

# Realism in Ignatius of Loyola

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The story of Ignatius' conversion is often described as a conversion from a military idealism to a religious idealism. A more accurate description, I suggest, is that it involved a conversion from a military idealism to a religious *realism*. To explain, let me begin with the basic story.

In 1521, while he was defending the castle of Pamplona against the French troops of King Francis I, his leg was broken by a cannonball. During his convalescence, he read a *Life of Christ* and a *Lives of the Saints*. He was so moved that resolved to go to the Holy Land to imitate the great deeds of saints for God. After an all-night vigil before our Lady at the monastery of Montserrat, he stopped at the little town of Manresa. There he worked in a hospice and spent hours in penance and prayer in a cave. For eleven months he struggled with intense scruples and spiritual consolations, all the while composing his famous *Spiritual Exercises*.

Ignatius himself gives a more detailed account of these events in a brief story of his life. What I find to be a goldmine of wisdom about the spiritual life is the first thirty-seven paragraphs,<sup>1</sup> which cover the time he spent at Manresa. His scribe, Luis Gonzales, notes in the Introduction that Ignatius resisted requests to dictate his story but gave in only after an occasion on which he told Gonzales about how he learned to struggle against the evil spirits regarding vainglory. It was as though he was finally moved with both a strong desire and a clear purpose for talking about himself. That purpose, I believe, is not to encourage but to enlighten, not to give guidelines for behavior but to explain how behavior is governed by the workings of the soul, so that anyone reading his story might learn to listen intelligently to the voice of God within. In fact, it is misleading to call this account an "autobiography." Nadal had asked Ignatius to "make known all that had taken place in his soul up to that moment."<sup>2</sup> Something like Augustine's *Confessions*, his story is an exploration of the general workings of the soul through an investigation of his own inner experience.

We can find out *what* he discovered about the soul in his "Rules for Discerning Spirits,"<sup>3</sup> appended to his *Spiritual Exercises*. But to find out *how* he made these discoveries, to understand the learning process, then this autobiography is the work to read. His purpose there is to teach, by the example of his own history, how to discover for ourselves the wisdom he encapsulates in the Rules for Discernment. What Ignatius discovered about

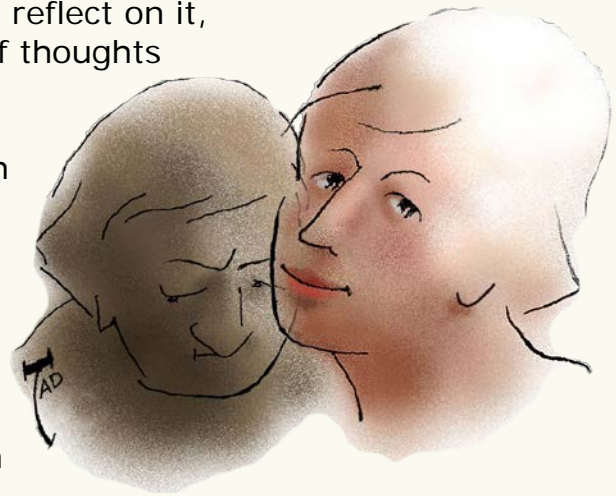
the soul was made possible by an intellectual curiosity and an unflinching dedication to truth which gave his spiritual development a solid intellectual foundation. If I had to put in a single word what he is trying to say there, I would call it "realism." What follows is a plausible account of the steps in his development as he describes them. Here and there I will also refer to the parts of the *Exercises* which clarify what happened to him at Manresa. As we go, the meaning of "realism" and its significance for our own spiritual development will become clear.

### **Noticing**

As Ignatius lay recuperating from his battle wounds, he not only read about the life of Christ and the lives of the saints. He also fantasized for long hours about doing gallant deeds for an unnamed noblewoman, and of other deeds which he discreetly puts under the category of "knight errantry" (A:5). But he noticed that the thoughts of chivalry excited him at the time but left him sad and dry later, while the thoughts of great escapades for God left him with an abiding peace. He says he paid no attention to this difference at first, but then (referring to himself in the third person as he does throughout the autobiography) he says, "one day his eyes were opened a little and he began to wonder at the difference and to reflect on it, learning from experience that one kind of thoughts left him sad and the other cheerful." He remarks that this was the beginning of a "step-by-step" (A:8,55) process by which he eventually learned the art of discerning spirits.

I want to underscore the fact that this first step in his spiritual education was simply a matter of noticing two quite different feelings which lingered long after his fantasies. He makes no mention here of examining his conscience or of feeling any interior sorrow for his past sins. Nor had he received any extraordinary visions at this time. What he remembers as the beginning of a profound spiritual education is a growing intellectual curiosity about the spiritual feelings left over from two kinds of daydreaming.

As we know, this was only a beginning. He notes that the growing desire to serve God which he experienced at this time was completely focused on external deeds—deeds as extreme as the deeds of chivalry that delighted him earlier— and that this new intellectual curiosity did nothing at first to change this simplistic zeal. "All his thought was to tell himself, 'St. Dominic did this, therefore, I must do it. St. Francis did this; therefore, I must do it'"



(A:7,17). He describes himself as doing penances “not so much with an idea of satisfying for his sins, as to placate and please God” (A:14). To his mind, the outer world was where real action happens, while the inner self comprised just the feelings and thoughts which react to that world. Like a child, he regarded his feelings and thoughts as simply *himself*. He had no idea that the self, too, might be part of an objectifiable world subject to inquiry, understanding and growing realizations. “Up to this time he had continued in the same interior state of great and undisturbed joy, without any knowledge of the inner things of the soul” (A:20).

He describes here a little story of decision-making so ignorant of the soul that we can't help think of him laughing at himself as he tells it (A:15-16). Once recovered from his leg surgery, he mounted a mule and headed for the monastery of Montserrat, where he intended to dedicate his life to God during an overnight vigil there. He fell alongside a Moor and they began arguing whether the Virgin Mary lost her virginity in giving birth to Jesus. The Moor seems to have won the argument and spurred his mule on ahead. Steaming with indignation, Ignatius could not decide whether to give the Moor “a taste of his dagger” for what he had said about Our Lady or to let the matter pass. “Tired out from this examination,” he did what many of us do on occasion. He rode to the fork in the road and let his mule furnish the best decision for him.

Well, the mule chose the better part of valor and brought him on to the monastery where Ignatius laid aside his dagger and fine clothes and spent the night in a vigil of dedication before the altar of Our Lady of Montserrat. From there he headed for Barcelona, taking a side road so as not to be recognized—a road leading to the fateful town of Manresa. He ended up spending eleven months there, learning the fundamentals of the spiritual life and writing exercises for others to learn the same for themselves.

### **Objectivity**

For the first time in his life, Ignatius began to experience visions, although these first visions turned out to be less than trustworthy (A:19-20). Very frequently during broad daylight, he says, he saw a serpentine figure, covered with bright objects something like eyes, and was greatly consoled by the vision. But not to be carried away with the consolation, he noticed two unsettling features of these experiences. First, when they receded, he was left displeased. Second, during these same days he was also bothered by an inner voice saying, “How can you stand a life like this for the seventy years you have left to live.” He reacts with the pugnacious instincts of a noble knight under attack. He retorts to this enemy, “You poor creature! Can you promise me even one hour of life?” He noted that this reaction brought

him peace and that these days he made great efforts to preserve the serenity of his soul.<sup>4</sup>

However, this small victory marked just the beginning of an all-out war against him by the Tempter (A:21). Immediately after, he says, "He began to experience great changes in his soul." For a time, he felt intense distaste for spiritual things, and then as suddenly "as one removes a cloak from somebody else's shoulders" he experienced intense spiritual consolation. Ignatius remarks, "Here he began to marvel at these changes which he had never experienced before, saying to himself, 'What new kind of life is this that we are now beginning?'" He points out that while he had "a great desire to go forward in the service of God" he still "had no knowledge of spiritual things." Knowledge, no, but curiosity, yes: a curiosity not about what anyone said or wrote about the spiritual life, nor about any virtues or principles, but about the actual inner events he experienced. And besides a curiosity, he acknowledges that he was very scrupulous about not departing from the truth (A: 12, 99). His sense of reality underwent a fundamental transformation inasmuch as he began to regard inner experience with no less objectivity and wonder than he formerly regarded the external deeds of chivalry.

In the crucible of these struggles with consolation and desolation, he worked out not only his own personal resolution to problems, but also an objective understanding of what goes on in anyone who seeks God, and how they might question their own experiences. Scruples began to toss him between certitude and doubt about whether he had really confessed all the minutest sins of his life. So he prayed seven hours a day on his knees and abstained from eating and drinking for a week, but this bias for external actions got him nowhere (A:22). As this struggle led him to the brink of suicide, he made a desperate but morally courageous leap. Of the two kinds of inner sensations he experienced during his convalescence, he realized that the scruples clearly stripped him of all the good cheer which resulted from reading the lives of the saints. Encouraged, probably, by his success in rejecting the earlier temptation to give up a lifetime of trial, he began to look behind the *content* of these torturing thoughts, which were likely true enough, and to wonder about their *source* (A:24,25). He notes that "he began to look about for the way in which that [evil] spirit had been able to take possession of him" (A:25)—a habit of scrutiny he will later recommend to anyone interested in serving God (E:333-334). He then made up his own mind, which had become very clear, he says, never to confess his past sins again, "and from that day on he remained free of those scruples, holding it a certainty that our Lord in his mercy had liberated him" (A:25).

We can see here how intently Ignatius wanted to show how his understanding, and not just some vague good will, was the key to his freedom. By taking responsibility for understanding his own inner

experiences, he completes the crucial differentiation which had begun earlier between his "self" and the feelings and thoughts that occurred to that self. He saw the self as capable of freely choosing to accept or reject feelings and thoughts. Implicit in this drama lies the unconceptualized idea that reality is simply whatever occurs and whatever really is, no matter whether "in here" or "out there" or "up there." From this time forward he watches the arrival of thoughts and desires into his consciousness like a high-stakes poker player watching the fall of the cards.

### ***A Theology of History***

At this point, we post-Freudians may wonder about the reality of these good and evil spirits. But Ignatius never doubts their reality and would not have been interested in debating doctrines anyway.<sup>5</sup> His belief in spirits is instrumental to his far larger concern to get intelligently involved in salvation history. Ignatius does not describe this larger concern in the autobiography, but it is quite evident in the *Exercises*, which he was composing at the time.<sup>6</sup> He envisioned salvation history from two angles: first, through a parable of the inner struggle of every man and woman; and second, through an extraordinarily matter-of-fact approach to the events narrated in the Gospels. First, let us look at his parable on the universal inner struggle, the meditation on the Two Standards.

At Manresa, while struggling with the spirits in his own life, Ignatius also discussed spiritual matters with many people with significantly positive results (A: 26,29). No doubt he explained what he learned about the spirits. But he also seems to have learned firsthand from this ministry how both the good spirits and the evil spirits themselves have a worldwide ministry in mind. We can see this in the universal and aggressive scene which the Two Standards presents. It is far more than a lesson designed for retreatants to resist temptation and cooperate with grace. It is a theology of history, a worldview, a philosophy of life in metaphor projecting a vision of how all the thoughts and feelings initiated by the various spirits influence all the actions of people. It envisions every person, in every possible life, as engaged in this fundamental battle. On the side of evil, Ignatius sees innumerable demons sent out across the face of the earth, so that "no province, no place, no state of life, no individual is overlooked" (E: 141). On the side of good he presents Jesus, described as "the Lord of all the world," who "chooses so many persons, Apostles, Disciples, and so forth," and who "sends them throughout the whole world, spreading his sacred doctrine through all sorts and conditions of persons" (E: 145).

In this battle, both sides employ strategies. Lucifer sends demons out to snare people by drawing them first to desire riches, and then to want honors that they may finally arrive at pride. Christ's strategy is just the opposite,



ploy for ploy. Christ sends disciples out to attract people to spiritual and even actual poverty, then to desire humiliations so that they may achieve humility (E: 136-148).

For Ignatius, the parable of the Two Standards represents not just one way of looking at good and evil in the world. It is more than a device to provoke religious feelings. As a parable of the first order, it combines such insights and feelings into a powerfully integrating symbol meant to provoke action. In the colloquy which concludes the exercise, Ignatius has the retreatant beg for the poverty and the insults which are the earmarks of "true life" as exemplified in Christ (E:139). To drive this point home, he prescribes this colloquy at the end of at least forty one-hour exercises during the retreat (E: 147, 148, 156, 159)! Like Karl Marx, Ignatius' realism aimed not just at understanding history but at changing it.

The second way in which Ignatius looked at salvation history is by regarding the Gospel events as real human history. We can see this in his introductions to the contemplations of scriptural passages in his *Exercises*. Ignatius always directs the retreatant to start with the "history" of the matter to be contemplated.<sup>7</sup> Now, by "history," he did not mean "here is a story with a good moral." First and foremost, he meant "what really happened; what you, God, actually did."<sup>8</sup> This is evident in his choice of passages for contemplation. Of the fifty-one scriptural passages he lists in the appendix, and the five passages in the body of the text, he skips all the parables of Jesus and every teaching but one (Sermon on the Mount, #278). He expects a retreatant to find fruit in such laconic references as "Christ our Lord and the disciples were invited to the marriage feast," or "He was obedient to his parents." or even, "Guards were stationed." Furthermore, he warns the director of the *Exercises* to refrain from "dilating upon the meaning of the history" and instead direct the exercitant to begin with the "true foundation of the history," and only then to go on to reflect on the meaning of the event contemplated. "It is not abundance of knowledge," he adds, "that satisfies the soul, but the inward sense and taste of things" (E: 2). Ignatius well knew the difference between reasoning on abstractions drawn from a story and acknowledging that an event actually occurred. It is one thing, for example, to reflect on how Mary's humility made her an apt choice for God to work the Incarnation. It is quite another to contemplate the raw fact that God actually became incarnate in this specific "house and room of our Lady in the city of Nazareth in the province of Galilee" (E: 103). Ignatius himself showed an intense love for the actual places Jesus walked. Twice he bribed guards to let him see the footprint supposedly left by Jesus on Mount Olivet (A: 47). Ignatius' spirituality has been called "Baroque" because it focuses so heavily on the visible and the sensible. But the deeper meaning of "Baroque" is that it begins from a conviction that God is mysteriously present in all history, to the point of having actually walked our land. This inner intellectual judgment

is the real ground for the so-called “affective” and “sensual” approach Ignatius is famous for. Ignatius was indeed interested in feelings, but he did not *feel* about feelings, he *thought* about them.

By focusing on the parable of the Two Standards and on “historia” in the *Exercises*, I did not intend to sweep the question of angels and devils under the carpet. To fully understand Ignatius’ realism, we should understand what the reality of spirits meant to him. Ignatius was mainly committed to the realism of a world in which our desires and thoughts are not our original creations; we remain essentially free to allow or reject them. In other words, his realism is not about spirits as much as about human freedom. We can gain some insight here if we take the point of view of contemporary psychology.

First of all, whether or not we believe in angels and devils, at least psychological health requires that we achieve some intellectual distance on our thoughts and feelings if we are to negotiate them responsibly. To grow out of our childish reactions to stimuli and into mature monitoring of our own reactions, we should be able to stand back from our inner reactions and notice what is going on in us. We need to insert this reflective moment between the events we experience (either within or without) and our response to those events.

Secondly, besides this psychological task, we also face a moral task. Once we recognize our spontaneous feelings and thoughts, we still must decide which ones we are going to let guide our living and which we will reject. For a responsible person, this means suppressing the feelings and thoughts about mere biological comfort or mere egoism and cooperating with those that respond to the objectively worthwhile. For example, if I am irritated by the noise in the apartment next door, I not only have to admit my feelings to myself; I must also decide whether or not to express my irritation and ask for some consideration.

But for Ignatius these psychological and moral challenges were embedded within a wider interpersonal challenge. The world of medieval Christianity was populated, not with abstract, undiscoverable “forces,” but with concrete angels and devils who had will and intention of their own. So, not only do our feelings and thoughts originate outside of us in such a way that we are free to cooperate with them or not as we please; they originate from living beings who are intent on achieving their own purposes—some towards loving and serving God and some towards spiritual discouragement and the pursuits of pride. Whether or not these spirits have ontological existence as persons, at least it is easier to deal with the mysteries of grace and malice—which always remain mystery—through the metaphors of purposeful spirits than with the hypothesis of a stubbornly opaque “unconscious” that has come down to us from Freud.

No doubt, Ignatius grew up with a notional assent to the existence of angels and devils. But now he has set his understanding of these creatures within his own experience of how the soul negotiates its own freedom. It is very important to notice here that this is an insight not into his personal psychology but into the psychology of human nature in general. Having made the personal breakthrough to a realism about the occurrence of his own feelings and thoughts, he achieves a comprehensive viewpoint on the general nature of all spiritual reality as a struggle between contrary spirits, each with conscious designs on the essentially free person. With this comprehensive understanding he is now ready to close in, as it were, on the forces of evil.

### *Categories of Experience*

To work out a practical strategy for dealing with personal spirits, Ignatius realized that he needed to use names, or categories, which were either drawn from experience or were defined in terms of experience. In particular, he shows extreme care to distinguish the exact functions played by human desires and human thoughts. In doing so, he created a consistent and useful metaphysics of the spiritual life. What he found there runs counter to most contemporary psychology.

To the contemporary mind, for example, human desires belong to humans. The more we experience good desires and act on them, the more we consider ourselves moral persons. On the darker side, the more we experience degrading desires, the more degraded we think we really are. Ignatius, however, considered every desire for moral behavior to be a gift from God, not really our own possession, just as every degraded desire comes not from ourselves but from the evil spirits. We can make these desires our own, of course, but prior to that choice we are free—neither good nor evil for having experienced them.

The contemporary mind also names self-centeredness as the basic moral failing, as if other-centeredness is the basic moral success. Ignatius himself says that in principle, spiritual progress “will be in proportion to one’s surrender of self-love and one’s own will and interests” (E: 189), but he does not raise other-centeredness as a norm for moral achievement. Instead, he scrutinizes where our desires originate. Even good desires for others come under his skeptical eye, on the chance that they might originate from the evil spirit and would bring in chaos disguised as peace. The point is not how much the desires of others supersede our personal desires, but how much divine desire we allow into consciousness.

The book of the *Spiritual Exercises* reveals the absolutely central role of desire which Ignatius sees not only regarding a person’s praxis<sup>9</sup> of discerning spirits but also regarding his or her practical worldview. He gives a number



of principles and parables that focus on a Christian's desire.<sup>10</sup> The director of the *Exercises* is expected to monitor closely the desires of the retreatant, waiting until certain specific desires are present before moving the person further.<sup>11</sup> He insists that good desires are gifts donated by God.<sup>12</sup> He also portrays both God and the evil spirits as having specific and urgent desires<sup>13</sup> about a person, and in doing so, he sets each person within a universal and enduring spiritual battleground. In other words, in the worldwide spiritual struggle, both God and "our ancient enemy" strongly desire to capture us, and once they do, they lead us further by implanting their own desires to become our own.

Besides discovering the central role of desires in the spiritual life, Ignatius also learned many lessons about how to deal with thoughts. Fortunately, we have not only his description in his autobiography (A:20-26) of how he learned about thoughts but also his extremely precise theory<sup>14</sup> and his practical advice<sup>15</sup> about it in the *Exercises*. "I presuppose that there are three kinds of thoughts in my mind, namely: one which is strictly my own, and arises wholly from my own free will; two others which come from without, the one from the good spirit, and the other from the evil one" (E:32). Elsewhere in the *Exercises* he points out that our thoughts are very largely governed by the consolation or desolation which we cannot cause in ourselves (E:317, 333, 334).

At some point during his sojourn at Manresa, Ignatius noticed that the good and evil spirits both prefer to move our affects, leaving our affective orientation to direct our thoughts. However, there are two significant exceptions to this rule. First, there are times when the spirits can introduce thoughts in our minds somewhat independent of whether we are in consolation or desolation (E:347). Second, and more importantly, Ignatius shrewdly noticed that the spirits resort to introducing thoughts chiefly when a person's moral horizon was opposite their own. So, for example, the good spirit often fills the morally good person with consolations, while the evil spirit will pry open that good conscience with disturbing thoughts in order to flood it with anxieties and sadness. For a generally immoral person the strategies are reversed, with the evil spirit flooding him or her with hedonistic consolations and the good spirit prying that conscience open with stinging thoughts in order to bring the consolations of an upright life.<sup>16</sup>

Am I belaboring the obvious by saying that Ignatius understood the difference between thoughts and desires? I think not. Granted, we all experience the difference between our thoughts and our desires, but few people ask themselves about the relationships between the different roles played by thoughts and desires when they reflect on their spiritual struggles. Fewer still generalize from their own experience to understand thoughts and desires within a comprehensive viewpoint. It was Ignatius' achievement to elevate the terms "desire" and "thoughts" from their everyday meanings to

the status of reliable categories in an anthropology of the spiritual life. What makes these categories so reliable is that they are (1) verifiable in anyone's conscious experience, (2) related to each other in a consistent and discoverable pattern, and (3) extremely useful in the praxis of making decisions that affect one's world.

Not only did Ignatius elevate the experiential terms, "thoughts" and "desires," to the level of explanatory categories, he also took a current theological category and grounded it in verifiable experience. I am speaking of the term "grace," one of the most disputed terms of his day. As Ignatius uses the term in the *Exercises*, he nearly always<sup>17</sup> refers to what we would call "actual" grace, that is, to some help from God at a particular time and place. More importantly, he specifies exactly which acts of consciousness a retreatant ought to notice. The list of these acts of consciousness (italicized) is quite revealing:

The grace to *remember* how often I have fallen into sin (#25); the grace to *know* my sins and to *cast* them out (#43)

The grace that all my *intentions, actions, and operations* may be directed purely and solely to the Divine Majesty (#46)

The graces of (1) *an inward knowledge* of sins; of (2) *feeling* the disorder of my actions; and (3) *a knowledge* of the world; and, with each of these, *a feeling* of abhorrence and the ability to amend my life (#63)

The graces of *inward contrition, of weeping* for my sins or over Christ's sufferings, or to *resolve a doubt* (#87)

The grace to imitate Christ and, implied, the *knowledge* of Satan's machinations and the *knowledge* of the true life which Christ shows (#139)

The grace to *choose* what is more for God's glory (#152)

The grace to be *glad* and to *rejoice* intensely (#221)

The grace to *know* where I have failed (#240)

The grace of great *devotion, intense love, tears and spiritual consolation*, which require, he says, an "*intimate perception*" of the fact that these are indeed grace from God our Lord (#322)<sup>18</sup>

Notice that all these passages describe an inner experience whose occurrence is rather easy to discern.<sup>19</sup> Just as the ordinary experiences of thoughts and desires often have divine origins, so divine grace has its effect in ordinary experience. The point here is that Ignatius discovered that the only categories that could do justice to both grace and nature were terms that pointed to events locatable in inner experience.

## *Rules for Understanding Movements*

We have been looking at the roles which the categories “desire,” “thought” and “grace” play in the Ignatius’ praxis of discerning spirits. We must now see how he put this functional analysis into practice. While he was at Manresa, Ignatius began spelling out guidelines for seeking God and God’s will in three different kinds of experiences: (1) in an indubitable consolation, (2) in a struggle between consolation and desolation, and (3) in a time of tranquility (E: 175-178). I want to focus on the first kind as normative<sup>20</sup> because it will best give the realistic horizon against which all the other two kinds of experiences should be interpreted.

Among the many spiritual consolations Ignatius experienced at Manresa, he noticed that in some, he was left with no doubt that its source was God and not an evil spirit, while in others, consoling as they were, he still could discern an absence of conviction or certitude. Ignatius described the experiences which erased all doubt as lessons from God treating him just as a schoolmaster treats a little boy (A:27)—as lessons whose validity he felt absolutely no inclination to question. In some of these indubitable consolations, Ignatius is moved to do something; in others, he receives an interior illumination about God’s presence in the world.

Let me give you an example of an indubitable consolation moving him to action. Ignatius, who had decided to abstain from meat, woke up one morning to a vision of a dish of meat appearing before his eyes. It was accompanied, he said, by “a great movement of the will to eat it in the future,” a movement so strong and clear that “he could not hesitate to make up his mind that he ought to eat meat.” Even after his confessor encouraged him to scrutinize the movement, Ignatius says that “examine it as he would, he could never have any doubt about it” (A:27).

Now what are we to think of this? Does Ignatius believe he is describing something rare in the spiritual life? I do not believe so. In the first place, he does not focus on what he saw with his eyes or imagination. He underscores the clear movement of his will which, free of antecedent desire, simply and unequivocally moved toward eating meat. In my experience as a spiritual director, I have found that many people experience these clear movements of the will but hesitate to trust them. Ignatius himself seems to think that these clear movements happen rather often. In a letter he wrote years later to Sister Teresa Rejadell he says, “It *often* happens that our Lord moves and urges the soul to this or that activity. He begins by laying open the soul, that is, by speaking interiorly to it without the din of words, lifting it up wholly to his divine love and ourselves to a sense of himself without any possibility of resistance on our part, even should we wish to resist.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the very fact that he gives rules in the *Exercises* for dealing with this kind of

consolation while a retreatant is deliberating about what action to take (E: 330, 336) says that he expects that he or she will likely experience it.

In his autobiography, Ignatius goes on to describe other indubitable consolations that illumined his mind both while he was at Manresa and afterwards. These movements brought profound understanding of many things—of how Jesus Christ was present in the Eucharist, of how God created light and the world, and of many other things, he says, concerning faith and learning, all accompanied by intense devotion and spiritual delight. What is happening here under what Ignatius calls “understanding” is not any new message from God which Ignatius suddenly understands. Other texts show that by “understanding” Ignatius means what we might call either a judgment or a validation of truth.<sup>22</sup> In other words, Ignatius did not experience an insight into *how* God creates or *how* Jesus is present in the Eucharist but rather what Newman calls a real assent to a known truth. In a mere notional assent, for example, we might make the judgment, “The idea that Jesus is present in the Eucharist is reliable; I am willing to stand by it.” A real assent, in contrast, would assert, “It is true that Jesus is present; this is the reality of the Eucharist.” In ordinary parlance, we often say “I realized” something or other. What is happening in consciousness is that a certain proposition makes so much sense of our experience that we find ourselves completely unable to raise a relevant question about its validity.

Again, like the indubitable consolations about how to act, Ignatius believed that indubitable intellectual illuminations was a common experience. In the same letter to Sister Teresa Rejadell, he says, “I will call your attention briefly to ... lessons which our Lord *usually* gives.” He describes one such “usual” lesson as “an interior consolation which casts out all uneasiness and draws one to a complete love of our Lord. In this consolation he enlightens some, and to others he reveals many secrets as a preparation for later visits.”<sup>23</sup>

My point here is that these indubitable consolations had as their chief purpose a confirmation of Ignatius’ judgment—a judgment at times about God’s will concerning particular activities and at times about God’s real presence in the world, a confirmation mediated by an intense love for God. Ignatius discovered that human judgment, both judgments of value and judgments of fact, can be directly affected by God in such a way as to completely eliminate a certain kind of doubt. He accepted as a real and common possibility that a person can experience the complete elimination of questions about the value of one among several options. And where someone already holds a proposition about reality, that person can be stripped of all questions about the reality to which the proposition refers. Both kinds of judgments are accompanied by and probably in part constituted by an intense experience of love.

It is my belief that learning how to do this is essentially a matter of trusting the inbuilt norms of one's own intelligence. True, we need faith that God cares for us and a felt love for God, but we should complement that faith and love by an intellectual conversion that regularly monitors the presence of residual questions and knows that the absence of questions is ground enough for conviction. Although Ignatius did not write about the grounds for conviction, he certainly understood for himself what they are and how they ought to be employed if he was to be a useful instrument in the hands of God.

I mentioned earlier that Ignatius also gave guidelines for finding God's will in two other kinds of experiences. In one, a person experiences strong swings between consolation and desolation. In the other, a person is not moved by strong movements and so must rely more on reason to deliberate pros and cons.<sup>24</sup> In either case, Ignatius intends on finding the will of God and shows every confidence that anyone who wishes can do so. Much like the disciples whom Luke described in *Acts* as artlessly "casting lots" to find the replacement for Judas whom God has chosen (1: 15-26), Ignatius takes the reality of God's will as the fundamental governing principle of the universe. It is this belief that God's will is not difficult to discover, and not his psychological genius for recognizing spirits, that kept Ignatius in the real world personally and gave him the practical horizon for working out rules for negotiating inner movements which would make sense to others.

## Conclusion

We have seen several dimensions in Ignatius' discovery of the elements and dynamics of the spiritual life. I called this intellectual achievement "realism." For the sake of drawing our own lessons from his account, let me summarize what a fully-developed realism ought to consider.

1. The absolute prerequisite for realism is the habit of noticing. By the habit of noticing I mean a healthy curiosity about my own feelings and thoughts, unhampered by religious guilt or doctrinaire "shoulds" about religious obligations.
2. The essential breakthrough to realism is reached when I have the ability to deal with inner events as objectively as with outer events. This crucial intellectual juncture gives me a new meaning to the word "real."
3. Realism reaches its widest scope through a theology of history. My theology of history should take the Gospels as an account of real, historical work by God. It also should explain, whether in metaphor or not, how every person's desires and thoughts are connected to this history. Finally, it should direct my praxis towards shaping present history in cooperation with the movements in me that come from God.



4. Realism next gathers its artillery of categories from the fertile field of recognizable experience. In order to deal effectively with inner movements, I ought to understand the roles which feelings, judgments, insights and so on, play in the spiritual struggle. I should also test all other categories by seeing if they can be correlated with experienced events.

5. I can now work to change reality. With a realism that has conceived a theology of history and has tested the key words used in talking about spiritual living, the door is open for me to discover patterns in the everyday experience of grace and malice, whether my own or the community's, and to engage the real world with a love guided by the light of a converted intelligence.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> St. Ignatius' Own Story, trans. W. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1956), ch. 1-3. References to the autobiography will be in the form, A: Young's paragraph number; references to the Spiritual Exercises will be in the form, E: paragraph number. For editions of the autobiography without paragraph numbers, e.g., *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius: With Related Documents*, trans., 3. O'Callaghan (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), use this legend: Ch.1 = #1-12; ch.2 = #13-18; ch.3 = #19-37.

<sup>2</sup> Young, *Ignatius' Own Story*. p.4.

<sup>3</sup> The full title is "Rules for feeling and recognizing in some manner the different movements that are caused in the soul—the good, that they may be received; the evil, that they may be rejected." He calls the rules for the Second Week "Rules to the same effect with greater discernment of spirits," hence their more familiar title, "Rules for Discernment of Spirits."

<sup>4</sup> In a similar fashion, Ignatius recognized that very lofty and consoling thoughts were robbing him of sleep at night. "He looked into this matter a number of times and gave it some thought" and concluded that despite their content, their source was the evil spirit and therefore he would ignore them completely (A:26).

<sup>5</sup> J. O'Malley, "The Fourth Vow in Its Ignatian Context: A Historical Study," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 15/1 (Jan 83), Part I: "St. Ignatius and Doctrine," pp. 8-14.

<sup>6</sup> J. de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1964), p. 118.

<sup>7</sup> Ignatius also introduces the parables of the Two Standards with an account of "the history" (E:137,150). I do not believe that this makes the "historical" focus of Scripture any less realistic. Rather, it makes the parable more realistic. Ignatius believes that the Two Standards represents an accurate account of what is actually going on throughout the world. He also introduces the more imaginary Three Classes of People meditation with the "history" of three couples who want to use 10,000 ducats well. It is fiction, but good fiction inasmuch as it says something about how actual people avoid letting "the desire of being better able to serve God our Lord [be] their motive" (E:155).

<sup>8</sup> Occurrences of "historia" in the *Exercises* are in the following paragraphs: 2 (three times), 102, 111, 137, 150, 191, 201, and 219. It is interesting to note that Ignatius never uses either the term "history" or the term "mystery" in the First Week. The first prelude during the First Week is always "a mental representation of the place" (E:47), while in the rest of

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the retreat it is “call to mind the history” (E:102, 111, 191, 219) leaving “mental representation of the place” as the second prelude. The reason for this difference can be found in the contrast between the graces of the First Week and the graces of the other three. During the First Week the retreatant asks for the graces of shame, confusion, sorrow, tears, revulsion and fear on account of his or her own sins (E:48, 55, 63, 65); it is one’s own real history that counts here, along with one’s own baffling choices to sin. During the Second Week, one asks repeatedly for “intimate knowledge” and “love” of our Lord (E:104). During the Third Week, one asks for sorrow, compassion and shame (E: 193) for the sake of Christ—“sorrow with Christ in sorrow, anguish with Christ in anguish, tears and deep grief because of the great affliction Christ endures for me” (E:203)—not as a direct response to the absurdity of one’s own sins. And during the Fourth Week the retreatant seeks to “rejoice intensely because of the great joy and glory of Christ our Lord” (E: 221).

<sup>9</sup> There have been two meanings of “praxis” current in philosophy and theology—Marx’s and Aristotle’s. For Marx it meant the activity, particularly the economic activity, that shapes a person’s consciousness. For Aristotle it meant the inner acts that precede making—doing rather than producing, conduct rather than product—and which are the source of external activity, even economic. I am using the term here in the far more astute Aristotelian sense. See B. Lonergan, “Theology and Praxis,” in FE. Crowe, ed., *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J.R. Lonergan, S.J.* (New York: Paulist, 1985), p. 184.

<sup>10</sup> For principles and parables in the *Exercises* on desire, see para. 23, 98, 146, 151, 155, 166, 167, 168.

<sup>11</sup> For references in the *Exercises* to the need to monitor desire, see para. 20, 73, 89, 130, 133, 174, 177, 185, 199, 339, 350.

<sup>12</sup> For references in the *Exercises* regarding desires as gifts from God, see para. 16. See also the many references to the “gift” of desires in his letters: W. Young, trans., *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), pp. 19, 20, 43, 50, 92, 131, 153, 186, 222, 232, 314, 354, 368, 375, 378. Hereafter, Young, *Letters*.

<sup>13</sup> For references in the *Exercises* that both God and Satan have desires, see para. 234, 326, 327. In his letters, see Young, *Letters*, pp. 18-24 (June, 1536, letter to Teresa Rejadell), 131.

<sup>14</sup> For Ignatius’ theory regarding thoughts, see the *Exercises*, para. 32, 346, 347.

<sup>15</sup> For Ignatius’ practical advice regarding thoughts, see the *Exercises*, para. 314, 315, 317, 329, 333, 334, 347, 351.

<sup>16</sup> For how spirits use thoughts as opposed to affects, see the *Exercises*, para. 314, 315, 317, 329. Also: “As a sequel to these *thoughts*, he was seized with a disgust of the life [of scruples] he was leading and a *desire* to be done with it. It was our Lord’s way of awakening him from sleep” (A:25).

<sup>17</sup> The one clear exception to Ignatius’ focus on “actual grace” is in #50, where he refers to the angels who were “changed from grace to malice” — an instance of what we would call “sanctifying grace.”

<sup>18</sup> Ignatius has four other, more general descriptions of graces: the grace to amend my life (#61); the grace to be prompt and diligent to fulfill God’s will (#91); the grace to be received under Christ’s standard, in spiritual poverty, actual poverty, and receiving insults (#147); and the grace to imitate Christ (#248). He also has eight completely unspecified references to “grace”: how solitude makes one “more disposed to receive graces and gifts” (#20); Communion helps preserve the soul in the increase of grace (#44); to amend, with the help of grace (#61, #243); to ask for only God’s love and grace; these are enough

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(#234); to ask for the virtues or graces of which one has greater need (#257); see the graces and gifts by which the Apostles were raised above the Fathers of Old and New Testaments (#275); in desolation, the Lord withdraws intense graces (#320). While unspecified in these texts, the specified texts can give the perceptive director a very precise idea of the inner experience to which Ignatius is referring.

<sup>19</sup> Ignatius clearly prefers to focus on actual inner events rather than faculties. True, in the very first exercises, Ignatius has the retreatant apply the “three powers of the soul,” memory, intellect and will to various stories of sin. This triad probably originates with Augustine, but whether or not Ignatius knew of it at Manresa, he clearly has the retreatant exercise these powers precisely in order to experience the “graces” of the further movements specified usually in the second prelude of the various exercises.

<sup>20</sup> For persuasive arguments defending the normativity of this kind of consolation see K. Rahner, “The Logic of Concrete Individual Knowledge in Ignatius Loyola,” in *The Dynamic Element in the Church* (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1964), pp. 84-170.

<sup>21</sup> Young, *Letters*, p. 22 (in the June, 1536, letter to Teresa Rejadell). Italics mine.

<sup>22</sup> “Falsehood and truth have of themselves a direct effect on the *understanding* and lead us to accept or reject a proposition even before we have reasoned about it” (ibid. p. 198). “For the will ... draws the *understanding* after it and does not leave it free to *judge* correctly” (ibid, p. 202). Italics mine.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21. Although it is not clear that doubt and resistance are impossible in the consolation Ignatius describes in this passage, at least he believes that a consolation illuminating one’s judgment of reality can be frequent in a good soul. I encourage the reader not so much to check past experience as to notice in present experience that these movements occur probably more frequently than one might expect.

<sup>24</sup> In the section entitled “Three Times for Making a Good Election” (E: 175-178) Ignatius gives no rules for interpreting the indubitable consolation, for the obvious reason that none is needed to settle doubt. In the case of a retreatant experiencing both consolation and desolation, he refers the director to the “Rules for Recognizing Different Spirits.” These are appended to the end of the *Exercises*, I believe, because they are applicable not only for a retreatant seeking God’s will but also for anyone negotiating the intellectual illuminations by which one sees God in all things during everyday life. In the case of a retreatant experiencing neither consolation nor desolation, Ignatius gives procedures within the text of the *Exercises* at that point, and repeats them almost verbatim in the “Rules for Distributing Alms” (E: 337-344), probably because they do not apply more widely to seeing God in all things but only to finding God’s will about a certain matter.