

An Ignatian Pilgrimage: From Personal Interiority to Shared Apostolic Vision

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Make Love Not War: The Dynamic of Discernment

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I begin this presentation by offering you the following thought:

If the United States of America could have shown the world how powerful and mighty they are by refusing to retaliate after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the world would be a very different place to live in today.

Choosing to be vulnerable could have turned everything upside down. It reminds me of the popular movement of the '60's 'make love, not war.' Perhaps greatest resistance to war is love – love, as St Paul says, is the greatest gift of all.¹ I would like to suggest each of us face similar choices within our own personal dynamics every day. Discernment is the art of listening deeply to hear how God, who is Love, will turn our lives and our world upside down if we take the time to notice our own little wars first. I will come back to this point later in this presentation, but for now I invite you to hold this as we journey together.

Context

In the 21st Century we bear witness to change in almost every aspect of the way we live as a human community and it is happening at an unprecedented pace. Christians are not immune to change, neither are we powerless to make choices in how society will be transformed and influenced by change. It has never been more important to be resilient and open to possibilities that change can bring. Martin Luther King says that: 'Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable ... every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.'² Therefore we must remain aware of both the cost and the possibilities that change brings with it.

The pace of change in our world has increased beyond what previous generations could have possibly imagined. I remember only a few years ago, face to face video calls on mobile devices and commercial space travel were just science fiction and only existed in our imagination and in cartoons. The development of the Internet in the

¹ The Holy Bible New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, *Nrsv Bible* (1998). 1 Corinthians 13:13

² Martin Luther King Jr – in his speech delivered On February 10, 1961, on the campus of New York University. <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/martinluth164280.html>.

1990's (that is only 20 years ago) changed the way we communicate and access knowledge forever. Fact-finding, which once would have meant days of research in a library, can be done in seconds on the Internet in our own homes. Technology has impacted the way we teach, learn, work and live. The diversity of choice in what we eat, wear, travel, play, study, how we shop, where we live, etc. continues to grow and the choices we have to make every day can seem endless.

But can we survive in this rapidly changing world? I sometimes wonder if life in the 21st Century has become so complex that it is almost impossible for humanity to manage.

In my work as a spiritual director I see a great deal of anxiety, depression, fear and hopelessness in people who are just trying to cope with their day-to-day living. In Australia, though you might be employed for 40 hours per week, oftentimes there is an expectation that you will work up to 60 hours per week without extra payment or consideration of the impact on the employees personal and family life. People can feel powerless to speak into unjust organisational systems and trapped in lives they can't manage. Spiritual direction which is embedded in the Ignatian tradition and discernment, can help a person to see more clearly what keeps them trapped in unsustainable lives and make choices to change this, but first we have to stop and be prepared to listen.

Every minute of every day seems to be filled with something – work, mobile phones, emails, internet, television, social media and so on. I feel exhausted just by thinking about these things. Even the Sunday ritual of attending Mass now has to compete with sporting events, work obligations and social activities. It seems there is no time for the sacred – in particular the care of our own sacred selves.

Some even argue that we are witnessing the beginning of the extinction of the human race.³ Global warming, overuse of natural resources, the escalation of terrorism, the use technology before we understand its potential for damage, and complex new resistant viruses such as Ebola are just some of the great threats to our continued existence on Earth. Did you know that there are currently only 11 countries in the world that are free from armed conflict?⁴

I think it would be reasonable to say that living in the 21st Century is psychologically and spiritually the most complex and challenging in the history of the human race. Some say that perhaps the evolutionary change happening to humanity now, is greater than when the human brain first became conscious.⁵

We can't stop change, but we do have a choice. We can choose to actively collaborate with God and impact the direction that change moves creation, or we can go along

³ Nick Bostrom, "Existential Risk as a Global Priority," *Global Policy* 4, no. 1 (2013). A recent study by a team of scientists at Oxford University: Existential Risk as a Global Priority highlights the reality of the risk of human extinction due to our lack of understanding of the consequences of technological advancement. They state that international policymakers must pay serious attention to the reality of species-obliterating risks in the 21st Century and to raise awareness of ways in to mitigate this risk.

⁴ Of the 162 countries covered by the [Institute for Economics and Peace's \(IEP's\) latest study](http://www.independent.co.uk), just 11 were not involved in conflict of one kind or another. <http://www.independent.co.uk> accessed 2 November 2014 11.05am.

⁵ Anne Hillman, *Awakening the Energies of Love: Discovering Fire for the Second Time* (United States of America: Anne Hillman, 2008).

with the flow and presume we are powerless. Therefore the real question is: will we let change happen to us, or will we consciously participate and influence change as it emerges. But it begins firstly with me. As Mahatma Gandhi is attributed to saying: 'You must be the change you wish to see in the world'.

In this context, the gift of Ignatian discernment is now more important and relevant than ever.

Discernment of Spirits in the Ignatian Tradition

Ignatian Spirituality is an apostolic spirituality and can be described as 'a spirituality of choice at the level of faith.'⁶ That means my relationship with God will impact every decision I make and that decisions made will ultimately free me to become apostolically effective in the world. Discernment can be used as a tool to make concrete individual important decisions such as an Election,⁷ but discernment can also be understood as a way of living in love with God where my whole life is directed towards God. As William Barry says 'to achieve union with God in action.'⁸

Ignatian spirituality evolved from the experience of the co-founder of the Society of Jesus, St Ignatius of Loyola (1491 – 1556).⁹ Ignatius lived by the knowledge that God is at work in the world and that each of us can personally experience God. He further believed that discernment can help us to make choices that either lead us towards God and so create a better world, or away from God damaging the world and ourselves. As St Irenaeus states: 'The glory of God is a human person fully alive.'¹⁰ In Ignatian spirituality we listen deeply to find the pathway forward that is life giving for ourselves and for the whole of creation.

Though Ignatius didn't have the advantage of recent developments in the study of the psychology, the unconscious and psychodynamics, he was very aware of her own interior life and understood that by noticing how his own internal dynamics worked, he could change the way in which he engaged in life. By observing his own interior life in detail, Ignatius noticed movements of the spirit within, and then noting the things he found useful, he put them in writing for others. These observations took the form of the Rules for Discernment, which form a part of a larger reflective process called the Spiritual Exercises.¹¹

⁶ Judith Roemer and George Schemel, *Beyond Individuation to Discipleship: A Directory for Those Who Give the Spiritual Exercises* (Scranton: Institute for Contemporary Spirituality, University of Scranton, 2000).

⁷ Election in the Exercises has come to mean the choosing of a permanent way of life - a calling or a vocation as in notations, for example will I be married, single, religious, ordained.

⁸ William Barry, *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001). 124

⁹ The Society of Jesus is a worldwide Roman Catholic religious order founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola. He originally called his group "The Company of Jesus" to indicate its true leader; the title was Latinized into "Societas Jesu" in the Bull of Pope Paul III on 27 Sept., 1540. The motto of the Society of Jesus is Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam (For the Greater Glory of God). "Jesuit Cuir Website" <http://www.sjweb.info>.

¹⁰ Michael Downey, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Bangalore India: Theological Publications 1995). 132

¹¹ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, trans., Michael Ivins (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2004). The numbers in square brackets refer to the specific notations in the text of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. The *Spiritual Exercises* can be undertaken as a 30 day

The Rules for Discernment begin with the following instruction:

Rules by which to perceive and understand **to some extent** the various movements produced in the soul: Good that they may be accepted, and the bad, that they may be rejected. [313]

What is interesting here is that Ignatius is not giving us a rulebook to memorise so we can keep the rules and become good Christians, rather he is helping us to notice interior movements, or motions of the soul. These interior movements consist of 'thoughts, imaginings, emotions, inclinations, desires, feelings, repulsions, and attractions.'¹²

Ignatius recognised certain patterns within himself that led him towards hope, peace, freedom and joy. He describes this as 'consolation' and a movement towards God. [316] He also noted that other movements within led him to darkness, turmoil, sadness, separation and a lack of hope, which he calls 'desolation' and a movement away from God. [317] Ignatius invites the exercitant¹³ to actively choose to move towards consolation and to work against desolation. This invitation is at the heart of the Rules for Discernment and all rules that follow help the exercitant to identify the subtleties of these movements and to work against what might take us away from God.

We need to note that Ignatius give us two different sets of Rules for Discernment. If my orientation is to go from bad to worse, I can expect the opposite to what has been described above and I will be consoled by bad spirit. This may be true for just one aspect of my life. For example if I have a gambling addiction, I could expect God to disturb me, reminding me that going to the casino is only going to make things worse where as the bad spirit will console me, having me believe that today will be the day I will win. So discernment and spiritual direction are about noticing which direction I am moving in – away from God into despair, hopelessness and fear; or towards God and peace, joy and gentleness.

I would like to suggest that though the Rules for Discernment can be helpful in any context with or without the background of having made the full Spiritual Exercises, when we take them out of this context we lose touch with the very kernel of the gift.

The Spiritual Exercises

The Spiritual Exercises are a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices developed by Ignatius to help people deepen their relationship with God. Ignatius claims that just as: 'taking a walk, journeying on foot, and running are bodily exercises, so we call spiritual exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments.' [1] So Ignatius is saying that if we want to

enclosed retreat [20] or a 30 week retreat in daily life [19]. The exercitant prays through a structured prayer experiences based on the life of Christ and then looking at their own life story. This retreat is divided in to four different dynamics that Ignatius refers to as Weeks (these are not actually literally one week each but rather different movements within the retreat.).

¹² <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/discernment-of-spirits/> accessed 3 November 2014 12.45pm.

¹³ Exercitant is the term used to describe the one who is making the Exercises.

be healthy spirituality, it takes exercise, and that we need to know what attachments we have that prevent us from being open to God's invitation to love.

The Exercises as offered by Ignatius are broken up in to four phases of the spiritual journey which Ignatius calls Weeks - note these are not literally weeks rather seasons or dynamics of the Spiritual Journey:

Week One: we come know ourselves as a loved sinner who recognises and understands our own part in the destruction of life within the gaze of God who loves us unconditionally; and that there is nothing I can do to attain this love or alternatively to stop God from loving me. The invitation to transformation is to know that God's love is there, freely given waiting for me to receive it.

Week Two: focuses on a personal relationship with Jesus and how this impacts our own apostolic and creative potential, by clarifying our identity and vocation before God. The invitation to transformation is to come to know ourselves as called and gifted.

Week Three: looks more closely at our capacity to stay focused and faithful to the Call even in the light of suffering. Can we stay faithful to the invitation of God to service even if the cost is high?

Week Four: is an invitation to incarnate our consolation. To bring into fruitful being the graces, gifts and desires that flow from our relationship with God.

So do we really see ourselves as *called and gifted and loved*? What would that look like incarnated in the world today? Could this help work against the current trends of the 21st and simplify our lives? Perhaps the Two Standards can help us to unpack this a little further.

The Two Standards

In the Second Week of the Exercises, Ignatius offers a meditation called The Two Standards [136]. By now the exercitant will have received the grace of the First Week of knowing God's unconditional love. We will also have begun to face some of our own inordinate attachments and recognise patterns within us that lead us away from God and distort our decision-making. We will have prayed on The Principle and Foundation [23] which challenges us to orientate our whole life to God's purpose; and then contemplated the Call of the Eternal King [91] as a way of fulfilling God's purpose choosing to follow Christ as our leader. Whilst praying through the Incarnation, birth and life of Christ, Ignatius invites us to become more aware of how we make choices, in particular what prevents us from choosing to live as Christ lived.

To further challenge the exercitant, Ignatius then rather shockingly asks us to consider The Two Standards ('standard' meaning a flag): 'One that of Christ our Commander-in-Chief and our Lord, the other that of Lucifer, the deadly enemy of our human nature.' [136] The question here is 'will I choose to stand with Jesus or the way of the world?' Ignatius sets the scene:

The first prelude is the history: in this case how Christ calls and desires everybody to be under His standard, and Lucifer, on the contrary, wants everyone under his. [137]

The second prelude: the composition made by seeing the place. Here it will be to behold a great plain extending over the entire region around Jerusalem, where the Commander-in-Chief of all the good is Christ our Lord: and another plain in the region of Babylon, where the enemy leader is Lucifer. [138]

The third prelude: to ask for what I want: here it will be to ask for knowledge of the deceits of the evil leader and for help to guard against them, and also for knowledge of the true life revealed by the supreme and true commander and for the grace to imitate him. [139]

The scene is painted and it would seem that we are about to go to war. Ignatius invites us to watch how Lucifer leads and then how Christ leads. And then after showing the exercitant the different ways, Ignatius suggests that to follow Christ would mean desiring and making radical choices:

Therefore there are three steps, first, poverty as opposed to riches; the second, humiliation or contempt as opposed to the worldly honour, and thirdly, humility as opposed to pride. From these three steps they can lead everyone to all other virtues. [146]

A very challenging invitation that at first glance I doubt anyone would choose poverty, humiliation and humility over riches, honour and pride. But this brings me back to my original consideration.

If the United States of America could have shown the world how powerful and mighty they are by refusing to retaliate after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the world would be a very different place to live in today.

I would like to suggest that in following the Two Standards, the choice to refuse to retaliate becomes a real option. Imagine if the example set was one of humility, poverty and love. How might this have disarmed the terrorists who seem to feed on publicity and fear? But I would like to take this one step further, that is to say that each of us face decisions such as this every day within our own personal dynamics. What are you at war with within yourselves, within personal relationships and within the world? Could you choose poverty, humiliation and humility over riches, honour and pride rather than going to war?

I once heard Joan Chittester speak at a conference in Melbourne where she said that: 'It is not God who punishes sin, rather it is sin that punishes sin. If our sin is pride, then our pride will ultimately destroy us, if it is gluttony, gluttony will destroy us' and so on. I think this makes a lot of sense. It is not sin to desire positions of honour, wealth or to be well thought of, but if this is the primary reason for making choices, it is likely they will lead me away from the thing I most deeply desire into enslavement. So one of the first questions for discernment 'is the focus on me, my own ego, my own pride, or is the focus on God and the greater good'. Because if I am able to choose the latter, even though it might appear at first that I am choosing humiliation and poverty, I would like to suggest that it will ultimately lead me to freedom and be the most life giving choice I can make; life giving for me, and for the Kingdom.

In the first week we come to know that God's love is greater than anything we can do. We cannot undermine God's love for us but can we love ourselves in the same way? Can we love those distorted parts of ourselves or will we go to war with them. If we are at war with something or someone, we naturally take up a position of either attack or defence and it is highly likely that we are defending our own ego: pride, honour or riches. This is the difference to surrendering to the possibility of humiliation, contempt and poverty or allowing our own ego to take control and convince us that we might be destroyed if we surrender to our own limitations.

Let me give you an example from my own experience as a spiritual director.

Peter (not his real name) has a young family and is working as a design engineer. He is paid to work for 40 hours per week but with current deadlines it seems he is expected to work 12 hours per day and then often asked to work on the weekend as well. He is exhausted but can't afford to lose his job as he needs to support his family. Peter comes to spiritual direction asking – how do I know what God wants of me? Thinking that God might also be asking him to take on a volunteer role in the parish on top of everything else.

By listening to movements of the spirit, slowly the real issue was revealed. Peter does not actually believe in himself or his own worth and so is afraid to speak to his manager as he might lose his job. But he can't sustain this workload it is causing Peter and his family a great deal of distress. This is further compounded by the fact that he believes he should also be doing more for God. The spirit that is preventing Peter to speak is driven, noisy, taps into his pride and fills him with fear – 'you are not working hard enough, you don't know how to do the work properly, it is your fault that you are needing to work so many extra hours, you will be sacked if you speak up.'

On the surface you might say that Peter should be grateful that he has a job and that it is not worth risking losing his job. Perhaps it is his ego and selfishness that leads him to want to work less hours. This voice sends Peter into war with his employer and with himself. Mind you this conversation is happening in entirely in his own head. Peter feels frustrated, fearful and becomes more and more angry and depleted. He moves between powerlessness and then armed ready for battle with his employer. At home, his family are paying the cost as well because apart from the long hours, when he is at home, he just wants to rest and can't be present to them.

In spiritual direction Peter notices that he also hears a second voice. It is quiet, gentle and whispers the words 'you are precious in my eyes, honoured and I love you.'¹⁴ This moved Peter to tears of love, the truth in this experience for Peter was very deep. It is good to remember here that Ignatius recommends that we savour consolation so that it might strengthen us in times of desolation.[323] Over the next few weeks Peter savoured these words, hearing God speaking them intimately and personally to him. 'You are precious in my eyes, honoured and I love you.' He started to trust these words, that he is lovable, gifted and precious. If God can say these words to him, then perhaps he could trust he was good enough. Prayer strengthened Peter and clarified what was really important.

¹⁴ New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, "Nrsv Bible." Isaiah 43:4

With new confidence given by God, Peter risked humility and poverty by choosing to act against this unjust situation and speak to his manager. It was a massive risk for Peter, but he trusted his prayer and the discernment process he was in.

Totally surprising to Peter, his manager listened and thanked him for the excellent work he was doing. He agreed to pay Peter for all of the overtime hours he had done over the past few months. Now when overtime is required, Peter is asked if it is possible rather than being expected to say yes regardless of the consequences. The student engineers who worked with Peter witnessed this brave action and have since had many conversations with Peter as to how to improve their own work situation.

Peter also came to understand that at this point in time, raising a young family and being present to them was his highest priority. Serving in his local parish would take even more time away from them and would add further stress. Serving God at this time for Peter is being fully present to his young family in every way he can.

So God freed Peter from overwork, over commitment and self-rejection. But it took great courage, careful discernment, good accompaniment and an awareness of how his ego wanted to keep him trapped.

It is important to note that Ignatius did not just make up these Rules of Discernment; rather Ignatius discovered these by following Christ and the teachings of St Paul. St Paul says that we will know the gifts of the Spirit by their fruits; charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity.¹⁵ This stands in direct contrast to the seven deadly sins: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony. Placed in the light of the Two Standards we can see just how Ignatius has reached this understanding.

For Peter the fruits were clearly joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness and faithfulness. We can trust that this is of God by noticing the fruit. If we really believe this, then we must act trusting that God will be with us. Discernment requires a deep trust and relationship with God.

Recognising the difference between the voice that draws us towards God and the one that takes away from God is central to discernment. We know God calls us forth by drawing us gently. We can also know that it is probably not God when we are driven or if the invitation is violent and destructive to others or ourselves. Ignatius articulates these movements so clearly in his description of the 'good angel' who 'touches the soul gently, lightly, and sweetly, like a drop of water into a sponge.' [335] If it is from God we can expect that ultimately we will be drawn into freedom, hope and love, even if on the surface it looks impossible.

And then the other the voice that 'touches sharply with noise and disturbance, as when a drop of water falls on a stone.' [335] Do you know this voice? What does it sound like? Does it have a recurring theme – *You are not good enough? Who do you think you are? You should be able to work harder? You are the problem.*

In a very simplistic way, we could ask in making every decision three questions:

Is this live giving for me and for others?

¹⁵ New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, "Nrsv Bible." Taken from Galatians 5:22.

Am I serving my ego or the greater Glory of God?

Is my focus on myself, or on the mission?

Good discernment is about understanding oneself, not so much knowing the rules. It requires that we remain in touch with God and the spiritual movements within, knowing what is most valuable in life.

Discernment for the World and the Role of the Ignatian Spiritual Director

Underpinning the Ignatian spiritual director's disposition is the fundamental belief that God is really present, actually at work in our lives; and further that God is infinitely interested in us, and that God's desire for all of creation, including the directee, is that we will flourish. Therefore the spiritual direction session is founded on a trust in God, and that seeking to move towards God will lead the directee towards the '*magis*'¹⁶ and freedom from their own interior limitations. When the directee's deepest desires are aligned with God's desires, the directee is freed to follow the pathway forward that is most life-giving for them in the knowledge that this will be the pathway God desires for them. Encouraging gifts – recognising potential will free the directee to

Maureen Conroy claims that 'developing a discerning heart is both an art and a skill.'¹⁷ The artist mode allows us to 'pay attention to the mystery and beauty of God's personal love for us'. The skilful stance enables the sifting and sorting through these experiences to help us become aware of unredeemed self, or the part of the self that might retreat from God and the invitation of love.

Ignatius is saying that what might begin from a choice between two goods can lead us down a spiral of self destruction if we are not aware of what motivates our decision making. By noting whether I first covet riches, pride and honour of the world as the basis of my decisions, I can recalculate the direction of my life by actively making the choice that invites poverty, insults and humility. My experience as a spiritual director has shown me that the active choice against honour, pride and riches, can free a person from enslavement, and lead them to freedom. This suggests that choosing poverty, humility and insults will lead to freedom. It would seem that in western society we have been led to believe that honour, riches and pride are essential to success in today's society, yet, with the help of developments in the fields of

¹⁶ '*Magis* (Pronounced "mah-jis") is Latin for "more," and asks individuals to question: what more can I do for God? What more can I do for others? St. Ignatius of Loyola used the word to urge others to live more generously and in doing so give greater glory to God. *Magis* is best understood as a lifestyle rather than an act or series of acts which demonstrate a person's commitment to the "more." *Magis* is an Ignatian term, and for Ignatius it is a relationship word, meaning that it applies in personal relationships, both with God and with others, in terms of love. It is through this love that the proper meaning to "more" is found, love given freely, in generosity, and always in reverence to God. Through discernment of spirits, as described in Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, one must order his or her desires so that they are in line with what God desires – both in what is desired and in the way that is desired. With an emphasis on aligning our desires with God's, pursuit of *magis* can be for the greater glory of God rather than being driven by pride or selfishness.' "Ignatian Wiki" <http://en.ignatianwiki.org/Magis> (accessed 8.23am 15 December 2013).

¹⁷ Maureen Conroy, *The Discerning Heart: Discovering a Personal God* (Illonis: Loyola Press, 1993). xi

psychology and psychodynamics, we might now be able to see that this stance promotes a narcissistic individualism in the world. Susan Long claims that:

A narcissistic society promotes the development of an increasingly perverse society, or at least increases major pockets of socially enacted perversion.¹⁸

Throughout the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius brings the exercitant's attention to the way in which they make decisions as they deepen their relationship with God, with the aim of co-creating with God and working against this potential perversion. The exercitant is invited to pay attention to affective movements and to notice whether they draw a person towards freedom and therefore towards God, or whether they cause the directee to become trapped in their own disorder.

So when we are challenged to work beyond our capacity, can we risk poverty and humiliation by speaking up and refusing to collude with unjust systems? When we see anxiety, depression and fear can we look into the cause and discern God's pathway forward for humanity? Or do we remain powerless?

Discernment supports us in actively working against anything that limits God's potential in the world. If we have the courage to live in deep relationship with God, discerning the pathway forward that leads to hope, freedom and love in the 21st Century, we might just be able to help the world transition from a culture of fear and narcissism towards a culture of love and find a way to not only survive, but thrive in this increasingly complex world.

¹⁸ Susan Long, "The Perverse Organisation and Its Deadly Sins," (London: Karnac Books, 2008). loc 600

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