

The *Spiritual Exercises* and the God of the Gaps: “A God of the Few, A God of the Many, Or A God of All?”

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*Abstract: The paper briefly critiques the dominant nineteenth century caricature of an exclusivist God; arguing that modernity has inherited, predominantly, an unfinished Neo-Scholastic understanding of God. The Neo-Scholastic construct consists of a God discovered in abstract philosophical proposition, ultimately, a God of the 'few' or the 'many', and one that also corresponds to a particularly narrow social construct. The paper moves forward to offer an Ignatian insight into the God encountered in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Developing a particular theological anthropology, the paper concludes with a brief discussion of the Ignatian concept of 'finding God in All things,' through the insight of a concrete relational encounter with those on the margins of Church and Society.²*

Introduction

The marginalized fall through the gaps that society and institutional religion construct. This neo-Marxist caricature contains some truth; in fact Gustavo Gutierrez reminds us, many agree with Sartre, that "Marxism, as the formal framework of all contemporary philosophical thought, cannot be superseded."³ If one acknowledges the existence of the marginalized, and who cannot, then arguably, from a biblical perspective, Christians are all called to serve those on the margins. Jesus' parable of *The Good Samaritan*, illustrates what we might call, in our context, an encounter with those on the margins, a person in need. Through orthopraxis, a right action, Christians come to live-out the Gospel in ordinary life, perhaps realizing in the process that Christianity is a form of 'right' living, rather than a form of 'right' words. Edward Schillebeeckx

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² This essay is, in many respects, inspired by an original question raised by Anthony Campbell in his book, *The Whisper of the Spirit*, (2008). Fr. Campbell asks: "Is God the God of the Few, Many or All?" And in some small way, this essay pays tribute to Tony's pastoral insight and his efforts to help us *all* see that, in the words of Victor Hugo: "To love another person is to see the face of God."

³ Gustavo Gutierrez (1973), *A Theology of Liberation*, 9, 18, fn32; "*Marxisme et philosophie de l'existence*," a letter quoted in Roger Garaudy, *Perspectives de l'homme*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), 112.

maintained, "Only in this way will I be able to discover what the kingdom of God means."⁴ Gutierrez insisted, "We have here a political hermeneutics of the Gospel."⁵

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. (v34) He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. (v35) The next day he took out two *denarii* and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have'.⁶

A central *raison d'être* of practical or pastoral theology is to raise a voice in the academy, Church and the public square in support of the marginalized. An articulation of orthopraxis is not a supplement to theology but rather a central characteristic of theology itself. Pastoral theology, applying a pastoral cycle methodology, reflects upon the lived experience of the disenfranchised. In other words the marginalized are a proper source, *loci-theologici*, for theology itself.⁷

Pastoral and practical theology shades off into liberation theology wherever the ordinary lived experience involved is seen as caught up in the process by which the large-scale distribution of power and opportunity in a society is arranged.⁸

God in Ordinary Life

The Incarnation represents the grace of a saving net for all humanity; one that inspired a generation of fishers to go fish. Historically 'God of the Gaps' has been associated with humanity's innate desire to question existence, or more precisely, with our frustration at not being able to find particular answers to questions of science or ethics. Primarily through our scholastic theology and philosophy we have ordered the world and located each within their place; the rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, while some are obviously considered to be beyond the pale in this particular ontology, those who we might call in the context of our conference, the marginalized. Often ignoring the teaching of Jesus in the Newer Testament, Catholics were amongst equals in casting the first stone, to keep a record of our neighbor's transgressions and together, we cast people out. In our honor and shame cultural anthropological paradigm, we canonize and excommunicate.⁹ In this particular anthropological construct God is ordered... and man decides who finds favour and who will not. Again, in this context, Feuerbach was right, man made God in his own image, and ever since the marginalized have been paying the price.

Basil Hume confided that he discovered the 'God of the few' at an early age. He also explained that it took him most of his adult life to recover from this unsettling experience. As a six year

⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Catolicos holandese*, 29.

⁵ Gutierrez, (1973), *A Theology of Liberation*, 13.

⁶ Luke 25:25-37

⁷ See Stephen Bevans, (2005), *Models of Contextual Theology*, 3-7.

⁸ Ford and Higton, (2012), *Modern Theologians Reader*, 248-253, 248.

⁹ See David Schultenover, *A View From Rome*, (1994), Chapter Five, "A Mediterranean Anthropology."

old, he sneaked into the kitchen and helped himself to an apple. Unfortunately he got caught. He was subsequently scolded and asked to explain: What God, who sees everything, would think of such a deplorable act? Only later in life did Cardinal Hume realize that our omniscient God may well have simply smiled and told the young boy to take two apples. . .

Examining our understanding of God in adult life is not without consequences; it may influence how we actually live and form relationships within our family, Church and wider community. Most of us need support to frame mature horizons of reference by which we can navigate concrete concerns. George Tyrrell courageously constructed a pastoral hermeneutic that would enlighten theology to produce fruit in the form of an 'adult' faith, even though we may fear the dark, he wrote,

If e'er I prayed while yet a child
For ever in Thy courts to dwell,
The crumbling walls from around me fell
And left me shivering in the wild.

Then wider courts I raised again
And fondly dreamt to hold thee there;
But thou, whose house is everywhere,
Unless Thou build, man builds in vain

Forgive the thoughts that one confined
Thy boundlessness in swaddling bands;
Forgive the temples made with hands;
Forgive the idols of the mind

Enough, enough one glimmering spark
From worlds beyond this world of night;
Forgive, O sun and Source of light,
A foolish child that feared the dark.¹⁰

In evidencing to a pastoral and practical orientation, Tyrrell maintained, Catholicism is not primarily a theology, but rather, Catholicism is primarily a life to be lived. A faith commitment is not necessarily something we only proclaim, but also a faith response or commitment to praxis is required. In this context, Catholicism remains the most efficacious instrument of the spiritual life, 'so long as it is not robbed of its liberty or tied to a faction.' Thus Tyrrell posits,

¹⁰ George Tyrrell SJ - "The Larger Faith - After In Memoriam," *The Month*, November 1999, 458.

Experience and reflection confirm me daily in the conviction that life is less simple than we learnt from our copy-books and our catechisms, and that our choices – leastways, those of any moment – are rarely between good and evil, divisible as it were with a hatchet... in real life such serenity (a thoroughly satisfied conscience), is the privilege not so much of the heroic as of the unreflective'.⁸

Karl Rahner's reflections also serves to locate and substantiate a pastoral and practical theological hermeneutic. He maintained pastoral theology can no longer be understood as teaching and direction relating to the world of the cleric charged with the cure of souls. Rahner asserts, 'today rather it (pastoral theology) consists in theological reflection upon the entire process by which the Church as a whole brings her own nature to its fullness in the light of the contemporary situation of the world.'¹¹

Nineteenth Century Projections of the God of the 'Few' - The Social Impact¹²

In positing God of the Gaps we are not only showing our vulnerability in the face of creation, arguably we are also consciously or otherwise signaling our inadequacies in the realms of philosophy and theology. Theodicy is a case in point. Humanity devises reasons to explain the apparent contradiction between an all loving God and the reality of Auschwitz and Dachau. We draw on Augustine, Irenaeus or even Process theologians to explain the gaps in our understanding of suffering, too often forgetting Kierkegaard's sound counsel that theodicy is a road down which philosophy should not venture; philosophy can no more give faith or take it away.¹³ We are perhaps also sympathetic to Dostoyevsky's Ivan, who overwhelmed by the suffering of the innocent, feels compelled to return his ticket: "It's not God I don't accept, Alyosha - only that I most respectfully return him the entrance ticket."¹⁴

Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and perhaps Dostoyevsky are not alone in their critique of Christian accounts of human suffering. Wittgenstein perhaps going further rejected Christian theodicy and linguistic attempts to contain God, Wittgenstein insists the mystical is a place where language should not go - we should draw up the ladder and remain silent.¹⁵

⁸ George Tyrrell, (1906), *A Much-Abused Letter*, 21.

¹¹ Karl Rahner, (1973), *Theological Investigations*, trans. David Burke, Vol.10, 350. Here Rahner considers 'caritas as a science', 369ff. For a systematic discussion of the term 'pastoral' in the context of *Gaudium et spes*, see Rahner, Vol 10, (1973), 293-298.

¹² See Charles Taylor (2007), *A Secular Age*, "Nineteen-Century Trajectories," 377-422.

¹³ See D.Z. Phillips, (Ed.), (1996), *Can Religion Be Explained Away?* And Patrick Sherry (1977), *Religion, Truth and Language Games*.

¹⁴ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, (1880), *The Brothers Karamazov*.

¹⁵ See Wittgenstein's earlier work, for example, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, (1922), 5, 6.

The difficulty Christians have with God-talk is that our language struggles to take us where we most desire to go. Nineteenth Century Philosophers such as Feuerbach, believed humanity described God in our own image, while Friedrich Nietzsche claimed God is dead, and by that he meant, in part, that the word no longer had any resonance with modern thinking. He believed a sort of nihilistic textualism would prevail into the twentieth century. Early Twentieth Century psychologist Sigmund Freud described our understanding of God as an illusion or father figure fixation; a view many late 20th century writers had sympathy with.¹⁶ Today the word 'God' masquerades through culture in a multitude of guises, although the name is seldom discussed rationally in the popular media. Most days we hear the word as a common curse or lament following a personal disaster. While others believe the term is central to the perceived clash of cultures between the secular west and the east. At the moment the word God when employed as a noun, proper noun or even adjective is in danger of becoming a broken-backed word, a word used to death – a word *pace* Wittgenstein almost without meaning.

Staying with a critique of philosophy for one minute more, the English linguistic philosopher John Austin alerts us to "language as verdict" and the "inner world (Infelicities) of the speaker: words come trailing clouds of etymology... things are said to influence people, thus communication is not always transparent... the language of God is not (always) interested in conveying truth."¹⁷ In drawing attention to the priority of "performance over the descriptive," it becomes apparent that 'God talk' can be used to blind us to some aspects of reality – when "words are false to the facts."¹⁸ As with the case of Nietzsche, Freud, Feuerbach and even Wittgenstein, the anti-theologians, God talk often exposes language as verdict and the inner infelicities of those who by their actions pejoratively proclaim God does not exist.

A Fundamentalist God - by Definition is a God of the 'Few'

In a similar vein as the anti-theologians, although at the other end of the philosophical spectrum, one finds the God of the fundamentalists; they are perhaps one side of the coin, with the anti-theologians the other. In effect these two parts of the one coin buy and sell an ideological vision with little or no regard for the pursuit of truth. It is not unreasonable to argue that the cause of religious hatred is in part due to a misconstruction of religious sensibilities, primarily stemming from the above two distorted images of God. In what appears to be a bizarre twist of fate, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* has too often become the dominant image of a violent, vengeful God - a fundamentalist God that divides cultures and people. One contemporary aspect of this phenomena is the rise of aggressive atheism and an increasing radical fundamentalist Christian response. Even within the house of Christianity this division is evident, one consequence is the

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, (1913) and *The Future of an Illusion*, (1927).

¹⁷ See "John Austin's Speech Act Theory," Mervyn Duffy, (2006), *How Language, Ritual And Sacraments Work. According to John Austin, Jürgen Habermas and Louis-Marie Chauvet*, 28.

¹⁸ Mervyn Duffy, (2006), 26-28.

allocation of energy and resources to internal philosophical gerrymandering at the expense of a primary Christian, bible based, imperative to serve the needs of the marginalised.¹⁹

Reading the signs of the times, many observe, that religious fundamentalism is sweeping the world. This disparate group of fundamentalists, from all religions, are united in their faith. Their estimation of God is the right one. Their image alone is the only true image. It consists of a God who condones countless atrocities, presumably in his name, while his followers call forth further revenge upon their enemies. Not surprisingly, secular society places this particular manifestation of God on trial, charged with bringing the human race into disrepute. As a consequence, peoples and cultures, such as we find in France, the Netherlands, New Zealand and possible Australia, find God guilty as charged and assert their secular identity, opposing any religious interference in society. Virtually all European countries and other western leaning nations, with the possible exception of the US, are marginalising religious influence. Traditional Catholic countries such as Spain, Italy, Poland and Portugal are passing numerous laws in a variety of areas aimed at curtailing religious influence. While the separation of religion and state is to be applauded, extreme marginalization of religious belief removes an important counter balance to free market materialism and protection of the socially marginalised.²⁰

The God of the Many

On April 24, 2012 Pope Benedict XVI wrote a letter to the members of the German Bishop's Conference, on the question of the translation of the words spoken over the chalice. Explaining why the liturgical text '*pro multis*' is to be translated as 'for many' (*für viele*) rather than 'for all' (*für alle*), and giving guidelines for the catechesis that should prepare priests and laity for the revised translation.²¹ There was no consensus from the German bishops, with some of bishops openly expressing their desire to keep the translation 'for all.' In effect the Pope had decided that in the new translation of the missal the word '*pro multis*' must be translated as Christ died for many and that no pastoral interpretation should be considered. The interpretative exegesis 'for all' is to be replaced by the simple translation 'for many.' The difficulty for the faithful, particularly those who live in pluralistic culture, of many faiths and none, such as Australia, the question arises: did Christ die for 'all' or for 'many'? *Lumen Gentium* is unambiguous in this regard:

¹⁹ John XXIII (1963), "Since men are social by nature they are meant to live with others and to work for one another's welfare. A well-ordered human society requires that men recognize and observe their mutual rights and duties. It also demands that each contribute generously to the establishment of a civic order in which rights and duties are more sincerely and effectively acknowledged and fulfilled. It is not enough, for example, to acknowledge and respect every man's right to the means of subsistence if we do not strive to the best of our ability for a sufficient supply of what is necessary for his sustenance." *Pacem et Terris* 31-32. See also *Gaudium et Spes*, (1965), 1.

²⁰ Benedict XVI wrote in Part II of *Deus Caritas Est*, "Love of neighbour, grounded in love of God, as well as being a responsibility for each individual member of the faithful, is also a responsibility for the entire Ecclesial Community,"

²¹ See power point notes in appendix one.

Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.²²

The issue is perhaps more philosophical than linguistic, more a question of interpretation than translation. Perhaps a further important consideration, which I think Vatican II answered from a pastoral perspective, questions the relationship between translation and interpretation, both are important, one perhaps more academic, the other with a stronger practical bent. Semantics and interpretation are important, particularly in the university where these matters can be debated by experts. Although it is reasonable to argue in the context of ministry, bringing Christ to the Age, requires the insight to read the signs of the times is also of considerable importance.²³ And any presentation of Christ which gives the impression of exclusivity or elitism will be flatly rejected by contemporary culture, particularly amongst the young, who in my experience, thankfully, demonstrate an innate sense of social justice. As I said early, "words come trailing clouds of etymology," and the distinction between the 'few', 'many' and 'all' has a particular distressing resonance in the land of Auschwitz. Those German bishops whom proclaim Christ died for 'all', read well the signs of the times, they have become in so doing the mouth piece of the *sensus fidelium*, which firmly believes, namely, that Christ died for all.

Hans Küng wrote, "A naïve faith can miss the true Jesus and lead us with the best intentions to false conclusions in theory and practice."²⁴ It is no surprise that many people in our culture feel compelled to turn away from the God of religions, when he is presented in a fundamental way. Küng observed:

'God' is the most loaded term in the human language. Men, predominantly men, have fought and died for it. Killed for it, massacred the innocent in the name of God. No other word in history has been used with such frequency to justify the unthinkable.²⁵

Human beings normally rely upon our aptitude for language to communicate our knowledge and sense of the world. We try with less success to do the same with our thoughts and feelings. When confusion arises we usually turn to science to confirm or reject our preliminary vision. Again with regard to our thoughts and feelings, as with language, science sometimes struggles to fill in the gaps of our uncertainties. A contemporary image and understanding of God, is one such

²² *Lumen Gentium*, 16.

²³ *Gaudium et Spes*, "To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics." 4. See also *Gaudium et Spes*, 44.

²⁴ Hans Küng, (1978), *On Being A Christian*, 164.

²⁵ Hans Küng, (1978), *On Being A Christian*, 164.

uncertainty. Science is a profound but different answer to such complex questions of existence. Mathematics cannot explain why I feel joy or sadness, no more than my emotions can illuminate Pythagoras' Theorem. Science is reliant upon empirical data, philosophy remains a slave to human language, the human quest for God, in this sense, is defiant of empirical limitations and desires to transcend material reality.

In Western culture, one of the consequences of estrangement from God is the gradual moving away from investing our time and energy in society. Moderns continue to become 'disconnected' as Dawkins' 'selfish gene' proliferates through the social order, drawing attention to Margaret Thatcher's famous dictum "There is no such thing as society."²⁶ Ever increasing numbers of us are becoming disaffected at home, in the work place with religion and of course with God. Nietzsche also predicted this movement away from God towards the *Zarathustra* or 'super-self.' "God is dead", he proclaimed, and of course it appears in one sense Nietzsche is right, if by God we mean Nietzsche's popular understanding of God.²⁷ The failure of traditional religions to communicate a relevant, dynamic image of God undermines the association that draws human beings into multifaceted communities. Without a viable living shared sense of the transcendent, human beings of every religious persuasion appear caught in the slipstream of an ever-expanding universe, a force which slowly pulls apart our very essence. Only a vital living presence of God, communicated via a concrete universal image of a loving God, can hope to challenge the centrifugal force that carries humanity away from itself, away from loving our neighbor who is marginalized.²⁸

Spiritual Exercises and the God of the 'All'

In drawing attention to the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola I want to turn the adage, 'God of the Gaps,' back on ourselves.²⁹ Ignatius was advocating a return to the subject long before the philosophers Kant and Descartes. The current misguided attempt to return to philosophy, wielding philosophy as a sword to slay secularism, is a further misguided attempt almost designed to fuel a fundamentalist arms race between the two warring factions of fundamentalists - the radical atheists and the radically religious. Neither exhibit care of the marginalized. Why do modern people lack faith Rome asks? That it is a question for orthodox philosophy they conclude; Let them know more philosophy; their answer boomerangs.

The philosopher Dietrich Hildebrand reminds us that misinterpretation of the role of the heart is due to our philosophical heritage dating back to Aristotle. The low place Aristotle reserved for affectivity (emotion) is surprising, since he declared happiness to be the highest good, although there is only one way to experience happiness, and that is to feel it. Love that is only thought or

²⁶ Pseudo-philosophical examples of this position are articulated by Richard Dawkins, see *Selfish Gene* (1976), and *The God Delusion* (2006).

²⁷ See Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

²⁸ Donald Dorr, (1992), *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching*.

²⁹ Insight into the *Exercises* include, *At Home with the Spirit*, (1992), Tom O'Hara and *The Gift of Spiritual Intimacy*, (2009), Monty Williams.

willed, and not felt, is not love. Love becomes a word without meaning when we sever it from feelings, the only form of experience in which it can be consciously lived.³⁰

St Ignatian in his *Spiritual Exercises*

Ignatius inspires us to critique ridged philosophical systems which attempt to confine God by human language and proposition - perhaps the real value of Feuerbach's critique is to draw attention to this eventuality. The former Jesuit George Tyrrell, inspired by the *Exercises*, pioneered an understanding of God that was generations ahead of his time. Other Ignatian theologians, such as Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan, pastorally guide us in pushing back the frontiers of our understanding of God.³¹ In an Australian context, the Jesuit Anthony Campbell and in particular his wonderful pastoral 'insight' *The Whisper of the Spirit* further challenges the fundamentalist caricatures of God.³² *The Whisper of the Spirit* invites us to reflect upon our relationship with God. Here one is confronted with a question: Is my God the God of the few, the many or a God of all? And what are the teleological consequences of my answer. For example, if the God of the few prevails, then what about the gaps in salvation history? Does a God of the few or even of the many, explain the holocaust and Rwanda and Bosnia? Does this understanding of God correspond to the God of Jesus Christ we meet in the Newer Testament?

In the context of our conference the question struggles to be articulated: is our God the God of the few, the many or the God of all? And does the 'all' include the marginalized and does the marginalized include: gays, divorced couples, theologians on the margins, fallen people, as well as those of other religions. Not forgetting those on the margins of our society: the disabled, terminally ill, mentally ill, the unborn and those who society today considers not quite human, in the *Übermensch* sense, people such as refugees and asylum seekers.

It seems clear that the theology of Tyrrell, Rahner, Lonergan and many other theologians from the Ignatian tradition was influenced by the *Spiritual Exercises*. I can only surmise that Tony Campbell's insightful biblical exegesis of the Older Testament was also inspired by the *Exercises*. Fr Campbell's latest book *Experiencing Scripture* invites the reader to "go think" and to experience the intimacy of God's love, a motif central to the *Exercises*.³³

The *Exercises* allow the person of faith to witness to the liberation of theology present in Tyrrell, Rahner, Lonergan and perhaps also in the work of Tony Campbell. I don't necessarily mean the liberation theology of Arrupe, Sobrino, Segundo and how important that is, but rather the

³⁰ Dietrich Hildebrand believes, "that to have a heart capable of love, a heart which can know anxiety and sorrow, which can be affected and moved, is the most specific characteristic of a human person." If we wish to say that something struck a man's heart, we wish to indicate how deeply the event affected him. Not simply irked or pleased him, but that it moved him in the very core of his being. Dietrich Hildebrand, *The Heart*, (1965), 11-47, 109.

³¹ Essays in Systematic Theology 18: 'Ignatian Themes in the Thought of Bernard Lonergan;' and 'Essays in Systematic Theology 19: Ignatian themes in the Thought of Bernard Lonergan.' See also Philip Endean, (2001), *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*, esp. 'Ignatius, Rahner and Theology,' 239-260.

³² Anthony Campbell, (2007), *The Whisper of the Spirit*.

³³ See also Anthony Campbell, (2012), *Experiencing Scripture: Intimacy with Ancient Text and Modern Faith*.

liberation of theology and therefore the liberation of the human perceptions of God, from the scholastic manuals of Suarez and so forth. Interestingly Walter Kasper described the greatest achievement of 20th Century Catholic theology as the surmounting of neo-scholasticism; although I think we still have some way to go in freeing our perceptions of the God of the *all*, from the old medieval constraints.³⁴

I should further add here a brief disclaimer, critical theology can make no claims of elitism or privileged access to God; as Timothy Radcliffe points out, claiming that you have the truth wrapped up does breed violence and intolerance.³⁵ The graces freely given in the *Exercises* do allow prayerful insight into an incarnational spirituality, these graces are freely given and no religious order has a monopoly on God.³⁶ The real and the truth can be met in a variety of ways. *The Exercises* are simply one way to God that happens to have inspired certain Ignatian theologians. Ignatius brought no new religion; his faith is simply the inclusive Gospel of Jesus Christ. However it seems reasonable to argue that Ignatius did inspire a theological methodology, a way of doing theology that walks with the 'other' and teaches an enhanced understanding of the divine presence in the other.

An Ignatian Method for Theology?

Ignatian prayer on the Incarnation encourages us to ask for knowledge of the Lord from the inside. What is needed is a personal response to Christ not from the head but rather from the heart and then a movement into one's life.³⁷ Ignatius sidesteps theological speculation for it can become a hindrance to will-union with the divine. Like Rahner after him, Ignatius leaves elaboration open...setting out a framework within which Christian discipleship can take on a variety of forms. Theological truth is always unfinished, something calling us forward into the future.

Ignatian theology allows creative insight into the Gospel, while "fidelity to Christ's Standard entails a freedom not simply to repeat Christian precedent."³⁸ Through the *Exercises* one receives knowledge of the God of Jesus Christ – which is more than what the encounter with Jesus Christ in the *Exercises* provides.³⁹

The divine self gift, profoundly articulated at the Second Council of Orange generates an incalculable variety of responses. A tradition in permanent expansion must constantly express itself in new ways.⁴⁰ For example Rahner draws on the graces obtained from a prayer for

³⁴ Quoted in Fergus Kerr, (2007), *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians*, 1.

³⁵ See Timothy Radcliffe, <http://www.finestquotes.com/quote-id-49052.htm>

³⁶ See the Second Council of Orange with regard to God's unconditional grace freely given to all his people.

³⁷ Philip Endean, (2001), *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*, 242.

³⁸ Endean, (2001), 245.

³⁹ Endean, (2001), 245.

⁴⁰ Endean, (2001), 246.

forgiveness outside of the normal sacramental channel of formal reconciliation. Here Ignatius helps liberate us from our frail human understanding of God; one in which we place God in a straight-jacket – such theology of course appears bizarre to those who have a personal loving relationship with the Father. The *Exercises* can free us from vulgar cultural Catholicism, in their renewal of a mature, personal knowledge and loving relationship with the God of Jesus Christ.

In the *Spiritual Exercises* we can discover the liberation of theology; God's grace is not dependent upon ritual or formula.⁴¹ The *Exercises* bring the exercitant into a personal relationship with God. God's grace is then sustained by a Christian interpretation of reality. Central to an Ignatian theology is a fundamental orientation to experience within the context of tradition, experience builds upon tradition. In the *Exercises* we discover a practical theology that deals with the human experience of God in our lives – it has a concrete authenticity and entails ongoing dialogue between divine initiative and creaturely response.

The experience and corresponding dialogue grows out from communal and individual objective and subjective contexts. "Knowledge of God is therefore relational and generative of a new form of life."⁴² Both our knowing and unknowing need to be brought to our prayer and then to our theology in this way theology may be illuminated by our experience and prayer within the context of the Christian tradition. Rahner insisted that our on-going experience, schooled by Christian tradition, constitutes an integral element in that tradition. Christian spirituality in a pluralistic age rests on the assumption that the grace of God is made manifest in Christ.

The *Exercises* make manifest an immediate experience of God, not primarily to the privileged people and institutions but to the human condition as a whole. Every human experience becomes an indispensable source for theology – in the context of our conference we thus realise the marginalised as a primary source for theology. Through the marginalised we experience God's presence in history our very own experience of the Emmaus walk, we are then challenged accordingly to make a response.

Building upon the Ignatian paradigm it is possible to argue that God claims neither coterie or favorite; God is not gender orientated or historically neutral. In the *Exercises* of Ignatius we are challenged to radically confront complacent and misleading images of God. Using a deductive method it is possible to show what God is not. For example, God is not distant. Unlike the romance of the daffodil, God floats upon no cloud.

In opposition to the religious fundamentalist, the Ignatian paradigm amounts to a God who loves all people – not just those at the mosque, church or synagogue. The language is different, but the image is present in a variety of forms and mediums. Through the vision of Ignatius one can rediscover God along their path of life. Ignatius speaks to those who discovered the real Father

⁴¹ George Tyrrell, (1912) *Autobiography and Life*, Vol. II, "The *Spiritual Exercises*", 77-84.

⁴² Endean, (2001), 246ff.

Christmas and need support to frame their thoughts and move beyond. The *Exercises* provide concrete signposts of the transcendent, which inspire our navigation of the imminent. The *Exercises* mirror a pluralism of creative freedom, “life under Christ’s standard is pluriform.”⁴³ As Philip Endean writes “Fidelity to the Christian tradition, the following of Christ’s standard, simply means flexibility and openness before the on-going action of God.”⁴⁴

The *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius are about unlocking the image of God in the world. They contain within them the author’s profound personal image of God. Near the river Cardoner at Manresa in the sixteenth century, Ignatius had a profound mystical experience. In order to communicate this event he produced the *Exercises* as a practical book, one that intends to inspire a personal relationship with God. Ignatius claimed:

I could put the old message in new words, why was this? I was convinced I had a direct encounter with God. This was the experience I longed to communicate to others.

Ignatian realism embraces an image of God in contrast to the historical, cultural and philosophical images of our confused times. Ignatius encourages the reader to discover an image of God built upon a personal intimate relationship.

The Ignatian Image of God

Motivated by a profound insight taken from the *Spiritual Exercises*, that God is love, one is directly challenged to reach out to those on the margins of both Church and society. In this Ignatian context, God is invited down from the clouds; the *Exercises* teach a living, loving God, one who is found in ordinary life. Rahner writes how God becomes manifest in a shared meal. This image may transform our sense of God, discovering in the process how he interacts in our life and world. The image of God as portrayed in the vision of Ignatius’ followers produced a particular praxis based spirituality that brings God into our ordinary lives. It seems more than a coincidence that many of those who contributed to the Ignatian image of God, did so regardless of fashion and politics. The Ignatian image of God is radically counter cultural. Organized religion must constantly guard against becoming an obstacle to God. Part of the problem stems from the fact that institutions don't love, people do. . .

The Ignatian image of God, one that amounts to a contemporary illustration of God formed through relationship with others, cannot be encapsulated adequately in words, not even polished philosophical propositions. And yet, thankfully, there remains a variety of images through which we may glimpse the face of God, and perhaps through our activities, we might experience God looking at us. A seemingly insignificant act of love is a small mirror of God’s love. It is also an

⁴³ Endean, (2001), 258.

⁴⁴ Endean, (2001), 258.

image that encapsulates freedom, for it has the integrity to disarm both the atheist and the religious fundamentalist – in other words, to set them free from their chains of ideology. If God is love, and we live as to witness that human beings are made in the image of love, then there is hope.

For Rahner, “God is the ever greater God, who outstrips every system within which humanity seeks to control God. God is too much for humanity – a thoroughly elaborated transparent system in theology would be a false system.

Rahner advises the theologian: In theology too you are the pilgrim seeking the external homeland of truth, in an Exodus ever new.⁴⁵

Rahner is convinced that a “mystical experience of God is the actual basis of Christian existence.” He says, “Tomorrow’s devout person will either be a mystic – someone who has ‘experienced’ something or else they will no longer be devout at all.”⁴⁶ Ignatius’s ‘immediate experience of God’ marks the beginning of modernity in the Church – a turn to the self. Ignatius brought Christianity to a new and enriched level of self-awareness in our relationship with God. It is this self-awareness that is lacking in contemporary Catholic culture – understood as a personal relationship with God.⁴⁷

To integrate the mystical experience with theology is a primary concern of practical theology. If we experience God, then God’s own-self must dwell within us - God is within us – All of us.

Thus theology becomes a disciplined reflection upon on-going mystical experiences. Rahner could then say: “All theology worthy of the name is practical theology”. Rahner could say that the Ignatian Exercises represent Christianity more fundamentally and radically than systematic theology ever can.”⁴⁸

The future of Christianity in a pluralist, secular society will depend upon an “ultimate, immediate encounter of the individual with God.” Rahner believes, “the experience of God is not the same as words about God.”⁴⁹ God is not a figment of speculative theology but rather an epistemological insight taken from the immediate experience of God.

Ignatian Reflections Upon Ordinary Life

Ultimately the *Exercises* awaken our senses to God; we become aware of God in ordinary life. Their purpose is to construct or enhance a personal relationship with God through reflection

⁴⁵ Endean, (2001), 259.

⁴⁶ Endean, (2001), 63.

⁴⁷ For a more detailed development of this position see Gabriel Daly, (1987), "Catholicism and Modernity," *Trajectories in the Study of Religion*, 229-252.

⁴⁸ Endean, (2001), 60, 66, 67.

⁴⁹ Endean, (2001), 12, 15.

upon ordinary life events.⁵⁰ This awareness or insight into the nature of God affects our behaviour. A relationship with God transforms lives.

The Ignatian image of God fosters a dynamic relationship with God and our neighbor. The relationship is deepened through service such as working for conflict resolution, particularly in religious generated disagreement. This endeavour generates a call to remove man from the centre of religion and replace him with God. This remains a possibility without diluting our religious affiliation and context as we focus attention not upon religious difference but rather upon a collective image of God as the God of love. Ignatian theology attempts to build on the *Exercises* and construct a personal relationship with God; one that reflects upon being fully human, at its centre is a praxis-based spirituality. This encompasses a relational response to God, which may take place in the ordinary life of the individual. Thus one can challenge the fundamentalist and secular paradigm, through praxis rather than rhetoric.

To conclude:

Inspired by Vatican II, Bishop Eugene Hurley questioned which side of the river does the Australian Church now live on?⁵¹ The bishop explained that a Catholic institution should be "fundamentally sacramental" in its own particular location of place and time. Building upon Emerson's assertion "that only so much of life do I know as I have lived," the Bishop outlined the pastoral imperative that one must not preach from without. There is a danger that the Church becomes obsessed with distant philosophical realities, attendance and scale instead of being pastorally involved in people's ordinary daily lives. It is true that the Church lives in a time of frenetic change, it remains axiomatic that the Church lives in the world. This can be a hostile environment, the media is no friend of the Church and the current financial crisis demonstrates that our secular city is virtually free from moral fortitude.

Today is precisely the time not to pull up the drawbridge, in the words of Pope John XXIII, "we should throw open the shutters and not listen to the prophets of doom," who advise that we should withdraw from this place.⁵² An authentic catholic identity has always entailed being the heart, hands and voice of Jesus in the world. Our understanding of God dictates our response to the world which in turn influences our actions.

Resurrection vision in the light of Easter is a hopeful vision of the blessing glory of Christ in the world. This allows us to proclaim that the God of *all* is out there! Socrates in the fifth century BC and William Shedd in the early twentieth remind us that ships are safe in the harbor, but they

⁵⁰ For example see, Harvey D. Egan, (1998), *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life*, and Ronald Modras, (2004), *Ignatian Humanism: A Dynamic Spirituality for the 21st. Century*.

⁵¹ Bishop Eugene Hurley, ACU Melbourne, "Conference on Catholic Identity," April 2008.

⁵² See Pope John XXIII's "Opening Address" at Vatican II 1962.

are made to push out into the deep, to go into dangerous places, to go beyond the walls of our mind, to be with those on the margins. John Paul II wrote:

We must learn to see Christ especially in the face of those with whom he himself wished to be identified: 'I was hungry and you gave me food'... By these words, no less than by the orthodoxy of her doctrine, the Church measures her fidelity.⁵³

Proclaiming Christ died for *all* is associated with risk, pushing out into the deep, ever trusting in the Spirit to ensure authenticity. The universal call to holiness is conjoined with a sincere approach to the common good, one that embraces the 'preferential option for the marginalised.' In the universal call to holiness, the "People of God" have the ability to mitigate suffering and offer healing to a broken world. This realisation of a compassionate and forgiving God is often portrayed as weak in opposition to a vengeful God who must smite Adam's sin. In reality compassion and forgiveness requires the greatest amount of courage, it represents a movement of holiness in which we can detect, and allow others to see, the face of God.

Becoming the loving presence of God in the real world entails reaching down to every human weakness; in our journey we become fundamentally sacramental. From this realization of mission, appropriate models of leadership and structure will emerge for the new millennium. John Henry Newman exhorts us not to fear life coming to an end but not having a beginning; it is our duty to bring about this beginning. Victor Frankl discovered in *Auschwitz* that we must not "let fear destroy God's dreams for us." Love is risky, yet John-Paul II can affirm that, "Love is truly the heart of the Church." Benedict XVI proclaimed, *Deus Caritas Est!* Love entails the church in this place and this time should push out into the Australian 'outback', and in walking with those on the margins, a walk-about, we discover anew the God of all.

Finally with the help of Ignatius we learn God is very close to home, in the kitchen of our lives, in the parental analogy of Father and Mother. Drawing upon my own experience, the unconditional love of a Father, brings the realization that God is not an exclusive distant God of the few in the pew; not even of the many, but rather a God of All. How could it be any different?⁵⁴ With Cardinal Hume I am convinced that the unconditional love of a father and a mother offers a smile of forgiveness to the young and not so young, even *if* they steal an apple from the tree of life.

⁵³ *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001),

⁵⁴ See Antony F. Campbell, SJ, (2008), *The Whisper of the Spirit: A Believable God Today*, 111ff.