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IGNATIAN MYSTICISM: A MYSTICISM OF ACTION

Ignatius Loyola lived at a time of transition and turmoil in the West. His mysticism played a definite role in the forms of Christian spirituality emerging from that period. The West now seems to be experiencing a new transition period. If the number of people asking to make the *Spiritual Exercises* may be taken as an indication, Ignatius' spirituality may once again exert a major influence on the future of Western spirituality.

In this article, I hope to describe the basic features of Ignatian mysticism and the spirituality connected with it.¹ The thesis is that Ignatian mysticism is a mysticism of action. In describing this mysticism, it will be necessary to discuss the relationship of contemplation and action as understood by Ignatius himself. Ignatian spirituality is usually associated with the *Spiritual Exercises*; yet Ignatian spirituality and the *Exercises* in particular have often been misunderstood. Thus, some time will be spent on the *Exercises*: they will be discussed not only in terms of mysticism of action but also in terms of the prayer-forms employed. In this context the use of the imagination and methods of prayer will be explained.

This study will follow the three basic stages of Ignatius' spiritual journey. Two points will be emphasized: one is the full development of Ignatius' mysticism in the final stage—"the flower in full bloom." The other is the roots or foundation of Ignatius' mystical life, the initial prayer experience he wished to share with others in his *Spiritual Exercises*. For a better understanding of this journey, let us begin by sketching its historical context.

1. In this article, I will not always make a clear distinction between "mysticism" and "spirituality" since one's mysticism flows from his spirituality and in return gives it its shape.

1. Historical Setting

By the time of Ignatius, method in meditation in Europe had become highly systematized. The basic elements were the classical four of "*lectio divina*": reading (*lectio*) of the material, meditation (*meditatio*) in which one reflected on it, prayer (*oratio*) in which one asked God for grace or to give thanks, and contemplation (*contemplatio*) in which one rested in and assimilated the mystery.

The scholastic spirit flowing from the rediscovery of Aristotle brought increasing efforts to classify and put more method into this form of meditation. In the 12th century, the beginnings of methodical prayer emerged. As the centuries progressed, so did the degree of complexity in the classification and forms of meditation. By the 15th century, the methods included lists of topics in a graded series, directions on beginning (bodily posture, use of imagination, etc.), the material for a meditation divided into distinct units or "points." Nothing seemed left to chance.

At the same time that "methodical prayer"² developed, the use of the imagination in prayer also developed. During these centuries, a greater interest developed in the humanity of Jesus, especially in the mysteries that fostered a strong emotional response, the Nativity and Passion. In popular works such as Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi*, the reader was encouraged to enter into the scene from Scripture through the imagination. By Ignatius' day, however, some would not only want to imagine the passion, but to "feel" the cross and "weigh" the nails—the evolution of Christian piety in terms of methodical prayer and use of the imagination had reached its pinnacle.

At the same time, a change was taking place in the understanding of the relationship between contemplation and action. For a long time, the common opinion was that the contemplative life was higher than the active life. Thomas Aquinas stimulated a change by claiming that a "mixed life"—one containing contemplation and action—was even better. For Thomas, it was better to share the fruits of contemplation than to simply contemplate, because action came out of contemplation and one went back to contemplation for nourishment to bear more fruit.

2. By "methodical prayer," I mean prayer-forms that are systematized with instructions given on various aspects connected with them.

Ignatius used methodical prayer and the imagination but in a simplified way. He encouraged a union of contemplation and action without subordinating one to the other. In this way, Ignatius was both a man of his times also a forerunner.

2. First Stage (1521-1524)

The first period of Ignatius' spiritual journey entails his initial conversion at Loyola, his stay at Manresa where the *Exercises* were born, and his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He was thirty years old at the time of his conversion. Being a noble Spanish Basque, absorbed in living the ideals of chivalry, he was not well-educated and could only read Castilian. His favourite books were novels on chivalry and his religious education was no more than the popular piety of the day.

While lying in bed recovering from battle wounds, Ignatius started reading the two books available to him, his "conversion books." They were the *Flos Sanctorum* by Jacobus de Voragine (1228-1298), and the *Vita Christi* by Ludolph of Saxony (d. 1378). The first contained both lives of saints and narrations concerning the lives and deaths of Jesus and Mary. In it, the saints were seen as God's knights (*caballeros de Dios*) and sanctity was spoken of in terms of service, a service that was a response to God's love and was expressed primarily in carrying the cross. The second book was probably the first formal life of Christ. It was meant to be a manual of meditation with a strong emphasis on entering into the events with the imagination.

While on his sick bed, he would spend hours day-dreaming either about deeds he would perform as knight for an earthly lord or about deeds he would perform as a knight of Christ. This combination of imagination and action was to develop, as Ignatius started his spiritual pilgrimage.

What led Ignatius, however, beyond his day-dreaming was his ability to recognize and reflect upon his different interior movements. In his ponderings he recognized that the fantasies of serving Christ brought him lasting peace while the others did not. Here began Ignatius' experience of "discernment of spirits."

Ignatius, as a man who came to Manresa was a novice in the spiritual life. He sought help from others but could not find the direction needed. His experience was rather that God Himself

finally taught him as "a schoolmaster" teaches a little boy.³ It was the fruit of that experience to which Ignatius sought to introduce others by writing and sharing the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Ignatius' own making of the *Exercises* was totally unique. His retreat was a search which lasted for months rather than the ordinary thirty-days of guided prayer. During these months, Ignatius prayed seven hours a day engaged in conversations with various people. For several months he suffered greatly from scruples and was even tempted to suicide. During this time, he also had a recurring vision, which he eventually realized was evil. Finally, when Ignatius was freed from this trial, he entered into what seemed infused contemplation. He spoke of five mystical experiences (probably intellectual visions) whose influence remained for life.⁴ The first four centred on: (1) the Trinity, (2) the creation of the world, (3) the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and (4) the humanity of Christ. The fifth experience, the vision at the Cardoner, opened his understanding to numerous other things.

i. *The Spiritual Exercises*

Ignatius began to compose the *Spiritual Exercises* at Manresa as a result of his experience of God's action and in hope of guiding others. Only after twenty years of use, however, did he write the final form. The *Exercises* give us an insight both into Ignatius' early prayer experience and how he sought to guide others. They are by no means the result of any theory studied or developed.⁵ The *Exercises* are not to be read but to be practised. The aim was for the retreatant to meet God *directly*. The book helps the director guide the retreatant, as Ignatius clearly wrote that he, the director, "should permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature directly with his Creator and Lord."⁶

Usually the *Exercises* were practised in thirty days of solitude and concentrated prayer. Normally, the exercitant attended Mass and meditated four or five times a day, an hour per meditation.

3. Cf. Ignatius' autobiography, *St. Ignatius' Own Story*, Fr. William Young, Loyola Univ. Press, p. 27. This will be cited hereafter as *Auto*.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-30.

5. Recall how spiritually uneducated Ignatius was when he arrived at Manresa.

6. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, (tr. by Louis Puhl, Loyola Univ. Press, 1951).
15. The critical edition of the *Exercises*: *Sancti Ignatii de Loyola Exercitia Spiritualia*, (*Monumenta Ignatian Series 2, Monumenta historica societatis Iesu*, Vol. 100), Rome, 1969. Hereafter cited as *Sp. Ex.*

He would reflect for fifteen minutes after each meditation on what had happened and how he had spent the time. Once a day he would talk with his director for advice and instructions. Three forms of meditation were used: "meditation,"⁷ contemplation, and application of the senses. They were typically medieval. Ignatius accepted these methods along with the traditional view of man: man has three higher faculties—memory, intellect, and will. The memory presents the material, the intellect considers, and the will responds and acts.

The whole person with his higher and lower faculties is to be focussed on the meditation. For that, a proper bodily posture is necessary. An introductory prayer (dedicating the hour to God and asking that all one's "intentions, actions, and operations" be for Him)⁸ and several preludes help compose the person. One prelude focusses the imagination on a symbol or gospel scene. Another prelude focusses one's attention and hopes on the grace desired, e.g., the grace to know, love and follow Christ more closely.⁹ In contemplation, a third prelude focusses the memory on the events to be considered. The main body of the meditation is divided into points, which are given very briefly, so that the subject-matter may be focussed and reflected upon more easily. The meditation is brought to a whole and completion with a colloquy (communicating with someone like Christ about anything to do with the hour).

For Ignatius, subject-matter distinguishes "meditation" from contemplation. The subject-matter for "meditation" is something to be thought about, e.g., one's sinfulness, while the subject-matter for contemplation may be a scene from Christ's life. In contemplation, one is encouraged to become totally involved in the scene by using imagination as well as the higher faculties. In the first point on the contemplation of the Nativity, Ignatius writes:

This will consist in seeing the persons, namely Our Lady, St. Joseph, the maid, and the Child Jesus after His birth. I will make myself a poor little unworthy slave, and as though present, look upon them, contemplate them, and serve them in their needs with all possible homage and

7. Ignatius has his own meaning for these terms. When the term meditation refers to Ignatius' meaning, it is in quotes in this article. Otherwise it is used as a generic term for the hour of prayer according to any of the prayer-forms.

8. *Sp. Ex.*, 46.

9. *Ibid.*, 104.

reverence. Then I will reflect on myself that I may reap some fruit.¹⁰

The application of the senses gives an excellent indication of the movement of these meditations. The subject-matter, as in contemplations, are scenes that can be imagined. In fact, they are scenes that have already been contemplated. During the last three weeks, the retreatant contemplates one or more scenes from the life of Christ. At the end of the day he is told to make an application of the senses on the same material, to savour deeply the material. He is to do so through the imagination (each of the senses is listed). But it surpasses the normal use of the imagination: one is asked to "smell the infinite fragrance, and taste the infinite sweetness of the divinity."¹¹ This type of "imagining" corresponds more to the "interior senses" spoken of by Bonaventure and others. In Ignatian contemplation, however, following the spade-work of reason and imagination, the retreatant is called to surrender himself to God's immediate contact so that he "may hear the soundless words of God, experience the contact of God, and taste the sheer sweetness which dwells in God."¹² By allowing oneself to be absorbed in and savour the gospel mysteries which somehow reveal God incarnate, an immediate contact with God occurs.

As there is a definite movement toward immediate contact with God everyday, the days themselves are bound together so that they lead one through various stages to greater freedom and deeper union with God. The *Exercises* are divided into four basic stages or weeks (not necessarily seven days in length). In the first week one faces his own sinfulness and God's response of constant love and forgiveness. It is a realization that permeates one's whole being. He prays for a realization that may lead even to tears.¹³ He is being called to accept his identity as a "loved sinner." He is called to recognize his need for a saviour (only then can he meet Christ as saviour) and he is called to a sorrow that leads to conversion, to freedom.

The theme of freedom is essential for understanding the *Exercises*. Ignatius describes the purpose of the *Exercises* in terms

10. *Sp. Ex.* 114.

11. *Ibid.*, 124.

12. Hugo Rahner, *Ignatius the Theologian* (Herder and Herder, 1968), p. 197. cf. pp. 181-213.

13. *Sp. Ex.*, 55.

of helping the exercitant gain the freedom (indifference or detachment) needed to discover and choose God's will.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES. Which have as their purpose the conquest of self and the regulation of one's life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment.¹⁴

As we shall see, the union with God in the *Exercises* is a union of wills, of doing God's will. The first week fosters both the love to do this, especially through gratitude for God's goodness, and the desire to turn away from any disorder that prevents it.

The second week corresponds to the illuminative way, as the first week corresponds to the purgative way, in traditional Christian terms.¹⁵ One moves into contemplation of the life of Christ. Christ is presented as the Son of God sent by the Trinity to save all human beings through service and suffering. He does not work alone but invites others to labour with him and eventually to share in his triumph. As one enters deeply and totally into the gospel mysteries, he seeks and prays to be filled with an interior knowledge and deeper love of Christ that will lead to a closer following of his Lord, to being filled with His Spirit. He prays to give himself totally to Christ and his work.

As the need arises during these weeks, various rules for discernment of spirits are given to the retreatant.¹⁶ To become a docile servant of the Lord one must learn how to listen to the various interior affective movements and to distinguish what leads to life and what does not. Part of the director's role is to help the exercitant develop this art so he can live the rest of his life under the interior guidance of God's Spirit. Sometimes the exercitant wishes to make a life-decision ("election") during the *Exercises*. If so, it is during these days of concentrating on Christ's life and his own interior movements that the exercitant specifies that choice.

The third and fourth weeks draw one into greater union with Christ by having him live through the paschal mystery of his

¹⁴. *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵. *Sp. Ex.*, 10.

¹⁶. *Sp. Ex.*, 313-44. There are actually three sets of rules (314; 315-27; 328-44). Which set applies depends on the spiritual stage of the exercitant.

Lord. In the third week, he contemplates Christ in his passion and death. He prays "for sorrow with Christ in sorrow, anguish with Christ in anguish, tears and deep grief because of the great affliction Christ endures for me."¹⁷ The emphasis is on entering into Christ's suffering, on suffering *with* him. In the fourth week he contemplates the risen Christ and prays "for the grace to be glad and rejoice intensely because of the great joy and the glory of Christ our Lord."¹⁸ Here there is no mention of rejoicing because of the benefit to one. The joy is all for Christ. This is the type of union and love to which the retreatant is invited.

The retreat does not end rejoicing with Christ in some heavenly place. In the fourth week, the exercitant contemplates Christ supporting his disciples, who will continue his work. The retreat then ends with the "Contemplation to Attain the Love of God."¹⁹ There the exercitant meditates on God's presence and action in creation. Everything points to God's active and present love for the retreatant. He is then encouraged to respond with his act of love, to offer his whole being to his Lord, to be used as He wills.²⁰

ii. Method in Prayer

Although the *Spiritual Exercises* were part of the medieval approach of methodical prayer, Ignatius simplified his instructions (cf. *Scala meditatoria* of Mauburnus for the summit of complexity). For Ignatius, detailed instruction or method was for the preliminaries of prayer and not for prayer itself. That was God's business. Thus he wrote to Francis Borgia:

God sees and knows what is best for us, and as He knows all, He points out the way to follow. But we, even with His grace, have a hard time finding it, and may have to try several ways before we travel by that which is evidently the one for us.²¹

17. *Sp. Ex.*, 203.

18. *Ibid.*, 221.

19. *Ibid.*, 230-37.

20. *Ibid.*, 234.

21. *Epistolae et Instructiones S. Ignatii*, Vol. II, (*Monumenta Ignatiana*, Series 1), Madrid, 1903-11, p. 230. Hereafter cited as *Epistolae*.

Method is to help a person become focussed in prayer and enter into it. The *Exercises* call one to dive deep into prayer and not stay on the surface or discursive level. "*Sentir*," to savour deeply, is a key-word for Ignatian prayer and repetition is an essential part of achieving this. One returns again and again to a passage so that God's action and message can penetrate him more than intellectually. The director encourages the retreatant not to obtain many ideas but much "*non multa sed multum*."²²

The method of the *Exercises* is more flexible than one might expect. The director is expected to adapt the *Exercises* to each retreatant, e.g., the length of each week is determined by the needs of the exercitant.²³ Ignatius was very practical. The starting point of the *Exercises* and his spirituality, what he called the Principle and Foundation,²⁴ states that the use or nonuse of creatures should be decided by whether they help or hinder one's praise, reverence, and service of God. Methods are such creatures.

The *Exercises*, concerning the experience of a relative beginner in the spiritual life, were written primarily for beginners.²⁵ Ignatius saw the need for special guidance at that stage. However, it is clear from his later writings that when one advanced in the spiritual life there is little need for rules. Thus in the *Constitutions*, he wrote about trained Jesuits: "Therefore, in what pertains to prayer, meditation, and study...it does not seem expedient to give them any other rule than that which discreet charity dictates."²⁶ Method then is part of the *Exercises* but it would be a mistake to conclude that an emphasis on method characterizes all stages of Ignatian prayer and direction. Method is used as an aid when needed.

iii. *Imagination*

Ignatius found the use of the imagination helpful to his prayer and encouraged others to use it. In the preludes, the imagination helps one to centre his whole person on the material

22. *Sp. Ex.*, 2.

23. *Ibid.*, 4.

24. *Sp. Ex.*

25. Cf. Alexandre Brou, *Ignatian Methods of Prayer* (Bruce Pub. Co., 1949) p. 25.

26. *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, tr. George Ganss, (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), Part VI, c. 3, n. 1.

considered. It is a way of entering more totally into the mystery and being possessed by it. Ignatius wished the whole person with all his aspects and faculties to become ordered (a key-element of sin for Ignatius was disorder and lack of harmony). Therefore, one in his entirety was expected to enter into the meditation and be involved.

In relation to this point, Ignatius also emphasized affectivity. The hope is that the entire person including his affectivity would become more ordered. The rules for discernment of spirits are important because they help the retreatant learn how to interpret the various movements within him. The exercitant's affectivity is meant to aid him in his journey toward God.

Ignatius experienced that the imagination affected what one felt, thought about, and moved towards. In our day, certain schools of psychology have explored the language of the imagination and claim it as the language of our subconscious. Carl Jung and others, for example, claim that the communication with these other layers is two-way: images in dreams or meditative states reveal activity at these levels and the images focussed on speak to these same levels.²⁷ Thus, some psychologists use imagination-centred meditation for therapy.²⁸ From another angle, Bruno Bettelheim claims that fairy-tales through basic symbols work at deep levels to help children's development.²⁹ Finally, Roberto Assagioli in discussing how to live more from one's centre, in making and following one's decisions, speaks of the influence of the imagination on this process, especially as it affects one's thoughts and emotions.³⁰

These psychological studies can help one understand and appreciate more fully Ignatius' approach. The proper use of the imagination can help one come to greater wholeness and harmony.

iv. *Mysticism of Action*

The God of the *Exercises* is a very active God. Christ is portrayed as being sent by the Father to save man. The "Contempla-

27. Cf. Jung's experience described in his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963.).

28. Roberto Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis* (Psychosynthesis Research Foundation, 1965), pp. 287-315.

29. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, (Knopf, Inc., 1976.).

30. Roberto Assagioli, *The Act of the Will*, (Viking Press, 1973.).

tion to obtain love"³¹ focusses one's gaze on God as Creator, constantly present and active in all of creation. This fosters a three-fold desire in the retreatant.

First, the exercitant is drawn to find God everywhere. Ignatius tells the retreatant early in the *Exercises*: "The perfect, due to constant contemplation and the enlightenment of the understanding, consider, meditate, and ponder more that God our Lord is in every creature by His essence, power and presence."³² The final contemplation obviously nourishes this. This thrust is not surprising since at least three of Ignatius' mystical experiences at Manresa centred on God's presence in creation.

Second, the exercitant is invited and encouraged to actively serve his God. This thrust towards service is clear throughout the *Exercises*. In the contemplation to attain love, the exercitant is told that love is shown more in deeds than words. The contemplations on Christ's life are made against the background of the Kingdom Meditation,³³ where Christ is portrayed as calling fellow-labourers. In the colloquy of the first meditation of the first week, the exercitant looks at his life in terms of what he has done for Christ.

Third, the *Exercises* instruct the exercitant to view creatures as gifts to be used in service. This is part of the Principle and Foundation of the *Exercises*. It is carried throughout the *Exercises* as one seeks to use the environment, one's body, imagination, and higher faculties to help one meet God.

The *Exercises'* thrust is towards a mysticism of action, finding God in the world and labouring with Him. Ignatius' emphasis on discernment of spirits is crucial for understanding this spirituality. God is active everywhere but active in a very special way within the person. He Himself seeks to guide the person in his service.

The strong Trinitarian thrust of the *Exercises* gives a structure for this mysticism. Ignatius related differently to each of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. He was called to labour with Christ, to become another Christ. It was the Spirit who would nourish and guide him from within. The one who began the process and was the final goal was the Father.

31. *Sp. Ex.*, 230-34.

32. *Ibid.*, 39.

33. *Sp. Ex.*, 91-8.

The year after his stay at Manresa, Ignatius expressed and emphasized this form of mysticism. His devotion to the humanity of Christ (i.e., God really present as man) and his desire to serve the Lord were fostered by his journey to the Holy Land. He proceeded there alone and penniless in order to grow in a reliance on God who would guide and protect him.

3. Second Stage (1524-35)

Upon returning from the Holy Land, Ignatius resolved to study so that he could be of greater service to God and his people: to "help souls." Although this ex-soldier desired to throw himself into apostolic work and long hours of deep prayer, he began instead to study Latin grammar with children.

For the next ten years (age 33 to 43), Ignatius placed study above prayer and apostolate. This was not easy. At the beginning, he experienced great spiritual lights and consolations that interfered with his studies.³⁴ He soon realized that this was a temptation, that studies demanded his full attention. Thus he cut back on his prayer and resisted "his tendency to devotion and his habit of spiritual absorption."³⁵ Polanco, Ignatius' biographer, says that Ignatius had to do himself "great violence" to study³⁶ and that he resolved to limit his daily prayer to Mass, the exams of conscience, and about one hour of meditation.³⁷

Ignatius had made a choice. For him, union with God was by love, a love that grew and was lived out in deeds rather than in quiet union. For ten years he deliberately let go of many of the consolations experienced in contemplative union and lived instead "the dryness of studies." All so he could "help souls."

4. Final Stage (1535-56)

After his years of study and relative dryness, Ignatius experienced a wondrous abundance of consolation. He interpreted

34. *Auto.*, pp. 54-55.

35. Nadal, who was with Ignatius in his later years, called the above Ignatius' most serious difficulty in studies. *Fontes Narrative de Sancto Ignatio*, Vol. 2. (Rome: 1951) p. 76. This is in three volumes. Hereafter, referred to as *FN*.

36. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 167-70.

37. *Ibid.*, II, p. 309.

this gift as a confirmation of his years of struggle. From then on Ignatius was able to live out a fully developed and, in a sense, effortless mysticism of action.

Ignatius saw union with God as the goal of life and mysticism. The goal for him was a union of wills, a co-operating with God in His labour to bring the world to fullness of life. He taught his Jesuit followers that the grace given to them to serve others was the very grace that would sanctify them.³⁸ Service was the way to both express love and grow in loving union.

Three features of this mysticism stand out. First, Ignatius was now able to *find* God in all things. He was a "contemplative in action." For Ignatius, the relationship between prayer and action was different from that proposed by Thomas Aquinas, i.e., let prayer give one the energy to serve and refill one as needed. It was the relationship of the goal, repose of all in God, and the working with God toward that goal. Maurice Giuliani describes this dynamics:

To return to prayer, therefore, is not to retire from activity, like the fighter from combat, but it is to elevate our activity even now to the level it wishes to attain—the repose of all things in God. In fact, if the soul has first enjoyed God in prayer, it was only a passing anticipation of the Kingdom. It is dragged away by "violence," withdrawing from the goal which it thought it had reached in order to build up by its activity the Temple to which God will come to repose with His own. The soul returns to prayer in order to experience anew its desire to see the work finished at last and to cherish the hope of God's coming.³⁹

The conclusion is not that one can stop formal prayer. Without it, the sensitivity and hope to seek God in all things wanes. Our attention is focussed differently in prayer and action. For Ignatius, to give oneself to service did not mean keeping one eye on work and the other on God. The union was of wills, not a looking at each other but together looking out at the work.

38. *General Examen*, from *Constitutions*, Ch. 1, n. 3.

39. "Finding God in All Things," *Finding God in All Things*, essays in Ignatian Spirituality (Regnery Co., 1958.) p. 15.

With his vision, Ignatius fought the tendency among some Jesuits to prolong meditation. At this direction, Polanco wrote to the new superior of a formation house:

As to prayer or meditation, unless there is a special need arising from troublesome and dangerous temptations, of which I have spoken, I see that our Father prefers that one try to find God in all that one does, rather than devote a long time to it. And this is the spirit which he desires to see in the members of the Society; that if possible they do not find less devotion in any work of charity and obedience than in prayer or meditation.⁴⁰

In other letters, Ignatius went further and stressed to his busy followers that service in obedience to God's will was better than hours of contemplation:

For distracting occupations undertaken for His greater service, in conformity with His Divine Will, interpreted to you by obedience, can only be, not the equivalent of the union and recollection of uninterrupted contemplation, but even more acceptable proceeding as they do from a more active and vigorous charity.⁴¹

Because of the emphasis on seeking God in all things, Ignatius stressed the importance of the examen of conscience.⁴² In the examen, a Jesuit, several times a day, would stop his activity and prayerfully attend to how God was present in the day and to ask how he was responding. This was a necessary part of seeking God in all things.

A second feature of this form of mysticism follows from the above: discernment of spirits. Although God is active everywhere, a centre of activity is within the person. There God guides and nourishes His instrument. Discernment is the art of interpreting the interior movements, learning to recognize

40. *Epistolae*, III, p. 502.

41. *Epistolae*, IV, p. 127.

42. If a Jesuit were sick Ignatius says he could drop meditation but not the examen. An excellent article on the examen is "Consciousness examen" by George Aschenbrenner, *Review for Religious*, Vol. 31, n. 1.

and follow God's action.⁴³ This is essential if one is to really be God's instrument, being pliable in His hands and finding Him in activity.

The third feature and a necessary condition for the above is purity of heart. Without it one cannot be contemplative, be receptive to God's call in the concrete nor have the love to carry it out.

The positive side of purity of heart is a passionate attachment to or love of God and His will (the focus of the final three weeks of the *Exercises*). The negative side is a loss of self, or detachment (focus of the first week of the *Exercises*). The entire *Exercises* and Ignatian spirituality stresses a growth in freedom (detachment) so that one can both hear and do God's will. The goal is St. Paul's words: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Gal. 2:20)

In the light of this, Ignatius placed great emphasis on the importance of mortification, of eliminating the ego and everything else that prevents union with God. This was more important to him than long prayers. When he criticized Nadal for sympathizing with those wanting more time for prayer he ended by saying: "For a man who is really mortified, a quarter of an hour will be enough to find God in prayer."⁴⁴ The obstacle to finding God in prayer and in activity is ego and disordered attachments. The remedy is mortification (most of which comes naturally in whole-hearted service) and love.

5. Conclusion: A Mysticism of Action

The essence of Ignatian mysticism is then a mysticism of action. Adapting William Johnston's definition of mysticism in *The Inner Eye of Love* (p. 20), I understand mysticism as a union with and knowledge of God found through love. This knowledge is experiential and supraconceptual.

43. Cf. William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love* (Harper and Row, 1978) pp. 27-28. There Johnston explains why he sees these movements as truly mystical experiences.

44. *Epistolae*, pp. 250-1.

From Manresa on, Ignatius enjoyed this type of union and knowledge. The five visions experienced there speak of experiences that are supraconceptual and then expressed in vague images. The consolations and movements that were such a part of his life and his ability in the final years to find God at any time speak of a deep mystical union.

Although the *Spiritual Exercises* were the foundation of that mysticism, they were also only the first stage. They set the direction of seeking God in all, of a strong incarnational tone that fostered one's becoming focussed in love on Christ and through Christ on the Father. They fostered a growth in freedom and an ability to discern that led towards a greater union with God's will and towards a life of service.

In this context, was observed the use of methodical prayer in the *Exercises* as a means to lay the foundation of a deep knowledge and love of God in Christ. The movement in the *Exercises* and Ignatius' life is toward greater freedom and simplicity. Likewise, with time the role of the imagination became less noticeable. In the *Exercises* more effort is needed to focus the retreatant on the mysteries being considered. Ignatius experienced that God could work through his imagination to draw him closer. As union grew, just to imagine Christ present would lead Ignatius' heart to delight in the Lord. As his journey continued, images might not help reveal God but they drew his heart even more into Him.

We saw that the basic elements and forms of Ignatian mysticism and spirituality were put together at this stage but that they grew through a stage of purification until they came to full bloom in Ignatius' later life.⁴⁵ Ignatius grew into a contemplative in action: one who with great purity of heart could discern the movements of God within and through his deeds of obedient service. He became one who could find God in all things.

All are invited to a union with and knowledge of God through love, to some form of mysticism. Most people who seek

45. Ignatius led his followers along the same path: (1) a novitiate, in which the *Exercises* are made and the foundations of one's spirituality laid down, (2) years of study where the emphasis is on study rather than long prayer, and (3) a life of ministry begun with tertianship (a time to deepen affective union with God).

God in our day need to do so not on the path of solitary contemplation but on the path of labour with and for others. The call of this path seems to come to many not only from physical necessity but from a movement to reach out in genuine compassion to others. May the experience of mystics like Ignatius, whom people find in a variety of world traditions, be a source of encouragement and guidance to such seekers!