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LOYOLA  
LECTURES  
IN  
RELIGION

"IGNATIUS LOYOLA  
A MYSTICISM OF GRATITUDE"

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LOYOLA  
NEW ORLEANS



IGNATIUS LOYOLA:  
A MYSTICISM OF GRATITUDE

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On March 18, 1542 (only two years after the Papal approval of the Society of Jesus), Ignatius Loyola wrote to Simon Rodrigues, one of his first companions:

It seems to me in the light of the Divine Goodness, although others may think differently, that ingratitude is the most abominable of sins and that it should be detested in the sight of our Creator and Lord by all of His creatures who are capable of enjoying His divine and everlasting glory. For it is a forgetting of the graces, benefits, and blessings received. As such it is the cause, beginning, and origin of all sins and misfortunes. On the contrary, the grateful acknowledgment of blessings and gifts received is loved and esteemed not only on earth but in heaven.<sup>1</sup>

I propose to you that these words of Ignatius reveal to us one of the key aspects of Ignatius' experience of God and his relationship to God and one of the central elements of Ignatian spirituality. At the heart of Ignatius' vision is the virtue of gratitude.

The importance of gratitude has long been a conviction of mine about Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises and about Ignatian spirituality, but it is not an idea developed in any depth in the secondary literature with which I am familiar nor does Ignatius discuss it at length in any of his own writings. One is a little hesitant to present as a central insight of Ignatian spirituality an idea that Ignatian scholars and even Ignatius himself rarely focus on and refer to only in passing. On the other hand, though the notion of gratitude is not developed at length by Ignatius or his interpreters, it is often presumed to be foundational to the religious experience of Ignatius and the early Jesuits. For instance, Pedro Ribadaneira, one of Ignatius' early companions, once wrote: "Among all the virtues that our Father (Ignatius) possessed was one by which he was especially distinguished: the virtue of gratitude. In that he was simply wonderful."<sup>2</sup> Hugo Rahner refers to "a characteristic

which distinguished the noble heart of Ignatius from the very beginning of his conversion: a truly passionate gratitude.”<sup>3</sup> Harvey Egan in his book on Ignatius Loyola the Mystic says that “Ignatius experienced mystically that gratitude and thanksgiving flowed from his authentic mystical life. To experience the mystery of the triune God in Christ rendered him gracefilled, grateful. He responded appropriately with thanksgiving....”<sup>4</sup> Add to this that Jerome Nadal, one of the first Jesuits and one whom Ignatius considered a faithful interpreter of his own mind, records in his own writings that thanksgiving was considered by the first fathers of the Society to be among the most important foundations of the spiritual life and of interior progress.<sup>5</sup> So I do not stand alone among students of Ignatius, even if the great Ignatian scholar Joseph de Guibert could write at length on Ignatian mysticism and spirituality and never refer to the words “gratitude” or “thanksgiving”.<sup>6</sup>

As for Ignatius himself, though the references to gratitude are limited, they do appear at key points in the Spiritual Exercises and in Ignatius’ other spiritual writings, especially his Spiritual Diary. It is clear from the words of Ignatius I began with this evening and from other places in his writings that gratitude is central to his vision of God and the world and the human person. I would like to explore with you the writings of Ignatius, including those most of us are less familiar with—his letters and his Spiritual Diary—and then to reflect at the end on how I perceive gratitude to be a unifying grace throughout Ignatian spirituality and Christian spirituality more broadly defined. I also submit these reflections as part of a larger dialogue and discussion about the role of gratitude in our moral and spiritual lives and in the history of Christian spirituality.

Before exploring the words of Ignatius, I would first suggest that Ignatius’ passion for gratitude is rooted in two experiences: first, in Ignatius’ own life experience as a beggar and, secondly, in his most profound mystical experience at the river Cardoner. From the time of his conversion, Ignatius lived as a beggar totally dependent on the support of others. As a pilgrim, as a student, and even as General of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius was aware of an enormous debt of gratitude to the women and men who gave generously to him and the early Jesuits. We will see that sense of indebtedness embodied in the

Constitutions of the Society and in so many of his letters to benefactors. Ignatius’ most pervasive sense of gratitude, however, flowed from his experience while at Manresa in the year after his conversion. Ignatius relates in his Autobiography how one day during the last few months of his stay at Manresa, he was blessed with a vision of God and creation that shaped his understanding of and feeling for the mysteries of the faith. He said that “he received such a lucidity in understanding that during the course of his entire life—now having passed his sixty-second year—if he were to gather all the helps he received from God and everything he knew, and add them together, he does not think they would add up to all that he received on that one occasion.”<sup>7</sup> What Ignatius understood in a new way was how the world came down from God and was returning to God. The two great acts of God were creation and the Incarnation and in those actions God initiated a movement of the world from God and back to God. This overwhelming sense of the giftedness of creation and redemption was at the heart of Ignatius’ understanding of all of creation and human history and was the source of his passionate gratitude for all God’s gifts. We will see this vision articulated in the key meditations of the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius’ gratitude, then, flowed from both his life experience and his mystical experience of God.

I would like to examine the writings of Ignatius to see how that sense of gratitude shaped his own understanding of the spiritual life. The major works of Ignatius are the Spiritual Exercises, his letters, his Spiritual Diary, the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and his Autobiography written toward the end of his life. His other small treatises and directories will not concern us here.

## THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

I begin with the Spiritual Exercises, the writing of Ignatius best known and certainly most influential in guiding the spiritual lives of innumerable retreatants over the last four hundred and fifty years. The Spiritual Exercises are a book that outlines and presents a series of activities—meditations, considerations, contemplations, methods of self-examination and prayer, and guidelines—for discerning God’s will and making a decision. The Exercises are a book for a director, a method to be adapted to the individual by the director for guiding

another's prayer and discernment and facilitating a persons's experience of God. They are also a record, the journal of Ignatius' own search for God, of his spiritual journey which is paradigmatic for other Christians' search for God. It is as a journal of Ignatius' own soul and as a guide for others' journeys that they are an important starting point for our exploration of gratitude in Ignatian spirituality.

What is the role of gratitude in the Spiritual Exercises? The explicit references are limited, but, on a deeper level, gratitude is central to the dynamic and movement of the Exercises and the retreatant's experience of God. This becomes most clear if we recall the final grace prayed for in the Exercises, the grace that sums up the Spiritual Exercises and the experience of thirty days of prayer and solitude. The final contemplation of the thirty-day retreat is entitled "Contemplation on the Love of God". It is a four-step reflection that invites the retreatant to recall all the gifts of God, how God dwells and labors in those gifts and finally how all those gifts come down from above and lead us back to the Giver of all gifts. It is a contemplation rooted in Ignatius' vision at the river Cardoner where he saw all things coming down from God and returning to God. What is most important, however, is the grace that is to be prayed for in this contemplation: "Here it will be to ask for an intimate knowledge of the many blessings received, that filled with gratitude for all, I may in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty."<sup>8</sup> It is the knowledge of the many blessings received that fills one with gratitude. That prayer is the culmination of the Spiritual Exercises and a summation of Ignatius' spirituality. Knowledge of God's gifts leads to gratitude which moves one to love and a desire to serve God. Ignatius had noted at the beginning of this contemplation that love consists in a mutual sharing between persons. As George Ganss points out in commenting on this contemplation, "Love ordinarily arises from gratitude. The lover gives to the beloved and the beloved, recognizing the giver's goodness, experiences gratitude and increased love for the giver."<sup>9</sup> Out of this love and gratitude and a desire to serve, the retreatant is invited to say the Ignatian Suscipe, the prayer of total surrender and generosity. "Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To You, O Lord, I return it. All is Yours, dispose of it wholly according

to Your will. Give me Your love and Your grace, for this is sufficient for me."<sup>10</sup> This is the prayer of a grateful heart that recognizes all as gift to be shared. As Ganss sums it up, this "Contemplation on the Love of God" "ignites in the human heart gratitude, adoration, and a loving application of one's whole self to serving God as well as possible."<sup>11</sup> This final contemplation gathers together all the graces of the four weeks of the Exercises in an offering of loving service.

But gratitude is not only a grace experienced at the end of the Exercises. All throughout the Exercises, the retreatant experiences gratitude for God's gifts—for God's love in the Principle and Foundation, for God's mercy in the first week, for God's call in Jesus in the second week, and for redemption gained through the death and resurrection in the third and fourth weeks. In the Principle and Foundation, the retreatant reflects on the end for which he/she is created, the means to the end and the need for indifference. The Principle and Foundation invites a person to a deeper experience of the love of God and the giftedness of creation. It calls forth a deep sense of gratitude for God's love and generosity. It has been my own experience in directing the Exercises that a sign that a person is ready to move into the first week of the Exercises is an experience of gratitude for all the gifts of God, in particular the profound experience of God's unconditional love.

The first week of the Exercises leads one to a further grace, the grace of knowing oneself as a loved sinner. It confronts one with a deep sense of sinfulness and of sorrow for sin, as well as a sense of God's unquestioned mercy. This experience of forgiveness calls forth gratitude in the retreatant. At the end of the second meditation of the first week, Ignatius invites the person to "conclude with a colloquy, extolling the mercy of God our Lord, pouring out my thoughts to Him, and giving thanks to Him that up to this very moment He has granted me life. I will resolve with His grace to amend for the future."<sup>12</sup> At the end of the fifth meditation on hell, there is a similar prayer of gratitude: "I will give thanks to God our Lord that He has not put an end to my life. . . I shall also thank Him for this, that up to this very moment He has shown Himself so loving and merciful to me."<sup>13</sup> By the end of the first week of the Spiritual Exercises, the gratitude for God's unconditional love manifested in creation has deepened and expanded into a

gratitude for God's mercy, for the gift of unmerited forgiveness and salvation.

We will deal very briefly with the remaining three weeks of the Exercises. The only explicit reference to thanksgiving that I have found in these three weeks is in the contemplation on the Incarnation at the beginning of the second week. This contemplation, however, is presented as a model for all the contemplations of the life of Christ throughout the second week. Mary's response at the Annunciation images for us our response to the gift of God becoming flesh in Jesus. "This will be to consider. . . how Our Lady humbles herself and offers thanks to the Divine Majesty."<sup>14</sup> It is obvious that Ignatius images our own response to the events of Christ's life, death and resurrection as giving thanks for God's love in Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

Ignatius' explicit references to gratitude in the Exercises, then, are limited, but they reveal that gratitude is an important dynamic in the movement of the Exercises from grace to grace. One moves from an experience of gratitude for God's love to an experience of gratitude for forgiveness to an experience of gratitude for the call to labor at the side of Jesus and to share in the Paschal mystery of dying and rising with Jesus. It is in reflecting on all these graces and gifts of God in the final contemplation that one is filled with gratitude and a renewed desire to love and serve God.

Before leaving the Exercises, there are two other references to gratitude that are important for understanding the mind of Ignatius. They are not essential to the dynamic of the Exercises, but they are part of two spiritual exercises or practices that Ignatius encourages during the retreat and also in one's ongoing spiritual life after retreat. The first is the practice of review of meditation. Ignatius encourages us to spend a brief time after each period of prayer reviewing the graces of the prayer, the consolations and the desolations, our responses and resistances, as well as our fidelity to the methods of prayer and our dedication to the time of prayer. Ignatius directs: "I will consider for the space of a quarter of an hour how I succeeded in the meditation or contemplation. If poorly, I will seek the cause of the failure; and after I have found it, I will be sorry, so that I may do better in the future. If I have succeeded, I will give thanks to God our Lord, and the next time try to follow the same method."<sup>16</sup> It is important

after prayer to thank God for graces received and for the work of God within us. Gratitude deepens the graces and unites us more closely to God as giver of all gifts.

The second reference to gratitude comes at the beginning of the practice of examination of conscience that Ignatius proposes in the first week of the Exercises. The first of five points of this method is "to give thanks to God our Lord for the favors received."<sup>17</sup> One goes on to ask for the grace to know one's sins, to review one's sins, to ask pardon and to resolve to amend one's life. Ignatius, then, begins this time-honored spiritual practice with a moment of gratitude. Awareness of our sinfulness, sorrow and purpose of amendment are all rooted in a sense of thanksgiving for God's gifts. This seems a confirmation of our previous reflection on gratitude as a grace flowing from the Principle and Foundation prior to beginning the first week of the Exercises.

Contemporary spiritual writers have interpreted this practice of examen as a method of ongoing daily discernment that facilitates our reflection on the movement of God in our lives and our response or lack of response to that movement. It becomes a practice not so much of moral inventory as a sensitivity to how God has been at work in our lives that day. The first point, then, becomes a grateful reflection on the gifts of God that day that invite us to spiritual growth. This interpretation of the practice gives much more meaning to Ignatius' insistence on the essential role of this practice in our spiritual lives. Again it emphasizes the importance of gratitude in Ignatius' spirituality.

I began with the Spiritual Exercises not only because it is more familiar to many of you, but also because the Exercises began as a journal of Ignatius' own experience of God at Manresa and became the instrument for leading many others on a similar spiritual journey. If gratitude is at the heart of the Exercises, it is at the heart of Ignatian spirituality.

## THE SPIRITUAL DIARY

In talking about the Spiritual Diary, Ganss says it "enables us to gaze most directly into the depths of Ignatius' heart in his intimate dealing with God. It also best reveals the sublimity of his mysticism."<sup>18</sup> The Spiritual Diary of Ignatius is the only remaining fragment of Ignatius' spiritual diaries. The rest were destroyed. What we have is a daily journal of his graces and mystical experiences from February 2, 1544 to February 27, 1545. In the words of Adolf Haas in his study of the mysticism of Ignatius revealed in the Diary, "In the Diary, however, Ignatius lays completely bare the mystery of his intimacy with God. Consequently, no other document offers us a more penetrating insight into the magnificent world of faith that was the inner life of Ignatius."<sup>19</sup> Strange to say, the Diary remained only a handwritten document in the Jesuit archives until 1892. The first critical edition of the Diary did not appear until 1934. Until recently it has been largely inaccessible, especially to English readers. Its unavailability is one of the reasons why Ignatius was so often overlooked as a mystic by spiritual writers. His Autobiography told briefly of his visions and mystical illuminations, but with a certain reserve and self-defacement. The Diary was not intended for publication and so gives an unguarded record of his constant and profound mystical experiences and extraordinary gifts. The Diary gives dramatic evidence of the mystical foundation and horizon that is the backdrop of the Spiritual Exercises and Ignatian spirituality and undercuts any rationalistic or voluntaristic interpretation of the Exercises that portrays them as merely rigid ascetical practices suitable only for beginners in the spiritual life.

The Diary records Ignatius' graces as he discerned over a period of a year a question about the type of poverty that should be practiced in the newly-formed Society of Jesus. It is a living example of how Ignatius used the principles and procedures for decision making that he had laid out in the Spiritual Exercises. What we find in the Diary is an extraordinary Trinitarian and Christ-centered mysticism and a mysticism of discernment. This has been discussed at length by commentators on the Diary. What is more important for our discussion, however, is the theme of gratitude that pervades the Diary and is the reason why Ignatius kept a diary of his experiences of God.

According to Adolf Haas, "Ignatius thought of the recording of the graces he received above all as an act of personal thanksgiving."<sup>20</sup> The same explanation is given by Arturo Codina in his introduction to the first critical edition of the Diary: "This diary is a catalogue of the benefits received from God, which our Father, Ignatius, drew up because of his great gratitude to God and man. Ignatius did this not only to stamp them more firmly in his memory, but also to inflame his heart with an ever-increasing love for such benefactors by a frequent re-reading of them."<sup>21</sup> George Ganss reiterates this thought in his own introduction to the Diary: "Ignatius jotted down his experiences in the order in which they came, merely to keep alive his memory of them and his gratitude."<sup>22</sup>

Scholars of the Diary have proposed different outlines and divisions of the Diary as a means of understanding better the contents. De Nicolas and Ganss have adopted the six-part division of Ignacio Iparraguirre in the Complete Works of Ignatius. The headings and subheadings given by de Nicolas and Ganss highlight the important role of gratitude in Ignatius' mystical experience as it is recorded in his Diary. Ganss, in fact, entitles the second part of the Diary "A Record in Gratitude for Mystical Favors". It is clear that these scholars recognize that gratitude is central to Ignatius' experience of and response to God. Let me give a few of the references to gratitude in the Diary. Ignatius says, "I could not bring myself to finish giving thanks to God our Lord, with great intensity, understanding, and tears, for so great a favor and so great a clarity I had received, just beyond explanation."<sup>23</sup> "Getting up and preparing for Mass, I gave thanks to His Divine Majesty, and offered him the oblation made, not without devotion and motion of tears."<sup>24</sup> "After Mass, both in the chapel and later kneeling in my room, I wanted to thank God for such great graces. . ."<sup>25</sup> "Then I made the final confirmation to the Most Holy Trinity, in the presence of the whole heavenly court, giving thanks with great and intense affection, first to the Divine Persons, then to our Lady and to her Son, then to the angels, the holy fathers, the apostles and disciples, all the saints, and to all persons for the help they had given me in this matter."<sup>26</sup>

I have only been able to find about a dozen such explicit references to gratitude in the Diary, though I think the headings and



divisions of de Nicolas and Ganss are correct in indicating a more pervasive tone of thanksgiving throughout the Diary. What these explicit references do reveal in the first part of the Diary, however, is a pattern that is repeated as Ignatius seeks confirmation of a decision made: Ignatius first offers the decision to God, then asks for confirmation and then gives thanks to God for the graces received. In the Spiritual Exercises, when Ignatius outlines the steps in a confirmation process,<sup>27</sup> he makes no reference to the final act of thanksgiving. In the record of his own discernment in this concrete case, however, it seems that gratitude is an important means of closure on a decision.

Finally, we cannot leave the Diary without reflecting on the context of Ignatius' prayer and mystical experiences recorded there. Most of the mystical experiences he describes occurred during Ignatius' prayer in the morning, which included the Eucharist. Harvey Egan remarks that "the Spiritual Diary attests that Ignatius' trinitarian and christocentric mysticism developed almost exclusively in the atmosphere of the Mass. . . The Spiritual Diary notes and associates almost every mystical grace he received with the Mass said that day."<sup>28</sup> It is not difficult to recognize the connection between Ignatius' sense of gratitude and the central role of the Eucharist in his mystical life.

## THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

It is clear from the Spiritual Exercises and Ignatius' Spiritual Diary that gratitude to God was a vital part of Ignatius' relationship to God. But Ignatius' gratitude also extended to the many benefactors who supported him in his pilgrim and student years and who later supported the Society of Jesus. This gratitude is most clearly manifested in his letters and in the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus.

Ignatius was elected General of the Society of Jesus in 1541. One of the tasks before him was to expand the brief "Formula of the Institute" into a set of statutes or constitutions which could serve as the governing law of the Society. The "Formula of the Institute" had been written by Ignatius with the help of the early companions as a necessary step to obtaining papal approval for their new religious order in 1540. It is a statement of the basic structure and mission of the Society of Jesus. The Constitutions, on the other hand, are a detailed description of the organization and government of this order

written by Ignatius between 1541 and his death in 1556.

The section of the Constitutions that deals most explicitly with gratitude is Part IV that discusses the colleges and universities of the Society. Ignatius' begins this part of the Constitutions with a chapter on the gratitude owed to the founder and benefactors of the colleges. "It is highly proper for us to do something on our part in return for the devotion and generosity shown toward the Society by those whom the Divine Goodness employs as His ministers to found and endow its colleges."<sup>29</sup> Thus the human benefactors are seen as ministers of the Divine Goodness. Gratitude is due to God but also to those who are instruments of God's goodness. This gratitude of Ignatius to God and benefactors was even more clearly stated in the original draft of the Constitutions of 1547. Ignatius wrote then: "Beginning with the gratitude so pleasing to God our Lord both towards the divine generosity, from which all good things come, and also towards his servants, through whose hands the good things come from above. . . it is our duty to take pains—in the same love and veneration towards our Creator and Lord—in some way to repay or respond to that pious reverence and love which these founders and benefactors show to us..."<sup>30</sup>

The members of the Society are to express their gratitude first by spiritual works, celebrating Mass for the benefactors and offering other prayers, but Ignatius also legislates the practice of presenting a wax candle to the founder or a close relative each year on the anniversary of the Jesuits taking possession of the college. This was done, as Ignatius said, "as a sign of the gratitude due him(the founder) in our Lord."<sup>31</sup> Ignatius adds that "the same obligation of showing gratitude is incumbent in the Lord on them(non-priests) as well as on the priests."<sup>32</sup> The non-priests are to offer prayers for the same intention for which the priests are celebrating Mass. Ignatius further remarks that the Society "is bound, by an obligation of charity and love, to show them(founders and benefactors and their dear ones) whatever service it can according to our humble profession, for the divine glory."<sup>33</sup> Finally, Ignatius comments that founders and benefactors share in a special way in all the good works of the colleges and of the whole Society.<sup>34</sup> It is not surprising that Antonio de Aldama, in his commentary on the Constitutions, reflects that "Ignatius considers

founders and benefactors only from the point of view of the gratitude that is due to them. Gratitude was one of his most characteristic virtues."<sup>35</sup>

## THE LETTERS

Finally, we must touch, if only briefly, on the letters of Ignatius. First, I begin with a confession. I have not read all seven thousand of Ignatius' letter. Yes, seven thousand; or, more exactly, six thousand eight hundred and sixteen letters and instructions gathered in twelve volumes of about eight hundred pages each. Like the Spiritual Diary, Ignatius' letters were largely inaccessible until the critical edition appeared in the first part of this century. English readers are dependent for the most part on William Young's translation of two hundred and twenty-eight letters and Hugo Rahner's imposing collection of Ignatius' letters to women. Young's translation is largely drawn from Ignatius' more spiritual letters, but Rahner makes available all the extant letters Ignatius wrote to women and received from them. I must admit I was tempted to abandon this project when I read Rahner's admonition in his introduction, "Only one who has taken the trouble to read and study the twelve volumes of Ignatius' letters in Spanish, Italian, or Latin, is qualified to say anything about the character of Ignatius, which is so difficult to understand"<sup>36</sup>, but then this Rahnerian level of scholarship would silence, I suspect, all but Rahner and few other scholars, most of whom have gone to their reward. One wonders too if Hugo was not engaged in a little sibling rivalry in chiding his brother Karl for writing so extensively on Ignatius without during the required homework. At any rate, I will be so rash as to offer a less informed reflection on Ignatius as a person of gratitude. First, we can recall the words of Ignatius to Simon Rodrigues with which we began. Ignatius speaks of ingratitude as "the most abominable of sins" because "it is forgetting of the graces, benefits, and blessings received. . . On the contrary, the grateful acknowledgment of blessings and gifts received is loved and esteemed not only on earth but in heaven."<sup>37</sup> Without hoping to provide an exhaustive list of references to gratitude in the seven thousand letters, we can offer a few examples that give some evidence of how often Ignatius wrote in a spirit of thanksgiving. One of the clearest examples of this can be

seen in the twenty-five letters that Ignatius addressed to benefactresses. Hugo Rahner has collected these letters and introduced them with some insightful reflections on the heart of Ignatius. Rahner remarks that "This correspondence brings Ignatius to life for us at his best: in his expression of gratitude."<sup>38</sup> Rahner speaks of Ignatius' "imperishable gratitude" and almost "helpless gratitude."<sup>39</sup>

To give only two examples from these letters to benefactresses: To Donna Maria Frassoni del Gesso, "I have, indeed, not replied up to the present to your Ladyship's letter of December 10th. I will do so now, thanking your Ladyship for the great charity and devotion with which you help that work of God our Lord in Ferrara and for the good intention you have to help it for the future. I do not doubt that God our Lord will make you share in all the good that shall be done in it."<sup>40</sup> To Dona Aldonza Gonzalez, "For all this I gave much thanks to God our Lord, of whose infinite and supreme goodness I hope that, through your holy desires, this work will in time come to be of great service."<sup>41</sup>

This same desire to give thanks also runs through many of Ignatius' letters to friends and spiritual directees and persons of prominence, as well as to fellow Jesuits. He wrote to his longtime benefactress and friend Isabel Roser in 1532: "I hope that God will not have to punish me for ingratitude, if in some way He makes me worthy of giving some praise and service to His Divine Majesty."<sup>42</sup> Later in the same letter, Ignatius prays that God will help him cancel his debt of gratitude to her. He adds, "Our Lord insists that we look to the giver, and love him more than his gift, and thus keep him ever before our eyes and in the most intimate thoughts of our heart."<sup>43</sup> Ignatius wrote with effusive gratitude in 1543 to John II, King of Portugal, "I find occasion to write this letter. I cannot help but rejoice in our Lord and give His Eternal Goodness infinite and ceaseless thanks when I reflect on how much, through his infinite and supreme goodness, He does for us, unworthy as we are of any mention."<sup>44</sup> He wrote to the Jesuit Peter Canisius in 1546, "We give thanks to God for his ineffable mercy and kindness with which He overwhelms us through the power of his glorious name."<sup>45</sup> To John of Avila, Ignatius writes to express his gratitude for the support he gave to the Society in Spain, "I made up my mind to write you for two reasons. The first is to give some sign of recognition



and gratitude by way of the warmest thanks to God, and to your reverence in His most holy name, for all that you have done for the glory of the Divine Majesty in behalf of us. . ."<sup>46</sup> There are numerous other references in Ignatius' letters to his gratitude both to God and to Ignatius' benefactors. Even a cursory reading of the letters gives support to Hugo Rahner's comment that "when the time for gratitude came, there was no restraining him (Ignatius)."<sup>47</sup>

## FINAL REFLECTION

I have tried to search through the writing of Ignatius to focus on gratitude as a central and recurring theme in Ignatius' spirituality. Ignatius did not leave us systematic treatises or learned essays on spiritual topics. His writings have a more practical bent from his handbook for directors that we know as the Spiritual Exercises to the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus to endless letters of spiritual advice and practical business to his own intimate diary of God's extraordinary workings in his soul. Much in Ignatius remains implicit and undeveloped and unarticulated. I have tried to substantiate that gratitude is a clear and explicit theme and even passion in the writings of Ignatius, but I would further contend that gratitude is a touchstone grace that reveals the very heart of Ignatius and his spirituality and mysticism. It takes nothing away from Ignatius to say that he did not fully realize or articulate just how central gratitude was to his vision of God and the human person. It is rather a compliment to the richness of his religious experience and to his own passion for service more than for systematic thinking to say that Ignatius' own conscious awareness could be enriched by our reflection half a millennium later. We can make explicit and name what is on some levels implicit and non-thematic in his thought.

Why do I say that gratitude is at the heart of Ignatius' vision? First, because I think that at the heart of Ignatius' experience of God is a profound experience of the giftedness of creation. It is rooted in his experience at the river Cardoner and it is embodied in the Principle and Foundation and above all in the final Contemplation on the Love of God. Ignatius saw everything as a gift from God, a gift to be received and shared. Hugo Rahner in his classic study of the theology of Ignatius refers to Ignatius' vision as a vision "from above."<sup>48</sup> All things come

down from God and return to God. It is this sense of giftedness that calls forth "helpless gratitude" in Ignatius. It is interesting that the only explicit reference to gratitude that I could find in Ignatius' Autobiography is immediately after his mystical experience at the river Cardoner. He remembers that "he went to kneel before a cross, which was near that place, to give thanks to God. . ."<sup>49</sup> It is gratitude that kept him in touch with the giftedness of life and ultimately in touch with God, the giver of all gifts and that deepened his relationship of total dependence and surrender to God. Ignatius not only saw everything as gift from God, he saw God dwelling and laboring in those gifts. He truly found God, the Giver of all gifts, in all things. It was Ignatius' felt conviction that his own labor was labor with Christ laboring in the world. That conviction united him with God in contemplative oneness in the midst of activity.

Ignatian indifference or freedom flows from a sense of giftedness and gratitude. It is because everything is seen as gift that one can let go and trust in the fidelity of the Giver. Gifts unrelated to a Giver become possessions, attachments, objects of unfreedom that are clung to. A grateful person is a free person because the grateful person holds everything in trust and never mistakes the gift for the giver. Our temptation, of course, is to take things for granted, to claim things as our own or as owed to us. When this happens we are no longer surprised by life. Brother David Steindl-Rast, in his book Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer, comments on the connection between surprise and taking things for granted: "Even the predictable turns into surprise, the moment we stop taking it for granted."<sup>50</sup> He adds: "To recognize that everything is surprising is the first step toward recognizing that everything is gift."<sup>51</sup> Ignatius who saw everything as gift must certainly have been open to the continuing surprise of God.

Ignatius' insistence on gratitude is related also to his commitment to poverty, to the desire to own and possess nothing but to rely completely on God. Poverty of spirit and a desire for actual poverty flowed from Ignatius' experience of all things as gifts of God. We have examined Ignatius' Spiritual Diary and the importance of gratitude in his mystical experience of God. The Diary, in fact, is concerned with the confirmation of a decision about the poverty of the Society of Jesus. For Ignatius there is a strong ascetical link between gratitude

and poverty. The awareness of all as gift freed Ignatius from attachment and the need to possess and accumulate, and his poverty reinforced his dependence on the benefactions of others and increased his gratitude for their generosity.

Gratitude also expands the heart and opens the person to the giftedness of all of reality. If we reflect on our own experience of gratitude, we recognize that a profound experience of gratefulness is incompatible with pettiness and negativism and self-centeredness. Ignatius looked for generosity in one making the Exercises, not a person of overly measured responses, but a person willing to risk all in following God. The final prayer of the Exercises, the Suscipe, is the prayer of a generous, expansive heart that has received all as gift and returns it freely, asking only for the ultimate gift of God's love and grace. Magnanimity, greatness of heart, a heart desirous to do more for God—these are all qualities identified with Ignatius. They are also qualities of a person filled with gratitude for the gifts of God.

Finally, Ignatian spirituality has always been recognized as action-centered. For Ignatius, love is shown in deeds as well as words. Ignatius was driven by the desire to serve God and to discern and carry out God's will. Ignatian mysticism is not primarily a mysticism of loving union but a mysticism of service.<sup>52</sup> Again gratitude is a source of that zeal to be of service. Gratitude opens a person's heart to ministry, to a desire to share the gift, to give in return. We recall the final grace prayed for in the Exercises, "Here it will be to ask for an intimate knowledge of the many blessings received, that filled with gratitude for all, I may in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty."<sup>53</sup> Knowledge of gifts leads to gratitude which leads to love and desire to serve. George Ganss in his recent translation of the Exercises has caught the dynamic character of gratitude and its connection to service. His translation replaces Puhl's literal translation of "filled with gratitude" with "stirred to profound gratitude."<sup>54</sup> Gratitude impels one to service of the Divine Majesty. It stirs up a zeal to share the gifts received and to proclaim the good news that God desires to gift all people with a share in the life of God.

In concluding, let me say that my purpose is not to replace the classic description of Ignatian mysticism as a trinitarian or Christ-centered mysticism or a mysticism of discernment and service. Rather

I would add to these descriptions the idea of a mysticism of gratitude. I think such a description uncovers a distinctive element of Ignatius' mystical experience of God and offers to us a new and rich insight into our own relationship to God.

I mentioned earlier how Ignatius insisted on the twice-daily practice of examen of conscience, the first step of which is to give thanks for all God's gifts and benefits. Certainly the examen was part of the honest self-discipline and self-examination that characterized Ignatius, but it may be that Ignatius also was convinced, even if only subconsciously, that if a person stops twice a day to give thanks to God, that person will grow in the freedom, greatness of heart and desire to serve that characterizes the true disciple of Christ. In this regard, Ignatius has much to teach us about our relationship with God and the importance of gratitude in growing in that relationship. For that, it seems only appropriate that we be grateful.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Autobiog</u>	<u>The Autobiography of St. Ignatius Loyola</u> Citations from Joseph Tylenda, trans., <u>A Pilgrim's Journey</u> (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1985)
<u>Cons</u>	St. Ignatius of Loyola. <u>The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus</u> . Translated with an introduction and commentary by George Ganss (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970)
<u>LettersIgn</u>	<u>Letters of St. Ignatius</u> . Trans. by William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959)
<u>LettersWom</u>	Hugo Rahner. <u>St. Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women</u> . Trans. by Kathleen Pond and S.A.H. Weetman (New York: Herder and Herder, 1960)
<u>SpEx</u>	<u>The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius</u> Citations from translation by Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951)
<u>SpDiar</u>	<u>The Spiritual Diary</u> Citations from Antonio T. de Nicolas <u>Powers of Imagining: Ignatius de Loyola</u> (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986)

FOOTNOTES

- 1 LettersIgn, p. 55.
- 2 Quoted in LettersWom, p. 169.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Harvey Egan, Ignatius Loyola the Mystic(Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987), p. 114.
- 5 See Adolf Haas, "The Mysticism of St. Ignatius According to His Spiritual Diary" in Friedrich Wulf, S.J., ed., Ignatius of Loyola: His Personality and Spiritual Heritage, 1556-1956(St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977), p. 195.
- 6 Joseph de Guibert, The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice(St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972).
- 7 Autobiog, no. 30.
- 8 SpEx, no. 233.
- 9 George Ganss, ed., Ignatius of Loyola(New York: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 418, n. 109.
- 10 SpEx, no. 234.
- 11 Ganss, p. 419, n. 113.
- 12 SpEx, no. 61.
- 13 SpEx, no. 71.
- 14 SpEx, no. 108.
- 15 See Ganss, p. 436, n. 12.
- 16 SpEx, no. 77
- 17 SpEx, no. 43
- 18 Ganss, p. 229.
- 19 Hass, p. 165.
- 20 Hass, p. 166.
- 21 Quoted in Hass, p. 166, n. 5.
- 22 Ganss, p. 232.
- 23 SpDiar, no. 21.
- 24 SpDiar, no. 40.
- 25 SpDiar, no. 41.
- 26 SpDiar, no. 47.
- 27 SpEx, nos. 175-189.
- 28 Egan, p. 113.
- 29 Cons, no. 309.
- 30 Quoted in LettersWom, p. 171.
- 31 Cons, no. 312.
- 32 Cons, no. 315.
- 33 Cons, no. 318.
- 34 Cons, no. 317.

- 35 Antonio M. de Aldama, An Introductory Commentary on the Constitutions (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1989), p. 150.
- 36 LettersWom, p. 1.
- 37 LettersIgn, p. 55.
- 38 LettersWom, p. 170.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 LettersWom, p. 191.
- 41 LettersWom, p. 241.
- 42 LettersIgn, p. 9.
- 43 LettersIgn, p. 10.
- 44 LettersIgn, p. 65.
- 45 LettersIgn, p. 97.
- 46 LettersIgn, p. 182.
- 47 LettersWom, p. 170.
- 48 Hugo Rahner, Ignatius the Theologian, trans. Michael Barry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), pp. 3-10.
- 49 Autobiog, no. 31.
- 50 Brother David Steindl-Rast, Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer (New York: Paulist, 1984), p. 9.
- 51 Steindl-Rast, p. 215.
- 52 See de Guibert, p. 50.
- 53 SpEx, no. 233.
- 54 Ganss, p. 176(no. 233).