letting God choose me for whatever God's wants and about my accepting that choice. In Ignatian spirituality falling in love with God means falling in love with a God who is active in this world and wants collabora-

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*This spirituality can provide continuity throughout one's life. With aging and ill health the same principles apply. Even as we age and grow progressively weaker, we are still part of God's one action, which is the world.*

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tors in that project. Once I have discerned God's choice, I then try to follow it out to the best of my ability, leaving the success of the enterprise to God. "Pray as if everything depends on you; work as if everything depends on God." With this fundamental attitude I give myself wholeheartedly to whatever enterprise I am assigned and do everything I can to make a success of my work. But I do not so wed myself to that enterprise that I am totally identified by my work or my place there or the people with whom I work. My identity comes primarily from my relationship with God acting with purpose in and

through me. Thus, if the enterprise fails, or if I am assigned to another work, or if I am no longer capable of carrying on the enterprise because of failing health, I am not destroyed and can, like Ignatius, but perhaps not so easily, recover my equilibrium through prayer.

The point is that this spirituality can provide continuity throughout one's life. With aging and ill health the same principles apply. This spirituality allows us to deal with the inevitable, sometimes very difficult frustrations of sickness and aging in the same way that we have dealt with other frustrations throughout life. Even as we age and grow progressively weaker, we are still part of God's one action, which is the world. This one action includes all the actions of humans in the history of the world and all events, that is, things that just happen apart from human agency. All these actions and events constitute the one action that is our world and are subsumed under God's intention in creating this world. Accidents

and natural catastrophes are part of this one action of God and are somehow subsumed into God's intention. "We know that all things work together for good for those who love, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Included in these actions and events are our own aging bodies, our growing debilities, and, God help us, even our senility, if that is our lot; included too is how we live with them. God is always active in our world, bringing about what he intends. Jesuit spirituality aims to help us to union with God's activity. Even though all human creations and actions are flawed, often corrupted by sinful intentions, and finite, still they can be more or less in tune with what God intends. Hence, how we act and what we create are terribly important; so we pray as if everything depended on us and how we act. At the same time they are finite and contingent; so we can work as if everything depended on God, as indeed it does.<sup>33</sup>

## Does It Work?

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating." Whether this spirituality works not only for the active time of our lives but also for our senior years can only be proved in the "eating," as it were. As each one of us tries to live it, we "prove" its efficacy as "a way to God," as "our way of proceeding." I want to end this essay with some examples of how this spirituality has worked and some questions. The examples spring from my own life as I faced a possibly debilitating illness and a life-threatening one; the questions arise from my own experience and from that of others as well. I hope that they will put flesh on the bare bones of the theory of the spirituality.

### Two Personal Examples

On July 31, 1985, I began a stint as assistant novice director after having spent the previous month in Brazil leading a workshop on spiritual direction and giving a directed retreat. I had been asked to return to Brazil from the middle of February to the end of May of the following year to conduct workshops on spiritual direction in ten different cities, a task I eagerly anticipated. In October I experienced

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<sup>33</sup> I have developed these ideas of the one action of God in *Spiritual Direction*.

frightful shooting pains down my left leg, the prelude to a period of about nine months when I was pretty much laid up with a bad back. Most of every day I lay flat on my back on my bed. I was not able to travel to Brazil to do the workshops. I finally underwent an operation to remove the disk that was causing the pain; but the agony persisted and I had to have some neurological tests. After those tests the neurologist told me that there was nothing doctors could do for the pain but prescribe pain medication such as Tylenol with codeine. His tone and diagnosis seemed something like a death sentence: I envisioned that for the rest of my life I would be as incapacitated as I had been for the past nine months.

It was not a good year from many points of view, and yet I found many consolations. Life in the novitiate went on, and I was able to do my share. I learned that I could still be effective as a spiritual director even though I was laid up. I wrote a little book on prayer, *Seek My Face*, and thereby discovered that I could still write even while confined to bed. In Brazil, Philomena Sheerin, MMM, a graduate of the Center for Religious Development in Cambridge, Mass., was asked to take over the series of workshops that I had originally planned to direct, and eight of the ten venues accepted her services. It was the first time that the Conference of Religious of Brazil had asked a woman to lead such workshops. She was very successful. God wrote straight with the crooked lines of my illness, and it was salutary for me to find that I was not necessary for the project. I became a little more "indifferent" with regard to my health and vitality.<sup>34</sup>

The second serious illness occurred when I was provincial, preparing to go to GC 34. A week before the congregation was to begin, I had a biopsy on my vocal cord that revealed a malignancy requiring six weeks of radiation treatment, five days a week. I wrote a letter to the members of the province that began with the lines of Robert Burns: "The best-laid schemes o' mice and men / Gang aft a-gley." Certainly my "schemes" had gone a-gley. I told them about the cancer and the treatment and then went on to write:

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<sup>34</sup>The neurologist's prediction that I would have to live with the pains in my back and leg and use painkillers regularly turned out to be inaccurate, thank God. Back problems have been only a sporadic problem since.



Needless to say, I am disappointed at not being able to attend the General Congregation, an opportunity that has come along for a Jesuit only 34 times in the more than 450 years of our existence. I am also anxious about this treatment. However, it is a chance for me to test my "alleged trust in God," as C. G. Jung once put it.

My sense of disappointment at not going to the congregation was understated in the memorandum, as I discovered by my reactions during it and afterwards. On more than one occasion tears came to my eyes when it dawned on me what was happening in Rome and later when I heard about the final documents.

As it turned out, the congregation did quite well without me. Bob Taft, my replacement, played a significant part in the deliberations and made a very moving presentation to the province assembly afterwards. His theological scholarship and long experience of relating to and working with Eastern Rite Catholics and with Orthodox Christians brought a unique perspective both to the congregation and to his presentation before the assembly. God wrote straight with this crooked line just as he wrote straight when I could not go to Brazil. I learned at a deeper level than ever before that I am not indispensable, a very salutary experience.

Another experience, connected with my bout with cancer, brought this insight home to me in a powerful way. About a year and a half after the cancer treatments ended, I made my annual retreat. I spent most of the retreat contemplating the words of the first Servant Song of Isaiah (42:1-9), hearing God tell me that I was a beloved servant. It struck me forcibly that, in the midst of praising the servant, God twice makes it quite clear that there is only one God, and that the servant is not God. "You are not necessary, but wanted," is what I heard God saying to me. One evening after supper I was walking outside. The thought flashed through my mind, "You could be dead now." I broke out in a smile, probably because of the mood of the retreat. It was true. I could have been dead, and someone else would be provincial; the province would go

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on without my so-called leadership. I am not necessary, but, for God's own reasons, I was wanted at that time not only in this position but in this world. I have never had such a clear experience of living on borrowed time, of living by sheer grace, and wish that I could keep it before my eyes always.

My usual routines, however, drive the experience from my awareness, and then I act as though I am alive out of necessity and am in control of my life and all its circumstances. When I am in this mode, I tend to worry about details over which I have no control, a way of "playing God," of thinking myself indispensable. In life we all have to make decisions whose success we cannot guarantee, for so much depends on other people and how they will act and react. When my "alleged trust in God" is at a low ebb, I can have sleepless nights going over and over the various possibilities of how matters will turn out, of how I might manage things better to ensure "success," or of how I might manage things better in the event that they did not turn out as I hoped. When I am in this mode, in other words, I act as though everything depended on me, not on God, and I am anxious and less hopeful.

Very early in my radiation treatment I found myself dealing with feelings of guilt. When the cancerous growth was discovered, the doctors routinely asked whether I was a smoker. I had been. To underline the fact that this particular cancer might be considered a "sin tax," my radiologist, on the first day I met him, rather cheerfully commented that people who never smoked and who drank whiskey abstemiously never got this type of cancer. "Guilty on both counts," was my response. I did not think that I felt a great deal of guilt, but an experience a few days later revealed a deeper reality. On the first Friday of January, at our weekly community liturgy, my community prayed over me and the superior administered the sacrament of the sick. After Communion, and out of the blue, an image of my deceased mother came to mind. I had the realization that God and my mother were looking on me with love, with not even a hint of an I-told-you-so attitude. I wept with gratitude and relief. Apparently guilt feelings and even a sense that I was being punished for my "sins" had some hold on my psyche. No doubt my behavior had brought on the cancer, and I regretted (and still regret) that fact and its cost, but I no longer felt or feel burdened by useless guilt feelings.

Fear was a constant companion. I think that I believed my doctor's prognosis that the radiation treatments would take care of the cancer. I seemed most afraid of the radiation itself. What was it doing to me besides taking care of the cancer? I tried to speak with Jesus about my fears and to hand myself over to God no matter what might come. For a fairly long period during the treatment, I felt distant from Jesus. But I had occasions when I felt not only close to him, but also a movement toward surrendering to whatever God had in store for me. Sometimes, before the radiation treatments I took time to tell Jesus of my fears and to ask for healing and for openness to God's will. I also tried to imagine myself being touched by Jesus' healing hand during the radiation treatments themselves. At these times I felt extraordinarily grateful for simply being alive and even peaceful at the possibility that I might not be able to use my voice without a machine.

One very consoling image came while I was contemplating the Transfiguration scene. The cloud of God's presence in our world always surrounds us. We continually walk within that cloud. We cannot know the future, can only grope in darkness as we move through life, touching those nearest us and being helped along by them, but the darkness of the cloud is not frightening. I felt the presence as kind and caring. I could well understand Julian of Norwich's "And all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." At moments like these my fears vanished, and because of such moments the fears did not really overwhelm me.

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Rather amazingly, throughout this period my spirits remained relatively high. My sense of humor never deserted me, and the humor and care of my community helped. In addition, I carried on the ordinary business of being provincial. But since I had cleared the calendar for the three months of the congregation, the ordinary business did not take up all of my time. What to do with all the time on my hands? I had read the first volume of John Meier's *A Marginal*

*Jew* when it came out and had purchased the second volume to take with me to Rome. I read that volume during the first couple of weeks of radiation and got the idea of writing a book on relating to the historical Jesus. It came to me that I could use the desire of St. Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, that I may have "an interior knowledge of Our Lord, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely" to begin each chapter and then provide the reader with material from Meier's study of the historical Jesus for contemplation. In the course of writing this book (*Who Do You Say I Am?*), I got to know Jesus more intimately myself. I came, for example, to appreciate much more profoundly that Jesus is like us in all things except sin, that he, too, had to live by faith, had to do the best he could to discern God's will and then leave the rest to the Father. In addition, focusing on Jesus and on writing about him kept me from being too focused on myself.

In many ways my "alleged trust in God" was tested and found wanting during this time. But in the process I was given a greater trust in God. "God writes straight with crooked lines." My life is a crooked line, my misuse of cigarettes and whiskey another, the cancer another. I do not believe that the cancer was punishment. But I do believe that God has written straight with these crooked lines. I am not only grateful that the cancer is gone but, strange as it may seem, grateful that I had it—because of the way God wrote straight with it and me. Amazing grace!

## The Fruits of These Experiences

Seamus Heaney writes something about hope that fits the spirituality I have been describing in this article.

Hope, according to [Václav] Havel, is different from optimism. It is a state of the soul rather than a response to the evidence. It is not the expectation that things will turn out successfully but the conviction that something is worth working for, however it turns out. Its deepest roots are in the transcendental, beyond the horizon.<sup>35</sup>

I grew in hope through these illnesses, but it had been incubating in me ever since I began to live out the tension of Ignatian spirituality,

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<sup>35</sup> Seamus Heaney, *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose, 1971–2001* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2002), 50.

by praying as if everything depended on me and working as if everything depended on God.

What have I learned from these graced experiences? For one thing, I am more open to looking at the issues involved with aging. I know that I can find God and live with some lightness of spirit even when incapacitated. I am less afraid of death when I can keep the truth in mind that I am not needed, but wanted by God. Too easily I slip back into the implicit mind-set that I am in control and that everything depends on me. But because of these experiences and my reflection on their meaning for Jesuit spirituality, I can find my way back from the illusion of control.<sup>36</sup>

Another fruit has been the realization that I have resources to fall back on when I am no longer able to be so active in the apostolate. As long as my mind is clear, I can, for example, give directed retreats and spiritual direction. I discovered that I could still read and even write while confined to bed. I learned something about passivity through the illnesses, that long periods of time alone in bed need not become daunting. I enjoyed praying and listening to music.

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In 1961 *America* published an article by John LaFarge in which he opined that old age is a time for prayer, for charity, and for courage. What he wrote about prayer is relevant here.

The latter years are a time when we simply allow ourselves to become more familiar with God and with His saints in heaven. We should let ourselves grow closer to that source of life, that ocean of love, toward which we are inexorably moving, just as the waterborne traveler on a great river begins to scent the first tang of the mighty sea to which the current is noiselessly carrying him. It means

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<sup>36</sup> P. D. James, the detective novelist, has one of her characters ruminate, "We need, all of us, to be in control of our lives, and so we shrink them until they're small and mean enough so that we can feel in control" (*Devices and Desires* [New York: Knopf, 1990], 248).

talking much to God . . . [and] listening for that Voice which could not make itself heard so well in the clamor of busier years.<sup>37</sup>

## Some Questions for This Spirituality

### *What Does This Spirituality Suggest for Active Jesuits?*

What we do apostolically is important because we want to be united with the Trinity at work in this world. It would be a perversion of our spirituality to downplay the importance of our apostolic work on the grounds that anything we do counts as nothing in comparison with the immensity of God. God gives us our apostolic desires and talents and asks us to collaborate in the great work of the Kingdom. We do not flee activity in this world in order to find God. We find God in our labor. Nor do we consider our apostolic desires hindrances to union with God, as some conceptions of a more apophatic spirituality would have it. In addition, if we work as part of an institutional apostolate, we do everything we can to make the institution work and to ensure its health and continuation as a work of God.

At the same time we do not totally identify ourselves with our work or our institutions. We find our identity anchored more in our relationship with Jesus in companionship with others than in any work we do. Moreover, in order to ensure that the work we are engaged in continues, if it is God's will that it should do so, we do everything to make sure that the institution, or our part of its operation, has the resources to continue after we are gone. So we do everything we can to prepare for our replacement, and we will ask God in prayer to help us to know when our presence is no longer a help to the enterprise. Indeed, we might make it a feature of the yearly account of conscience with the local superior and the provincial to ask whether we should move on for the good of the apostolate or for the good of other apostolic works. I heard of one institutional president who each year asked the provincial whether the latter wanted him to remain in his position. We are not necessary, but wanted by God for a certain work; but there can come a time when we are no longer wanted, because new ideas are needed or

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<sup>37</sup> Reprinted in John LaFarge, "On Turning Seventy," *Catholic Mind* 78, no. 1342 (April 1980): 15.

because our powers are no longer up to the challenge. The success and continued existence of our apostolic works we must leave to God and to those who follow us.

Jesuits need to take reasonable care of their physical, psychic, and spiritual health precisely because God wants them to be collaborators in the Kingdom. Part X of the *Constitutions* begins with these words: "The Society was not instituted by human means; and it is not through them that it can be preserved and increased, but through the grace of the omnipotent hand of Christ our God and Lord" (no. 812). Soon thereafter, however, we read: "When based upon this foundation, the natural means which equip the human instrument of God our Lord to deal with his fellow human beings will all help toward the preservation and growth of this whole body, provided they are acquired and exercised for the divine service alone" (814).

Jesuit spirituality lives with the tension of complete trust in God and trust in oneself as an instrument of God. One of the natural means recommended by the *Constitutions* is care for one's health: "moderation in spiritual and bodily labors" (822) and "attention

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... to the preservation of the health of the individual members" (826). Jesuit spirituality does not scorn bodily concerns. Ignatius learned at Manresa that excessive ascetical practices could seriously impair his health and thus hinder his effectiveness as an apostle. Indeed, he learned that a moderate care of his appearance made him more apostolically effective. But moderation is the key word. Trust in God and the need to care for one's health must exist in tension in any Jesuit's life. Moreover, Jesuits imbued with Ignatian spirituality recognize that growing old and experiencing growing debilitation are part of God's providence with which they have to reckon. We cannot stave off the steady journey that leads to the grave.

Our spirituality should help us to look reality squarely in the eye. We need to prepare for the time of diminished ability. We can do this by developing ministerial talents that can be used later in

life, by cultivating a love of some solitude and of prayer, and by cultivating friendships. Our spirituality, to be vital, requires that we hold two elements in tension: on one side, a wholehearted commitment to what we are doing in ministry with a reliance on God in prayer, a real friendship with the Lord in prayer; and, on the other side, a readiness to move to different ministries when the need arises—and, we might add in our era, when aging has diminished some of our powers.

*What Does It Suggest about Growing Old and Facing Debilitating Illness?*

Jesuit spirituality is tensile; that is, at their best Jesuits are expected to live comfortably with a number of tensions.<sup>38</sup> For example, we are to be distinguished by obedience to superiors, yet creative, inventive, and discerning; we are to be men of prayer, yet

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*With Jesus' help I can, perhaps, come to the conviction that my primary identity is not rooted in my work, but in union with God always active in the world.*

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actively engaged in the world. One of these tensions has relevance for our topic. We are to be zealously and wholeheartedly committed to our present apostolate, yet ready to leave it at a moment's notice for a greater good or if ordered by our superiors or the pope. The onset of some of the debilities of the aging process can be likened to an order from a superior sending us to another apostolate. In fact, often enough it is a superior who brings to a Jesuit's attention that his

physical capacities now suggest that he retire from his present apostolate. It may take him some time to come to terms with the disappointment and other feelings that follow upon the realization that the time for retirement from active ministry has come, but the spiritual principles remain the same as they were in our active lives.

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<sup>38</sup> See William A. Barry and Robert G. Doherty, *Contemplatives in Action: The Jesuit Way* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2002), for a description of a number of these tensions.



Let's return to the spirituality of "election" in the Spiritual Exercises. As noted earlier, this "election" has to do with letting God elect me, letting God shape my freedom and my life. Indeed, the exercitant, in the Third Week, seeks God's confirmation of this "election," made in the Second Week. Michael Buckley writes:

The completion of freedom is the election of [God's] will in prayer and the living with it in life. For union with God was a union with a God who was not simply the source of all things, nor present in all things, but who . . . labors in all things, struggles in all things, drawing them to himself [*SpEx* 236]. It was the presence of this struggling God, one who immanently works out the salvation of all human beings and whose highest instantiation was the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ, who calls out to Ignatius—God drawing him into the formulation of his providence. The finding of the divine will was by a process of election in which the providence of God and choice of the person became one. The election was the total disposition of oneself.<sup>39</sup>

The final test of such total disposition of oneself comes with the onset of debilitating illness or, what may be even more difficult, the need to retire from active ministry because of age.

Such disposition of oneself includes also the possibility of such feared illnesses as dementia, Alzheimer's, macular degeneration, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, strokes, and the like. Proximity to men with such illnesses at a health center brings home the full meaning of the prayer Ignatius asks exercitants to say after the first point of the Contemplation to Obtain Love. In that prayer we try to say and mean:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will—all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord. All of it is yours. Dispose of it according to your will. Give me love of yourself along with your grace, for that is enough for me. (234)

When one visits friends with Alzheimer's disease or dementia, the stunning impact of this prayer hits home: "All my memory. . . ."

When confronted with retirement from active ministry, many a Jesuit wonders about his usefulness. "If I am not teaching, who am I?" is the kind of plaintive feeling that can hang like a pall over a

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<sup>39</sup> Buckley, "Freedom, Election," 74.

man's spirit. The spirituality I have been outlining can, I believe, help us to move beyond this feeling. First of all, I can tell Jesus how I feel. I can tell him I feel useless. I can rail at him in anger at this turn life has taken.<sup>40</sup> Through such prayer I can find comfort in Jesus' understanding and continued presence. With his help I can, perhaps, come to the conviction that my primary identity is not rooted in my work, but in union with God always active in the world. Even after retirement from active ministry, we are still wanted by God, still united with God's activity in this world, but now with God's participation in our diminishment.

One Jesuit told me of a moving conversation he had with his provincial. A few months before this conversation, this man, in his

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sixties, had had a very serious operation for cancer. The postoperative treatment included experimental chemotherapy with debilitating side effects; the prognosis of a cure was not good. He mentioned to the provincial that he felt OK, but that he had no energy after 11:00 A.M. and wondered whether he could do anything useful. The provincial thought for a moment and then said: "I want you to live; and as long as you live, men in the province will say, 'Isn't

God good to give us \_\_\_\_\_ for one more day!'" That provincial was telling this man that he had value far beyond his work.

In most provinces nowadays the movement to a health center comes with a letter from the provincial giving the mission to pray for the Church and the Society. Ideally such a letter comes after an account of conscience in which this change in status is discussed.

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<sup>40</sup>The writer André Dubus, after losing a leg in an accident, now faced the loss of his two young daughters when his wife left him and obtained custody of the children. He utters this great prayer: "On the twenty-third of June, I lay on my bed and looked out the sliding glass doors at blue sky and green poplars and I wanted to die. I wanted to see You and cry out to You: *So You had three years of public life which probably weren't so bad, were probably even good most of the time, and You suffered for three days, from Gethsemane to Calvary, but You never had children taken away from You*" (*Broken Vessels: Essays* [Boston: Godine, 1991], 161). Later in the essay he indicates that his *cri du coeur* eventually brought him a measure of peace.

The spirituality we have been outlining here makes this mission of a piece with all one's other missions from provincials. We believe in a Triune God who is always active in our world. With this mission we enter into that activity of God in a new but no less real way.

Earlier I quoted John LaFarge on prayer. He also has some wise words of advice on the topic of old age as a time of charity:

In the latter years you cannot . . . practice anything like what you once could in the way of strenuous works for your neighbor. The area in which you can operate becomes gradually smaller. Your greatest hope is seeing that others carry on your works, perhaps much better than you could hope to do. . . . But with all this, the latter years offer countless opportunities for charity, many of which are appropriate to that very time. . . . Old age is the time for *hidden charity*: the good word spoken here and there, a quiet service performed, visits to those in suffering, visits to others of the same age period whose predicament you can understand.<sup>41</sup>

He goes on to list some of the works of charity that are possible: listening to younger people and encouraging them, trying to make life more tolerable for others, writing letters, and, of course, praying for others, those one knows and everyone else. These are all part of the mission to pray for the Church and the Society.

### The "Inverted Pyramid"

Can this spirituality help us to deal more creatively and effectively with the "inverted pyramid" faced by religious congregations in the United States? Those of us who are sixty or older can recall a time when elderly religious were a distinct minority. The age pyramid had a large number of younger religious at the base with numbers gradually declining until there were very few in the older ranges. The average age of most Jesuit provinces in 1970 was about forty-five. Older members of the New England Province, for example, can remember years when there were fifteen and more regents at Baghdad College and numbers in the same range in the other high schools of the province. This age pyramid has now been reversed. In most of the Jesuit communities and apostolates of the United States the elderly predominate. Where there are any regents at all, it is unusual to have more than two, and the norm may be

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<sup>41</sup> LaFarge, "Turning Seventy," 16 f.

closer to one. Young formed priests and brothers also constitute a handful. This fact poses a challenge not only for the young but also for the elderly. And one of the challenges is how we care for the elderly among us who need more than ordinary physical, emotional, and spiritual assistance in daily living.

When there were very few elderly men in a community, it was expected that an elderly man needing some daily assistance would be cared for in the community. This was not only the norm for religious communities but also for society at large. This model exerts an emotional tug on all our hearts. Most of us want to take care of our elderly and feel great consolation when we hear stories of how the elderly were treated in past times. Can it be done without detriment to the apostolic effectiveness of the

community in the present circumstances? I believe that an honest answer has to be no. The inverted age pyramid has put us in a new situation. It cannot be expected that the relatively small number of active Jesuits will be able to carry on their apostolic activity and still give the kind of

psychological, emotional, spiritual, and physical care that a relatively large number of elderly men need. However, I believe that we have not as yet been able, as communities, to face this question with the resources of our spirituality. We do not yet have the "communities of discernment" that our recent congregations and Fr. Kolvenbach hoped we would become. Is it possible to move in this direction?<sup>42</sup>

The situation described is a given. It is like an unwanted assignment by the provincial or an unexpected and debilitating sickness. There is no use in trying to discover who is to blame for it. It is, if you will, one of the crooked lines with which God must write straight. In this situation how should we act? That is the salient question for those of us brought up on Jesuit spirituality. In other

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*How would they remain bonded to one another when dispersed on mission? They engaged in communal discernment, trusting that God would reveal to them through their prayer and discussion how to proceed.*

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<sup>42</sup> Here is the one place where I indicate how our spirituality might help us as a corporate body.

words, each of us needs to pray as though everything depended on us. It is important that we discern how to be in tune with God's intention in this situation. If all of us were to pray with the desire of discerning how to act in these circumstances, we might find a way through the darkness seemingly presented by the inverted pyramid. This would especially be true if we were then able to communicate with one another on our individual discernment and thus pave the way to communal discernment.

The situation, in some ways, has analogies to the one faced by Ignatius and his first companions when they found themselves in Rome in 1539 about to be dispersed on mission by the pope. How would they remain bonded to one another when dispersed on mission? They engaged in communal discernment, trusting that God would reveal to them through their prayer and discussion how to proceed. They were men of different countries and temperaments. "Some of us were French, others Spanish, Savoyards, or Portuguese. After meeting for many sessions, there was a cleavage of sentiments and opinions about our situation."<sup>43</sup> They prayed as if everything depended on them and communicated the results of their prayer with great candor, openness, and trust to one another over many days. They determined that they would follow the majority vote; thus, they trusted that God would show them how to proceed even if they were still rather divided at the end. After a number of days, they came to the unanimous conclusion to ask the pope to let them found a new religious order in which they would take a vow to obey one of their own. After their decision they acted as if everything depended on God.

Our situation, as I have indicated, has analogies to that of the founders. We face a situation that begs for discernment. Moreover, the issue faces all of us, both older and younger members of the Society. How do we continue to help souls in our apostolates, given the new situation presented by the inverted pyramid? How should we organize our communities, given the demands of the apostolate and of the care of the elderly? How should we handle the situation

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<sup>43</sup> Jules J. Toner, "The Deliberation That Started the Jesuits: A Commentario on the *Deliberatio primorum patrum*. Newly Translated with a Historical Introduction," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 6, no. 4 (June 1974): 185.

of a man who obviously needs more care than we can provide in this community? These questions cry out for communal discernment.

I am not naive about our capacity for such communal discernment. Many of us are not used to talking with others about our experiences in prayer. We are more used to arguing for a point than to presenting our own opinions as possible hints from God about how the group should move. And the issues touch questions that make many of us vulnerable and anxious, questions such as "Is it time for me to move to assisted living?" "Will this apostolate continue as a Jesuit work?" "How can we support ourselves with fewer men earning salaries?" Whoever leads the group in communal discernment will have to be aware of the anxieties and possible pitfalls and be strong in holding the community to the task at hand, which is to discern God's will for us in our new situation.<sup>44</sup>

If the magic works, however, something new and exciting can take hold of our communities. For one thing, older and younger members would be praying and talking together to discern how to move forward in the situation presented to us. We would be living out the spirituality of Ignatius. We would pray as if everything depended on us and on what we do; hence, we will do everything to discover God's will for us as individuals and as a community. Thus we would demonstrate our real (as opposed to notional) assent to the words of the *Constitutions* that affirm Ignatius's conviction that God wants the Society of Jesus to exist even in these changed circumstances.<sup>45</sup> We would use all the human means we can muster, in the spirit of no. 814 of the same *Constitutions*, because we are convinced of our own call and of our importance at this moment of the Society's existence, when its very life and health are at stake.

Absent such communal discernment, local superiors and provincials have had to make decisions about the care of the elderly. Clearly, in most provinces the choice has been to develop province infirmaries or health centers to which men who need daily assistance are assigned. I believe that these decisions have been the right ones

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<sup>44</sup> I have made some suggestions on how to move toward communal discernment in "Toward Communal Discernment: Some Practical Suggestions," in *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001), chap. 12.

<sup>45</sup> *ConsCN* 812 (p. 400).

not only to care more effectively and well for the elderly but also to care for the apostolic communities. Our apostolic communities are not equipped to handle the needs created by the advances of modern medicine and the fact of the inverted pyramid. Nor should they be, in my opinion. These communities exist for the sake of the apostolate, not for the sake of the community. It is very painful to face the fact that one's time in an apostolic community is coming to an end. Superiors are well aware of the pain, and because of it often wait too long to raise the issue with elderly men who need regular assistance. Such delays are understandable, but not ultimately helpful for the man or for the apostolic community. I speak from some experience of having delayed dealing forthrightly with men in a timely manner. I believe that I shortchanged the men by not raising the issue earlier. Not only did they not get the care they needed, not only did the apostolic community suffer somewhat, but because of my inaction these elderly men were deprived of the chance to face the reality and to accept it in faith and trust in God.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

The poet Fleur Adcock spent a year in the Lake Region of England. The year seems to have given her a perspective on the effects of aging, as the poem "Weathering" attests.

Literally thin-skinned, I suppose, my face  
catches the wind off the snow-line and flushes  
with a flush that will never wholly settle. Well:  
that was a metropolitan vanity,  
wanting to look young for ever, to pass.

I was never a Pre-Raphaelite beauty,  
nor anything but pretty enough to satisfy

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<sup>46</sup> I am reminded of another neuralgic issue for superiors and community members, namely, whether to confront the elderly about unhealthy behaviors, for example, the abuse of alcohol. I have heard things like this said: "Oh, he's too old now to be confronted about things like that." Such thinking, I believe, reflects a mind-set that sees the elderly as beyond change and treats them as already at death's door. It removes from many elderly the chance for a better lifestyle in the years ahead and the opportunity to ask God for help in changing self-destructive and addictive behaviors.



men who need to be seen with passable women.  
But now that I am in love with a place  
which doesn't care how I look, or if I'm happy,

happy is how I look, and that's all.  
My hair will turn grey in any case,  
my nails chip and flake, my waist thicken,  
and the years work all their usual changes.  
If my face is to be weather-beaten as well

that's little enough lost, a fair bargain  
for a year among lakes and fells, when simply  
to look out of my window at the high pass  
makes me indifferent to mirrors and to what  
my soul may wear over its new complexion.<sup>47</sup>

I would like to believe that years of living in companionship with Jesus and with others in the Society of Jesus might give us a similar "indifference" to the effects of aging. I have argued in these pages that the experience of the Trinity working in this world and inviting us to collaboration in this working can give us a spirituality capable of accompanying us through all the stages of life. This tensile Jesuit spirituality can make us "indifferent to mirrors and to what our souls may wear over their new complexion" as we face the inevitable effects of aging on our ability to work apostolically. I hope that I have succeeded.

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<sup>47</sup> Fleur Adcock, *Poems, 1960–2000* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2000), 124. Used with the gracious permission of Bloodaxe Books.



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