

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

A Bridge between Postmodernity and Christian Institutional Structures

James M. Bowler

IN THE MID 1970S I had the opportunity to visit the Stanford Research Institute in Palo Alto, California. I was there to discuss the implications of a draft they had recently published entitled *Changing Images of Man*.¹ Their thesis was that humanity in the West is entering a revolutionary transitional period, one at least as pronounced as that between the agrarian and industrial or the industrial and the scientific ages. They referred to this phenomenon as a transcendental, psychological or spiritual epoch. Each of the particular epochs that they identified corresponds to an image of the human person which is a 'gestalt perception of humankind, both individual and collective, in relation to the self, others, society and the cosmos'.² They were also concerned as to whether or not humankind would be able to navigate this coming revolution successfully. It is important to note that the overall project supervisor, Willis Harman, is regarded as a, if not the, preeminent twentieth-century futurologist.

For many years I followed the evolution of this study till its final expression by Harman in 1998.³ It has played an important role in my own intellectual and spiritual development. It also is a valuable lens through which to interpret the current diametrically opposed forces at work in our postmodern culture, especially the dichotomy we currently observe between the spiritual and the religious. This article will explore the images of humanity mentioned above and how their cultural landscapes have

¹ O. W. Markley and Willis W. Harman, *Changing Images of Man* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1982)—final revision of the draft.

² Markley and Harman, *Changing Images of Man*, 3.

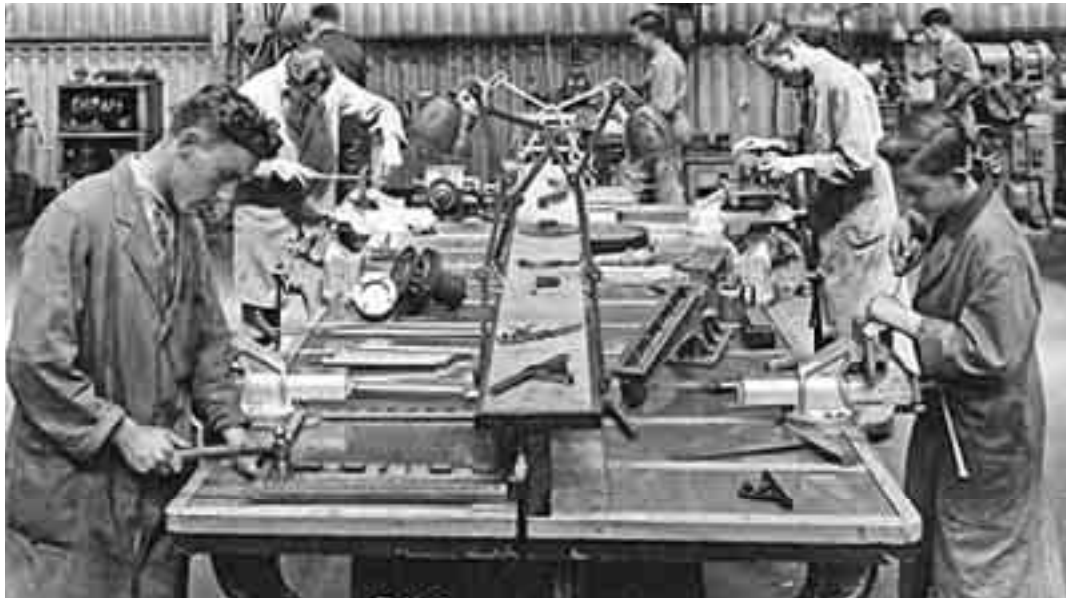
³ Willis W. Harman, *Global Mind Change: The Promise of the 21st Century* (San Francisco: Bennett-Koehler, 1998).

created the present apparent dichotomy. The final part will discuss how the contemporary renewal of Ignatian spirituality is and promises to continue to be an important means of bridging the two.

Historical Images of the Human Person

Until the middle of the eighteenth century the operating image of humanity was agrarian, emphasizing manual labour assisted by the efforts of domestic animals.⁴ The labourer was part of an organic whole. The emergence of the image of ‘economic man’ involved a transition to machine-based manufacturing, in which the human labour force became units in the production process, leading to urbanization and the industrial revolution. It is not difficult to grasp how this eventually transformed humankind’s image of self, others and society, as well as of the cosmos. However, owing to the radical innovations in science and technology during the second half of the twentieth century, this industrial image no longer appears to dominate the western world.⁵ The landscape of empty factories and the emergence of ‘silicon valleys’ testify to this.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there began to emerge another organizing image for the human person—the scientific—which would come to dominate how humankind in the West, either explicitly or implicitly, formulated its world view. It is important to note that



⁴ Markley and Harman, *Changing Images of Man*, 45–48.

⁵ Markley and Harman, *Changing Images of Man*, 49.

this emerged from the economic image rather than in isolation and incorporates this previous paradigm.⁶ The characteristics of the scientific image certainly reflect contemporary Western cultural experience:

- Reason is the supreme tool of humankind.
- Knowledge, acquired through the use of reason, will free mankind from ignorance and will lead to a better future.
- The universe is inherently orderly and physical.
- This order can be discovered by science and objectively expressed.
- Only science deals in empirically verifiable truth.
- Observation and experimentation are the only valid means of discovering scientific truth, which is always independent of the observer.⁷

In short, humanity is in control of its own future.

In a subsequent work presupposing and building on the previous study, Harman summarises this revolution in the following way:

Medieval society was not strongly interested in technology. A new dynamism entered with the interrelated developments we call the Reformation, the rise of capitalism, and the scientific revolution. The underlying belief-system shift included increased emphasis on manipulation of the physical environment through technology. That in turn required a valuing of that knowledge which is useful for the development of technology—namely, knowledge that will enable prediction and control. Increasingly, through the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, scientific knowledge and the ‘scientific method’ were identified with prediction-and-control. It went largely unnoticed that other societies (such as ancient Greece, India, Europe in the Middle Ages) had valued other kinds of knowledge useful for other purposes than the technological conquest of nature.⁸

An Emerging New Image

Harman argues that many of the underlying principles supporting this dominant scientific image of humankind are currently ‘very much in question’ and that a new paradigm is emerging.⁹ Brian Greene, in *The*

⁶ Markley and Harman, *Changing Images of Man*, 67–72.

⁷ Markley and Harman, *Changing Images of Man*, 68, drawing on James Bryant Conant, *Science and Common Sense* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1951).

⁸ Harman, *Global Mind Change*, 22.

⁹ Harman, *Global Mind Change*, 102.

Elegant Universe,¹⁰ agrees, noting that the two theories—general relativity and quantum mechanics—that have guided the progress of physics during the last century are mutually incompatible. When physics tries to integrate these two models ‘their union brings violent catastrophe’.¹¹ This points to an ‘essential flaw’ in the scientific understanding of the universe. Although hope is offered through the emergence of ‘string theory’, this will take the major part of the twenty-first century to develop. However, for the present, the science of physics is confronting vast regions of the unknown.¹²

In its deification of objectivity, Harman notes that the scientific image avoids the subjective, the realm where a sense of meaning and value commitments—so foundational to culture—are explored. Coupled with a diminishment in the authority of scientific orthodoxy, a renewed respect for subjective experience (for example in psychoanalysis) is leading to the emergence of a transcendental, psychological or spiritual paradigm. It is critical to note that this rises from, incorporates, but also supplants, the scientific.¹³ He also notes (prophetically) that institutions attempting to adapt to this new cultural paradigm will probably experience ‘a relatively traumatic transition period’.¹⁴

Initially it was the areas of consciousness research (for example biofeedback, hypnosis, dream analysis) that led the way in challenging the scientific paradigm. However, in the second half of the twentieth century there were a number of diverse social phenomena—the human rights movement, environmentalism, a self-realisation ethic, globalisation, the search for a sense of community, interest in Eastern philosophical systems in the West, and various schools of psychological therapy—that pointed to the bankruptcy of the purely objective, scientific worldview.¹⁵ Harman calls this a shift in the dominant metaphysic, ‘a second Copernican revolution’, effecting a transition such that, rather than measurable matter determining the content of human consciousness, human consciousness, spirit or mind is beginning to shape and define matter.¹⁶ The more one ponders this reversal, the more one realises just how radical the shift becomes. He states:

¹⁰ Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe* (London: Vintage, 2000).

¹¹ Greene, *Elegant Universe*, 118.

¹² Greene, *Elegant Universe*, 130–131.

¹³ Harman, *Global Mind Change*, 23–24; Markley and Harman, *Changing Images of Man*, 185.

¹⁴ Markley and Harman, *Changing Images of Man*, 185.

¹⁵ Markey and Harman, *Changing Images of Man*, 113–120; Harman, *Global Mind Change*, 130–137.

¹⁶ Harman, *Global Mind Change*, 30–35, here 33.

If the basic assumptions underlying modern society are indeed shifting in the way we have suggested, it follows that society will, only a few generations from now, be as different from modern industrial society as that is from the society of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, it will be different in ways that we can only vaguely intuit, just as a Renaissance futurist would have had a hard time trying to describe modern society.¹⁷

It is important to realise that this thesis began to be formulated by Harman and his research associates in the mid 1970s. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it represents a vibrant confluence of energy influencing the culture in which we live.

This evolution of emerging images of humankind can be described from the viewpoint of its external, material aspect or its internal, spiritual one. The former is manifest in the dominant cultural expression of society (for example scientific) while the latter is discernible through observing the manifestations of an emerging evolution in human self-awareness.

As we come to higher stages of evolution, the attribute of consciousness comes to the fore. By this we mean the discovery of relationships and the making of choices—both individually and collectively—on the basis of understanding, appreciation and judgment; and being influenced by a relevant context with its past, present and future rather than being determined by instinct, habit or some authority from another time and place.¹⁸

To sum up: in the past several centuries humankind in the West has experienced an evolutionary process flowing through four consecutive cultural transformations: agrarian, to industrial, to scientific, to—increasingly—transcendental. The driving force of this evolution is towards a superior stage of human consciousness or self-awareness which, as noted, also integrates the salient aspects of the preceding organizing image. What we experience is a narrative of the unfolding from within of human development and potential.

The transitional periods between these paradigms are long and arduous. One has only to reflect on the transition between the industrial and the scientific (reflected, for example, in the decline of manufacturing and its corresponding unemployment) to understand the trauma involved.

¹⁷ Harman, *Global Mind Change*, 194.

¹⁸ Markey and Harman, *Changing Images of Man*, 132.



© Michael Kappel

Such, certainly, is a factor explaining the economic crisis of the early twenty-first century. While we are immersed in a new transition, it is nevertheless difficult to grasp the tremendous challenge that the emerging transcendental image represents. One cannot help but notice the hostility the many manifestations resulting from postmodernity provoke from our dominant culture. It is certainly likely that society's structures (including religion) will be resistant to accommodating themselves to this new image. First of all, there remains a persistent and all-promising belief that the solutions to our problems lie in rationality and its corresponding commitment to the scientific method. Secondly, bureaucratic structures are often obdurate when asked to modify or change. Finally, there is the tendency to look towards yesterday rather than tomorrow for answers. Some futurologists are sceptical as to whether our cultural institutions will be able to cope with the challenges posed by the emerging transcendental image of the human person.

A Theological Reflection

If the shift to this new image of the human person is a possibility for the coming evolution of humanity, the question presents itself as to whether this process occurs solely through random change, natural selection and/or human agency, or whether it is also influenced by some external teleological source. This brings us to a central issue here: when we look to the origin and source of the evolutionary process detailed above, we are confronted with both an empirical and a transcendent force. Deep within and at the core of each individual we can recognise a

transcendental self, distinct from the conscious ego. This reality is at the core of creation, which is also graced by the same transcendental energy. To many people of faith, this is God.¹⁹ In Christian terms, we could call the transcendental force the Holy Spirit. Looking at the human evolutionary process from this perspective, we can see the hand of a loving God inviting and guiding both individuals and the cosmos as a whole in a cooperative venture. I would like to elucidate these ideas further from the viewpoint of two twentieth-century intellectuals—Teilhard de Chardin, a philosopher and paleontologist, and Karl Rahner, a theologian.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Teilhard claimed that the universe is continually evolving towards greater levels of material complexity and consciousness. He postulates an ‘Omega point’, a ‘divine center of convergence’,²⁰ completely complex and completely conscious, as the actual cause of this phenomenon. Perhaps prophetic of the revolution represented by the transcendental image of the human person, he claims that this reality, once the province of the mystics, is progressively becoming more present to the human race. Humanity is continually being more immersed in this spiritual reality till it will ‘detach itself from this planet and join the one true, irreversible essence of things ...’.²¹

Karl Rahner offers an explicitly christological interpretation and deepening of this perspective. Philip Endean writes that, in Rahner’s view, ‘the Renaissance and the Enlightenment period have brought Christianity to a new and enriched level of self-awareness’.²² The way in which Rahner theologizes from this enhanced level of human consciousness may well explain his appeal to contemporary intellectuals who are interested in the world of the spiritual. Foundational to his theology is a vision of the world and human consciousness as the deeply transcendental place of God’s presence in Christ through the Holy Spirit. For the Christian believer, this makes it possible to identify the evolution of human consciousness with a loving God guiding the cosmos and its inhabitants.

Endean posits that, for Rahner, at the most profound level of the human psyche, ‘deeper than intellect or will’, lies the presence of the

¹⁹ See David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2004), 82–83.

²⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 101–128, here 115.

²¹ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, 127.

²² I am very much indebted to the work of Philip Endean for the insights that follow. See Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), here 64.

divine spirit.²³ This allows God to be experienced at the depth of human life, history and creation.

It is Karl Rahner's theology that enables us to see mutual entailments between human experience of God, divine self-communication, and the doctrine of the Trinity. If God's own self can be found by human beings in creation, then the structures of human mental life must reflect the ontology of God.²⁴

He takes this further, citing an unpublished draft by Rahner describing,

... the mystery whereby an infinite God co-exists with the finite world—a God who in freedom has willed to exist only as one whom establishes the world ... in the sense that the world is constantly being established by God, so that the duality is itself enclapsed in God's unity.²⁵

This is the basis for the belief that humans are continually being invited by God to participate with God in the emerging narrative of the cosmos.

What Rahner is basically saying—and this is critical for my argument here—is that 'access to God always depends on our worldly interactions'.²⁶ Reflection on our lived human experience is integral to the encounter with God, and it also has a critical role in the current apparent dichotomy between spirituality and religion.

Spirituality and Religion

One day I saw a notice at a local chiropractic and physical therapy centre advertising three sessions of various types of group yoga on a Sunday morning, each for the period of an hour. I could not help but see the resemblance between this and a sign outside a church, synagogue or mosque announcing the times of weekly worship. This resemblance exemplifies the split between spirituality and religion experienced by so many today. What is it that people receive from yoga that they do not receive from participating in traditional forms of worship?

More and more we hear a new sort of believer claim to be spiritual but not religious. Such believers feel dissociated from formal religious structures and traditions. This phenomenon is more subtle than one might

²³ Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*, 28.

²⁴ Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*, 78.

²⁵ Karl Rahner, 'Konsequenzen und Ergebnisse', cited in Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*, 93.

²⁶ Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*, 92.

think. For example, I have encountered young adults who identify themselves with the Roman Catholic tradition and have had a deep experience of directed Ignatian prayer (an existential experience of the loving Christian God)—yet who are rather casual about their attendance at Eucharist. They do not see an essential connection between these two experiences. The same is true of their assent to many of Catholicism’s moral teachings, especially in the area of human sexuality. But they also regard themselves as valuing spiritual experience, a commitment to a better and more humane world, community service and prayerful meditation (whether in Christian forms or outside the tradition in practices such as yoga).



In his book *The Spirituality Revolution*, the Australian writer David Tacey addresses this question of the apparent dichotomy between spirituality and religion in a profound and articulate fashion. First of all, according to Tacey, the reason that religion sometimes seems to have lost its sense of the sacred and its appeal to the heart is because it is oblivious to the sense of transcendence offered by the natural world, emphasizing its own structures at the expense of the human self’s life experience. Tacey sees religion as distant from the heart and trapped in the head by dogmas and moral teachings. The present emerging generation experiences many forms of organized religion as caught in a series of dualisms: spirit and earth, spirit and body, spirit and nature, spirit and sexuality.²⁷ Tacey’s findings resonate with the emerging transcendental image of the human person already described. He observes ‘volcanic eruptions’ in human consciousness which the traditional structures of

²⁷ Tacey, *Spirituality Revolution*, 82–84.

organized religion (but not religion itself) either cannot, or for the most part do not desire to accommodate.²⁸ He employs the biblical image of ‘putting new wine into old wineskins’ to describe these changes, and quotes Carl Jung in support of his argument:

In view of the widespread interest in all sorts of psychic phenomena, an interest such as the world has not seen since the last half of the seventeenth century, it does not seem to be beyond the range of possibility to believe that we stand on the threshold of a new spiritual epoch; and that from the depths of man’s own psychic life new spiritual forms will be born.²⁹

Tacey offers ten criticisms, which many share, of contemporary religious structures. I shall attempt to summarise them below.³⁰ Organized religion gives the appearance of ...

- being too patriarchal and masculine; excluding the feminine aspect of the divine;
- being based on an antiquated cosmology with distinct realms for the natural and supernatural;
- believing in spirit as a reality external to creation;
- being too other-worldly and having little to say to humankind in this time of ecological crisis;
- promoting perfection rather than human wholeness as a goal;
- teaching dualism between spirit and body, sexuality and spirituality;
- being hierarchical and elitist, out of touch with the voices of God’s people;
- promoting teachings and practices alien to the self it desires to transform;
- discouraging the communication of the faith experiences its individual believers enjoy;
- being too identified with the social establishment to offer a substantive critique of it.

²⁸ Tacey, *Spirituality Revolution*, 35.

²⁹ Carl Jung, ‘Does the World Stand on the Verge of Spiritual Rebirth?’ (1934), in C. G. Jung *Speaking: Interviews and Encounters*, edited by William McGuire and R. F. C. Hull (London: Picador, 1980), 81, cited in Tacey, *Spirituality Revolution*, 27.

³⁰ Tacey, *Spirituality Revolution*, 36–37.

It is important to note that Tacey in no way promotes the separation of spirituality and religion, and that he seeks in his work to explore ways these two worlds might be reconciled.

The historical role of religion is to liberate the spirit from personal narcissism, and to introduce a cosmic or universal perspective as well as to keep spirituality firmly related to morality, social responsibility and the remembrance of our own mortality.³¹

As he observes, in the current landscape—shaped by existentialism, psychoanalysis and feminism along with the revolutions of sex, race, gender politics and ecology—the human spirit emerges without any supportive structure, not knowing how to express itself in a communal setting, which often results in an unhealthy individualism leading to alienation. He views many who transfer their allegiance from the Church to other, often commercial, organizations as deceived by false prophets who promote themselves rather than the transcendent ethos that they are marketing.³² Spirituality and religion need to reunite, but the question is ‘how’.

Constructing a Bridge: Ignatian Spirituality

Tacey proposes abolishing the distinction between conservative and liberal theology, and replacing it with what he calls a mystical approach. He hopes this will result in new images of God that accommodate the spiritual desires and needs of the disaffected while at the same time healing their negative impression of formal religion. From the platform of Roman Catholicism, Tacey embraces the mystical approaches of Karl Rahner and Hans Kung because of the emphasis they place on an immediate experience of God.³³ This brings us to the my central thesis, which is that the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and its spirituality offer a practical means of implementing this mystical approach.

Over time, the *Spiritual Exercises* has proved to be a classic—a work of lasting significance with a timeless quality that touches the core of a person’s being.³⁴ It is a work which has come into contact with many cultures and, while preserving its own integrity, is experienced in diverse

³¹ Tacey, *Spirituality Revolution*, 150.

³² Tacey, *Spirituality Revolution*, 40–42.

³³ Tacey, *Spirituality Revolution*, 166–171.

³⁴ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (London: SCM, 1981), 107–109.

ways. This is especially true when Ignatian spirituality encounters the spiritual needs and manifestations of contemporary postmodernity and its image of the human person. Perhaps this is a major explanation for the increasing popularity of the many forms of Ignatian spirituality we experience today.

I would like to choose five themes in Ignatian spirituality and show how they might relate to the thirst for the spiritual in contemporary culture. These are:

- an immediate experience of God;
- finding God in all things;
- contemplatives in action;
- the *magis* (a thirst for the *more*);
- discernment.

It is important to note that, with the exception of the Rules for Discernment, these characteristics are not unique to Ignatian spirituality (though Ignatius emphasizes them in a unique way) but are present in other parts of the Christian tradition. Also, when someone experiences the Spiritual Exercises, he or she enjoys a lived, personal and internalised experience of the major Christian doctrines (such as the Trinity, incarnation and redemption).

First of all, Ignatian spirituality offers *an immediate experience of God*. Rather than being based on the testimony of God's representative, this is a direct, personal encounter between the human heart and a personal, loving and accepting God who desires us as we are—with all our imperfections. This can be a profound experience of authenticity and wholeness. God's love is not only experienced in an individual's present but also discovered through reflecting on our personal historical narrative through the lens of God. When genuine, this experience is transformational and provides an excellent foundation upon which to fashion our identity in life.³⁵

Secondly, such an immediate experience leads to the ability to *find God in all things*. This means experiencing the divine presence not only in oneself, one's daily experience or in other people, but in creation and in the story of the human cosmos. A beautiful contemplative expression

³⁵ See Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*, 13–31, 211–213, for an excellent account of this.

of this reality in a christological context is offered by Teilhard de Chardin in his *Hymn of the Universe*.³⁶ One cannot underestimate the quality of support this experience offers both to environmentalists committed to ameliorating the destruction being perpetrated on our planet and to those committed to alleviating the plight of victims of social injustice.

The next theme is *contemplatives in action*, which might be regarded as the flip side of finding God in all things. This is really the heart and core of Ignatian prayer. If an encounter with God is present in our worldly interactions, then we must be willing to meet God in the various ways in which daily life reveals this divine presence—or absence—and take time to savour this experience. Ignatius offered an exercise called the Examen as one way to do this. This is a form of Ignatian contemplation which is emerging with significant popularity in contemporary society as a means towards living an authentic way of life.³⁷ It is said that Ignatius instructed young Jesuits that this, above all other forms of prayer, should take priority in their lives.

The fourth theme is called the *magis* (the Latin word for ‘more’), which means that, given a set of alternatives, we are encouraged to choose what is ‘for the greater glory of God and the salvation of one’s soul’ (Exx 185).³⁸ This is a qualitative and not a quantitative variable. In terms perhaps more attuned to our contemporary culture, when faced with such a choice, we should prefer that which corresponds more to our authenticity while at the same time serving the promotion of the common good—a major priority for any healthy religion. This criterion has significant relevance not only to the process for determining one’s vocation in life but also, for example, to how we respond to the many issues presented by the dark side of globalisation (the distribution of wealth, the use of natural resources) we encounter in the world.

Finally, the notion of *discernment* not only stands on its own but is also foundational for enabling and identifying the other four themes in our lived experience. To many, Ignatian spirituality is discernment—the *how* of finding God in all things. Two different spirits may be perceived in the circumstances and choices of our lives, inviting us towards wholeness or disintegration. One is the source of life and light and comes

³⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe* (London: Collins, 1965).

³⁷ See Timothy M. Gallagher, *The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today* (New York: Crossroad, 2006).

³⁸ See Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*, 123–127.

from God. The other is the source of death and darkness and comes from evil or Satan. Authentic discernment involves accepting that both these spirits are at work in a given situation and then utilising the means to identify which is which through the experiences of consolation and desolation that they inspire. Ignatius offers 22 rules to discern these spirits, rules which point to just how difficult it can be at times to identify a particular spirit at work. This is especially true when darkness deceptively manifests itself under the guise of light. Although he was writing in the sixteenth century, many have commented on how applicable Ignatius' methods are to contemporary life and circumstances, and on just how astute a psychologist he was. The literature on Ignatian discernment is voluminous, but an excellent introduction is offered by Elizabeth Liebert.³⁹

A Concrete Experience of Ignatian Spirituality

I would like to conclude with an example of how these five characteristics were experienced by a group of college juniors during a two-week cultural immersion experience in the dire poverty of Ecuador, during which we lived, prayed and worked together with a small Christian community. The essential spiritual component of this project was structured reflection on lived experience, a key aspect of any authentically Ignatian spirituality. Through such reflection, I will show how this type of project has the potential to offer answers to some of the criticisms of organized religion listed by David Tacey.

- When we entered the local community, which had no paved roads and where people of faith were living in shacks, we could not help but experience a sense of presence that became more pervasive as time went on. For many, upon reflection, this became *an immediate experience of God* in that community. This presents an alternative vision of a religious community to the hierarchical and elitist one presented by Tacey.
- One day we visited the town dump, where the illegal immigrants lived, and saw their children playing in the dark smoke from rubbish fires. One student saw this as hell, while another called

³⁹ Elizabeth Liebert, *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

it Calvary. This is certainly an example of *finding God in all things* and shows how religion need not rely upon an antiquated cosmology with distinct realms for the natural and supernatural.

- During each evening's Eucharist there was an extended faith-sharing time when we disclosed our consolations and desolations of the day in light of the scripture readings. This was certainly an experience of being *contemplatives in action* and, in Tacey's words encouraged 'the communication of the faith experiences ... individual believers enjoy'.
- Reflecting on the basic social teachings of the Catholic Church in the context of people having to boil their drinking water and lacking educational opportunities and meaningful work brought home to us the importance of the *magis* and authentic *discernment* in geopolitical decision-making. It also showed that Catholic Social Teaching has something profound to offer in the context of today's social injustice and ecological crisis, and need not be 'too identified with the social establishment to offer a substantive critique of this'.

Many more examples could be found in the total experience of working in Ecuador. However, my purpose is to describe one method—Ignatian spirituality—which has the potential to bridge the gap between spirituality and religion.



A Spiritual Ecology of the Imagination

In a very provocative article, Michael Paul Gallagher claims that, in contemporary Western culture, ‘a major interruption of communication has taken place and traditions seem impotent to nourish religious identity’.⁴⁰ In his view, we need new ways to undertake an evangelization that is rooted in and respects the cultural milieu where God’s people find themselves. Gallagher claims that the promotion of faith today requires ‘a spiritual ecology of the imagination’ to open people’s hearts to hear the Christian message. He points to the role of imagination in Ignatian contemplation, connecting gospel narratives with human experience, as a model that responds to this ecological appeal.⁴¹ Using this form of prayer to link the major Ignatian themes with current trends in spirituality could well bring about the necessary readiness and openness to initiate a profound conversation between contemporary spirituality and traditional Christianity.

James M. Bowler SJ is Director of the Ignatian Spirituality Center at Fairfield University, Connecticut, USA.

⁴⁰ Michael Paul Gallagher, ‘The Challenge of Evangelizing in a Secular Culture’, *Review of Ignatian Spirituality (CIS)*, 42 (2011), 27–37, here 30.

⁴¹ Gallagher, ‘Challenge of Evangelizing’, 34–37.