

From Personal Interiority to Shared Apostolic Vision:

The Instinct and Wisdom of Bees

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This year I spent four days with a novice beekeeper. When we arrived at her home in Somerset, England, in early September, she was busy driving away bees that were trying to re-establish themselves after she had collected honey from their hive.

Honey has long been a sacred symbol.¹ To the Israelites it was a sign of God's abundance and benevolence – In Numbers 16.13, Egypt, like the promised land, Canaan in Exodus 3.17, was described as a land flowing with milk and honey. In the early Christian era, milk was considered to be the sustenance of physical birth and honey, the sustenance of spiritual birth.

Bees have the amazing skills of being able to distinguish members of their own hive from those of other hives. They notice light beyond the spectrum visible to our own eyes. They communicate in an extensive vocabulary. Yet, few animals are individually as helpless as a honeybee. Each bee, to a surprising degree, is quite dependent upon the others in the hive.²

But let me return to the bee-keeper's story. In the garden, the bees buzzed around the discards from the honeycomb that she had wrapped and tried to disguise in an outside burner. Eventually she relinquished the plan to drive them away. She enclosed herself from head to toe in her white beekeeper's suit, and she moved the discards from the burner to a rubbish bin some metres away. But ... bees are highly alert and sensitized ... they found the rubbish bin as well. It seems that bees know

¹ Hilda Ransome. *The Sacred Bee in Ancient Times and Folklore*. George Allen and Unwin: London, 1937.

² R. S. Beal, Jr. "The Voice of God in the Voice of Bees" in *Beesource*. Taken from Good News Broadcaster – June, 1962
<http://www.beesource.com/resources/elements-of-beekeeping/beekeeping-articles-worth-reading/the-voice-of-god-in-the-voice-of-the-bees/> accessed 13 November 2014 at 8.50 pm.

what is important to them. They do not want to be separated from familiar things. They do not want to be separated from each other.

At the Basilica of St John Lateran in Rome, the importance of community to a baptized believer is acknowledged by the inclusion of a bee in the artwork on the baptismal font. I was told by the beekeeper that bees are so attuned to community, that I am safe even in a swarm, because the bees only want to be with the queen at the centre of the swarm. They swarm in the shape of a womb, nurturing and protecting the queen and each other as they work together to achieve the desire that their instinct dictates.

Bee-focus is what I want. I want to stay close to the focus of my life without becoming distracted by many competing possibilities. Over the last ten years, I have found Ignatian spirituality to be central and meaningful. It is not that I didn't know about Ignatian spirituality before, it is more that I didn't know that many elements in my life-long formation in the Christian tradition were largely Ignatian, for example, the emblazoned Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam or AMDG as I put on every page of my schoolwork back in the 1960s, and seen here at the back of the auditorium, was unbeknown to me, Ignatian.

In a more formal way, I came to Ignatian spirituality through Campion Centre of Ignatian Spirituality in Melbourne, Australia. In 2004, I prayed the full Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life over about 30 to 35 weeks. I shared the fruit of my daily one-hour of prayer with my spiritual director once a week for an hour. The Spiritual Exercises can also be given in a retreat setting over 30 days.

There are four seasons or four chapters in the pilgrimage of life. Ignatius identifies these chapters as Weeks. Each Week has its own character and dynamic, and God gifts the praying person with specific graces appropriate to the desires that the retreatant expresses in each of the Weeks. These graces can be simply described as love, faithfulness, compassion and joy.

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- Season 1: to know oneself as loved though flawed
- Season 2: to follow Jesus Christ authentically
- Season 3: To be able to suffer with Jesus, with another
- Season 4: To celebrate in the resurrection, to incarnate joy as a life-giving presence in the world.

Ignatian spirituality also sits within the poetic dimensions which are important and absorbing in my life. I am interested in eco-poetics, and now the brief for this conference invites you and me to think about pilgrimage, a theme that, in my view, is closely connected to the earth, the seasons and the wonder of creation.

In our contemporary world, however, it seems increasingly easy to mistake our wonderful sense of the cosmos with a view that creation is God. In Ignatian spirituality we are asked to find God in all things. We are not asked to believe that God is all things. It seems that if I lose focus on God, deferring to my interests in spirituality, poetry, pilgrimage, the cosmos or anything else. These interests will remain parallel but not convergent. And I want them to converge at the loving Mystery who is God.

I have been asked to speak about Ignatian spirituality as a way of life. The broader title of the conference, Ignatian Spirituality from Personal Interiority to Shared Apostolic Vision, actually says how Ignatian spirituality can be a meaningful way of life. I am pleased to reflect on this topic because it is good to know how one moves from one thing to another. I have asked myself how did it happen that I came to be involved at this level in Ignatian spirituality? My intention in coming to Campion Centre of Ignatian spirituality was to do a retreat and grow in grace. While I could say that as I grew in knowledge and in grace, I simply morphed into my current role as Director of Student Formation, I am more sure that God chose these things for me. At the same time, I consciously chose to participate one step at a time with the vision God gave to me. Ignatian spirituality has freed me to make such choices, so that I recognize that the things I have done and will do in my life are brought about through my conscious and unconscious desires that are all part of the presence of God in all things.

How does this happen? In this presentation I will use many verbs to describe a person's participation with God and God's unfolding cosmos: welcome; listen; notice; engage; encounter; inspire; dream; imagine; create and surrender. I suggest that this participation happens in spiral dynamic that is uplifting. The actions implied in these verbs are not a hierarchy. They are not sequential, not linear. They begin with some level of surrender to the process of listening. I suggest that listening is critical to creative and conscious transformation. I need to listen to what is actually going on in my life. I say 'actually going on' because I think that it is very easy to listen to the world selectively, and match what I hear and see to the noises and sights that reinforce my skewed and incomplete vision. The kind of listening I am trying to incarnate in my life is multi-levelled. It hears both the superficial world and what that world is saying and meaning at its multiple levels.

A concrete example of this, in the space of spiritual direction, is if I notice that a person tells me the same story many times, I know that this person at some level has not had her needs met in all the tellings of the story. I need to find out if there is something about that story that I have not heard in the way it is intended. Among other things, I need to find out if perhaps the person has not heard or owned her own story.

This example speaks into the world of poetic listening that is akin to listening in spiritual direction. If, the Ignatian adage that we can find 'God in all things' is to be taken seriously, then I have the imperative to see, hear, taste, and touch all things as metaphors which lead me to God's vision. Freya Mathews, an Australian professor of ecological philosophy says in her essay *An Invitation to Ontopoetics*: "to find the world hidden within the world is to experience an opening of the ordinary world into poetic significance."³

³ Mathews, F. An Invitation to Ontopoetics: the Poetic Structure of Being, *Australian Humanities Review* (43). Retrieved on 1/8/2012 from <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/> 2007a. 4
Mathews, F. The World Hidden Within the World: A Conversation on Ontopoetics, *The Trumpeter*, 23 (1). Online edition. Retrieved on 1/8/2012 from <http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/> 2007b.

As a poet, I know no other way to engage in relationships at every level of human consciousness other than to sense life as poetic. This is onto-poetics, the poetry of being. We are more than rational, more than machines. Thank God, we are sentient beings capable of profound reflection and assigning meaning to all the experiences of our lives. Onto-poetics is in the realm of the ordinary experience of human beings, that is, human beings who function as more than robots. What can be seen in the world is an image of what is beyond that seeing. What I see in you is an image of God.

It is clear and becoming clearer in our 21st century stage of developing consciousness that all things influence us and we influence all things. We are part of a whole interconnected world. We know this easily through our global communication technologies, even if we use and abuse these technologies in superficial ways. It seems that we might have missed the point if we are motivated to use our amazing potential for only pleasure and power. The technological revolution enlightens us to know how interconnected we can be and hence how interconnected we are and always have been.

In this context, 'spirituality' suddenly becomes a 'buzz' word. It is a word of breadth and depth, describing the unseen self, the interior self that reaches beyond itself and recognises itself in all things. This interior self has thoughts, feelings, intuitions, desires, needs, values and imagination, none of which are visible in the sensory world any more than the networks of wireless technological communication.

In 2010, Pranav Mistry, a PhD candidate in the fluid interfaces group at the MIT media Lab, explored the possibility of sixth sense technology especially a 'wearable gestural interface device which augments the physical world around us with digital information and lets our hand gestures interact with that information.'⁴ Due to the world's growing dependence on science and technologies for information and concomitant diminishing dependence on intuitive and non-verbal communication, this sixth sense technology is developed to overcome the diminishment of a person's

⁴ Sixth Sense: Integrating Information With The Real World. Pranavmistry.com accessed 19 October 2014 at 9.04 am.

capacities to be more attentive, more reflective and more attuned to nuance. I feel inspired by scientific discoveries but saddened by technology designed to help me interact with the world I can see and experience through my human capacity to be intelligent, intuitive, affective, and spiritual.

Sensory data has monopolised the variations in our capacities to find meaning in the world. We have learned to assign reliable meaning to what we can hear, see, taste, touch and smell and the logical, rational conclusions drawn from this data. What if we were to trust our thoughts, feelings, desires, needs, values, intuitions and imagination to the same extent that we can trust the sensory world? What if we believed that God is found to be reliable in all things. Now I am speaking about Ignatian spirituality as a way of living for all of us.

I wrote much of this presentation in Halls Gap in Western District of Victoria Australia. Halls Gap nestles between the remnants of mountains that are now at their smallest proportions in the cycle of seismic shifts, earthquakes and floods. As I sat in my studio room, I looked out on a rustic landscape of kangaroos that I could see and snakes and echidnas I could not see. I thought about what I had left at home in urban Doncaster. I especially thought about my neighbour the Reverend Ruth Smith, Canadian born and an Australian citizen, who had only two days earlier been taken to palliative-care for probably the last time. I had the intuition to pray for her, in more than the usual way. I brought my whole self to this prayer by gathering all my physical self, my desire, my love and my mind into a my heart centre, then offering that centred self in full presence to God in complete connection with my neighbour. As I reflected on this an hour later, I wondered if this was the moment that she also offered her whole self to God leaving this earthly life behind. I did not need to check that out because I trusted the intuition I had that at that moment in that place, four hours drive from where she was in Kew, that what I did was what was needed. In these ways, I was completely at one with her.

In that scenario, everything was relevant. Halls Gap has been a holiday destination for me more than 20 times in my life. My heart is centred there. I exhale as soon as I see the Grampians from the Western Highway, and inhale the breath of God in a

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conscious and significantly prayerful way. In Halls Gap, I know things that I am not conscious of in other places. I know myself as centred in God. From this knowing, I deduce that I can engage with this 'in-Godness' wherever I am. It almost goes without saying that in God, I am connected with myself wherein I trust my thoughts, feelings, intuitions and imagination not necessarily in a literal sense but in a poetic sense. These thoughts and feelings point to the unfolding of truth. They are at least metaphors of what is and what can be. From this centred place of myself, I am connected with the wordless deepest Mystery of anyone and anything.

In my doctoral thesis, *Poetry and Grace: An Autoethnography Exploring Poetry As Prayer In The Context Of Ignatian Spirituality*, I discovered that my poetry and the process of writing that poetry, were deeply revelatory. It spoke not only about myself but also about the cultural milieu in which I live and relate. I knew more about myself and that culture, the more I took seriously the words that actually spilled onto the page. I will give you an example of this. I write in the present tense to communicate the immediacy of the experience.



The example I give is being written now. It is not drawn from some other experience. It is happening now as I write this presentation in Halls Gap at this table on 19 October 2014. This aspect is important because if I am to know more than I currently know, I have to trust that what I say now in poetry is going to tell me something that I don't already know, such as dreams might do. I will need to listen poetically to the words that I have written because they are not only factual in relation to all their content but they are symbolic. I want to explore what their symbols mean to me.

Across the grass is a white butterfly.
And here is another, which is so close
that I missed it at first.
In fact there are many white butterflies
flickering from dandelion to daisy.

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It is spring here in Victoria, Australia.
There is much happening
(The eucalypts are heavy
Their slender young, soft leaves flicker
shadows across a small rusty rock.
Suddenly it is a guinea pig grazing.)

I hear birds communicating.
Pining like a flute,
sounds find waves,
sail around my ears,
break into my heart.

As I listen
I become aware of smaller stirrings,
smaller birdsongs
as clear and piercing as a piccolo.

I am listening my God
to what you are saying,
to what you underline for me
in the bird on the ground at my feet
and in the birds of the air.

I looked at the poem I had written and asked myself (much as Ignatius might have) three questions about some of the content that struck me as having something worth exploring. The questions were:

- Why did I notice this?
- What significance does it hold?
- What do I know now that I didn't know before I wrote the poem?

Later I asked myself:

- How do I feel about the answers to these questions?

Across the grass is a white butterfly

- I noticed the butterfly because it contrasted with the fading green and brown landscape, and because it was moving and dynamic
- This is significant: God's world is in contrast with the world it has become (Two Standards)
- I want to look at what shines out and is dynamic against the unchallenged frameworks of my culture.
- I feel consoled by these thoughts. They are truths centred in me. These truths are life-giving and hence come from the source of Life who is God. (Consolation comes like water dripping on a sponge).

And here is another which is so close
that I missed it at first

- I recognized even in the poem that I sometimes look beyond what is actually present. It is to 'the present' that I am called. It is 'the present' that will call me to the future.

In fact there are many
going from dandelion to daisy

- My attentiveness is being refined. I am becoming more present to what is.

It is spring here in Victoria, Australia

There is much happening

- I am attuned to the seasons and the life that is present in a Victorian Spring. It is the wildflower season throughout the region. Flowers pop up on pathways and between rocks. This is the cycle of life, busy and urgent. What appears

to be dead is simply dormant. Such is the story of the girl who, Jesus says, is not dead but only sleeping (Mt 9.24). If I ever feel 'dead', I must hold the truth that I am only sleeping for a while, and that God will raise me in another Spring.

I hear a bird communicating

- I immediately recognize bird songs as communication. I do not hear them as the soulful longings of isolated individuals. If I cry out, I am trying to communicate. Whether a response comes or not, I am trying to communicate. I am meant to be in relationship with others.

(I hear a bird communicating) pining like a flute

- 'Pining like a flute' is pleasing, beautiful and holds a sense of holy longing for me. I hear these sounds and cannot easily identify which bird has sung, but I can identify the movements of my soul. Beauty and longing are evoked in me. The longing, I identify within myself, is the longing for connection with another like myself, but I am becoming more aware as I write that at a deeper level I am longing for union with my God. I pause at this point to pray because I often hear myself say: Why would you long for God when you can have God?
- And at that moment of prayer I received an email from a parishioner at St Jude's Anglican Church in Carlton, Melbourne. She said that arsonists had burned her Church. She sent an image and a letter that her minister had sent to the congregation. The letter ended with "May God be glorified through this." I thought again of the butterflies and how this minister's words were moving ... and white against the backdrop of commonly held frameworks of thinking. Yes I wanted God to be glorified through this, and I wanted God to be glorified in me.
- Again I became centred and poured my whole self towards God in the people and circumstances at St Jude's. I asked for prayer from my colleagues. I ask: What is happening in our world that a Church building, a place in which people worship God and find a sense of belonging, can be vandalized and set alight either intentionally or even at whim? What is this saying about the values of the world and how can it challenge my values as I ponder this occurrence? Of course I am speaking about the Two Standards, an idea which Ignatius couched in a meditation to help people decide if they wanted to live in a life-giving way or a life-destroying way. Of course there are more than Two Standards for living but for each of us, a choice can be made. How can I look at this and other seemingly tragic events both realistically and in a way that gives life to me?

- Later I went for a walk to ponder the meaning of this fire in such a vibrant parish as St. Jude's. I came up with the same kinds of questions and answers that anyone with a spiritual sense might ponder and explore. But what struck me more than anything was a sudden God-moment which, because of its relevance, I then inserted earlier in the poem. These are the lines which tell the story:

The eucalypts are heavy.

Their slender young and soft leaves flicker

shadows across a small rusty rock.

Suddenly it is a guinea pig grazing.

I ask the three questions: Why did I notice this? What significance does it hold?

What do I know now that I didn't know before I wrote the poem?

- Why did I notice this? The poem and writing the poem has distilled my attention towards anything that 'moves' and 'contrasts'. The sudden movement of the shadow contrasted with the stillness of terra cotta (rock). I saw what was imaginary for a moment. I say 'imaginary' because the rock was not a guinea pig. And yet, what was 'imaginary' led me into my imagination, which revealed deeper levels of awareness. My imagination delivered a whole series of pictures: I saw the rock, small and still, vulnerable and life-less. Then I saw the rock with the eyes of my soul. It was a rock pulsating with life. It had a story, a connectedness with life, a history, which is still being narrated. The rock has a purpose for being which only God can know but for which I am exceedingly grateful. Until I saw the image of the 'moving' guinea pig, I thought I had seen the whole picture of this rock. What I see now in this rock, is a microcosm of the Grampians mountain ranges which surround me. The rock is a holon,⁵ a whole and a part of all things organic, of which I am also one part. I am now consciously enjoined to the rock which enables me to see a little more of God's vision. I say that because only when I am connected to all things in God can I possibly see with God's vision. Through this rock and this imaginary guinea pig, I have been given an invitation to see with God's vision what can be imagined for the still and lifeless parts of me. These parts of me, which are seemingly dead and lifeless, are yet to be imagined, conceived, and born.

I continue with the poem:

(I hear a bird communicating

Pining like a flute),

⁵ Judy Cannato, *Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology Is Transforming Spiritual Life* (Notre Dame, Indiana Sorin Books, 2010).

sounds find waves,
sail around my ears,
break into my heart.

- The wave metaphor is the poetry of networks. Sounds emanate from one bird to another, one person to another. Sound has a finite relationship with the air as a wave has a finite relationship with the ocean. The bird has no control over where the sound will dissipate and cease to have its own audible identity, any more than waves know where they will fall in the ocean and cease to be visually distinctive, and any more than I know where my intentional prayer will end and what effect it might have on the cosmos. I do know that when I receive sound in my ear, I am changed by it, just as the ocean is changed, albeit minimally, by a crashing wave. This bird-sound evoked my love for beauty and broke my heart open with the desire to be in my heart-space with God.

As I listen more deeply,
I become aware of smaller stirrings,
smaller birdsongs,
as clear and piercing as a piccolo

- Sounds draw me. I hear smaller and smaller sounds both outside and within me. This auditory sense is distilled and acute as I write the poem. There is the metaphor of ‘hearing’ also, to which Ignatius refers in the prayer of ‘The Application of the Senses’ [121-126].⁶ The late John Veltri sj (died October 2008) names this sensory application as ‘the passive reception of deep intimacy’.⁷ Hearing is more than audible sounds interacting with my physiology, more than the feelings evoked. Hearing is the awareness of the vibrations of God’s fingers on my life. Hearing involves a disposition of welcome to all that impacts my life. Only with such a disposition can I notice, engage, encounter and dream. Only then can I ask how this engagement inspires me, to surrender and incarnate the creative response to which God enjoins me.

I am listening my God
to what you are saying,
to what you underline for me

⁶ David L Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises, a Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading* (Saint Louis, Missouri: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996). The numbers in square brackets refer to the specific notations in the text of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. 12

⁷ Glossary of working definitions from A through D. “Application of Senses” jesuits.ca accessed 19 October 2014 at 3.01 pm.

in the bird on the ground at my feet.

- At this point in the poem, I have ceased to ask ‘why?’ I am encountering God, not the bird, not the ground. I am hearing God’s voice and the way that the bird and the ground underline the truth that God speaks to me. I am encountering God who gifts me with a plethora of ways in which I can encounter God. This is an encounter with God; intimate, loving and extravagant God. As I return to the poem to write this reflection, I am able to put words on the experience in a way that I did not care to at the moment of the first experience. This is what Ignatius means by asking us to pray the ‘Prayer of Repetition’. This prayer is not actually a repetition. It is a new prayer, a new encounter with God. It is the ‘Magis’ of Ignatian prayer that encourages us to seek ‘more’, to be ‘more’, to become more in the image of God.

And in the birds of the air.

- The last line came swiftly. It connected me with the scripture (Mt 6: 25-34) that I find to be both consoling and theologically questionable. ‘Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap or store away in their barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.’ The verses 25-27 indicate God’s knowledge of the birds, their habits and practices. Verse 27 is consoling because it indicates God’s unconditional care. In verse 28 however we read ‘Are you not much more valuable than they?’ This is a strange saying for it indicates that God values one species over another, and God addresses the needs of one creature more than another. I decide not to dwell on this ancient theological worldview that I struggle to accept. Instead I allow myself to be drawn into incongruity, and the ambiguity of what I love and hate, and what consoles and dissolves me.
- George Herbert’s poem ‘Love’ begins by saying ‘Love bade me welcome/ though my soul drew back/ guilty of dust and sin/ but quick-ey’d Love, observing me grow slack/ From my first entrance in,/ Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning/ If I lack’d anything.’⁸
- Fear and desire are opposites in love. At the best part of ourselves, we desire what God desires in us, and it can only be love. Also at the best part of ourselves is fear that we will not be loved and lovers as we need to be and want to be. This fear, though tragically enacted upon in this world, is a tool that has the capacity to draw us in to God’s world where all our fears are transformed by the light, movement, presence and action of God. Suddenly in God’s world we see all the butterflies, hear all the sounds. We see the guinea pig move. These awarenesses are as real as the rock that sits silently and still on the earth.

⁸ George Herbert (1593-1633). “Love”. *LiederNet: The Lied, Art Song and Choral texts Archive*. Recmusic.org accessed 19 October 2014 at 11.36 am. Unverified text.



So what has all this to do with Ignatian spirituality? I think it has everything to do with it. I have shared with you a way in which Ignatius encourages us to find God in all things. I have modelled for you the prayerful Application of the Senses [121]. I have valued all that Ignatius values in the Principle and Foundation [23] of the Spiritual Exercises. I have enjoined my life and this presentation to Ignatian spirituality in that everything on the face of the earth is there to accept or reject in accord with what is life-giving and what is life depleting. I have shown that the imagination is a powerful life-giving tool to connect us with the deeper realities of our lives. Feelings, thoughts, values, intuitions, can be trusted as windows to grace, to expansiveness, to freedom. Perhaps the French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596 – 1650), a contemporary of Ignatius, who is famous for having said ‘I think therefore I am’ might in our contemporary world of evolving consciousness be more inclined to say ‘I feel before I can think, therefore I am’. The inclusion of all things human is potent in healing our world.

When we are focussed on God or drawn into our centred selves in God, we become more human. We are able to do the work of being human; this brings me back to the bees who are truly bees when focussed on the Queen and being bees and doing the work of bees together.

I would like to finish with my poem Principle and Foundation, which Mickie Yau has kindly translated for me. You will find both versions in my collection of poetry on First Week of the Spiritual Exercises entitled, *Grace Undone: Love*.

Principle and Foundation

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There is nothing in this galaxy
or the universe beyond,
nothing on the face of this planet

⁹ Marlene Marburg, *Grace Undone: Love*, Paperback ed., Four vols., Grace Undone, vol. One (Melbourne: Windsor Scroll Publishing, 2014).

or underneath to its depth,
that cannot help each one and all
to respond to love's call to communion.

There is no hierarchy of goods
in abundance or lack.

In any moment, the heart of a person hears
what gives life, and what draws life away,
what elicits love or hate,
what creates and impassions,
what extinguishes hope,
and which decisions loosen the heart
to love, to cry, to give,
to stand in awe before all that is.

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