

A mysticism of embodiment

interconnectedness and interrelatedness in everyday experiences

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While in Manresa, Spain, recently I stayed at *La Cova Sant Ignasi* (The cave of St Ignatius.) While preparing for an 8-day contemplative retreat, I walked for a while beside the Cardoner River and came to the site where Ignatius of Loyola experienced significant enlightenment. As I looked down at what in New Zealand we'd call a 'muddy creek' rather than a river, I pondered Ignatius' account of his experience here by the Cardoner.



Looking down from the site of Ignatius' experience by the Cardoner River, Manresa. Photo 20 June 2023

He sat down for a little while with his face toward the river which was running deep. While he was seated there, the eyes of his understanding began to be opened; though he did not see any vision, he understood and knew many things, both spiritual things and matters of faith and of learning, and this was with so great an enlightenment that everything seemed new to him.

This experience for Ignatius, according to Leonardo Silos, 'unified all his experiences into a meaningful whole'.¹ Inspired by insights from this enlightenment he '... put down in writing in his book 'Spiritual Exercises'² to lead others to experience what he had.

From then on Ignatius never thought of the Trinity without being drawn to the world of nature and humanity, God's creation, and never thought of the natural and human world without becoming

¹ Leonardo R. Silos. *Cardoner in the life of St Ignatius of Loyola* (US: Archivum Societatis Iesu, 1964), 20.

² Karl Rahner and Paul Imhof, *Ignatius of Loyola* (Munich: Collins, 1978), 52.

conscious of its relationship to the Trinity. There was no longer any separation of the sacred from the secular. Each was seen as compenetrating the other.³

The word, "compenetrate" means to penetrate every part of, to infuse. There was no longer separation between 'the creature and the Creator and Lord,' [15] Ignatius experienced nonduality. 'There is only one reality. Any distinction between natural and supernatural, sacred and profane, is a bogus one'.⁴

Therefore the three pillars holding together what I describe here as a mysticism of embodiment are *interconnectedness*, *interrelatedness* linked together in the third pillar which is *ordinary, everyday experience*.

Prompted by a small dog, I look down at my feet at this site by the Cardoner, I notice this memorial plaque, flat to the ground created as a spiral with engravings of names of many mystics from different cultures, religions and lands, whose experiences resonated with that of St Ignatius.



Memorial Plaque flat on the ground at the site of Ignatius' experience by the Cardoner. Photo 20 June 2023

Reminding me that experiences of *interconnectedness* are not unusual in the history of Christianity. 'The day of my spiritual awakening,' writes Mechtild of Magdeburg, 'was the day I saw and knew I saw all things in God and God in all things'.⁵ Julian of Norwich describes her experience as being

³ Brian O'Leary, *Searching for Meaning Today, An Ignatian Contribution* (Italy: Review of Ignatian Spirituality, 2005), 110.

⁴ Richard Rohr, *Seven Underlying Themes of Richard Rohrs Teaching: Third Theme* (Albuquerque: CAC, May 22 2013), <https://cac.org/dm-themes> accessed 25/10/13

⁵ Sue Woodruff, *Meditations with Mechtild of Magdeburg* (Santa Fe: Bear and Company, 1982), 42.

knitted to God 'by a knot so subtle and so mighty that it is oned in God. In this oneing, it is made endlessly holy.'

I suggest that this experience of oneness is considerably more universal in human experience. According to Br David Steindl-Rast 'Every religious tradition starts from the mystical insight of its (known or unknown) founder. Every one of them has the goal to lead followers to mystical oneness with the Ultimate', which he further summarises as experiences of 'limitless belonging'.⁶ For Steindl-Rast, we all have experiences of connection and belonging, which we might not title mystical, however. 'Rightly understood, the mystic is not a special kind of human being; rather, every human being is a special kind of mystic'.⁷ This perspective presents the experience of limitless belonging in the domain of ordinary life and relatedness.

The interconnectedness experienced by Ignatius of Loyola at Manresa is personal relational and embodied. No longer convinced that he was called to imitate the saints as a solitary pilgrim, he knew a call to work in relationship with Christ for and with others.⁸ He began to write his Exercises and seek companions from a desire to serve others. This view is endorsed by Ilia Delio who states: 'I argue that divine action occurs within the context of relationship, grounded in the Trinitarian relationships of the Father, Son and Spirit'.⁹ Personal relatedness then infuses the living matrix of us creatures, embodied, with the Divine Trinitarian interrelatedness. For Delio, 'Relationship is not a quality of being, as Aristotle thought; it is being. To be is to be related'.¹⁰ For Ignatius, interconnectedness and relatedness, which he experienced, are central and embodied. Ignatian spirituality is often described as a "spirituality of service".¹¹ As with other mystics, experience leads to works of service in and for our world.

From this site by the Cardoner River I look up to the glorious view of Montserrat and the rolling hills in the foreground. It seems Ignatius' visited his spiritual director who lived in the mountain as one of the many Hermits there during the 11 months he was in Manresa in 1522-23. 500 years ago.



From the Site of Ignatius' Cardoner Experience I Look Up to the Glorious view of Montserrat

⁶ David Steindl-Rast, *The Great Circle-Dance of the Religions* (gratefulness.org: website, 2013) www.gratefulness.org/readings/dsr_GreatCircleDance.htm accessed 10/11/13

⁷ Steindl-Rast, *The Great Circle-Dance of the Religions*. <http://www.ts.mu.edu>. accessed 20 October 2013

⁸ Ganss, ed. *Ignatius of Loyola Spiritual Exercises*, 31.

⁹ Ilia Delio, *Is Creation Eternal?* (Theological Studies, 66, 2005) <http://www.ts.mu.edu>. accessed 20/10/13.

¹⁰ Delio, *The Emergent Christ*, 27.

¹¹ De Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* (Missouri: Institute of Jesuit Sources, Loyola University Press, 1964), 174-175.

A description of mysticism for Karl Rahner S.J. is: 'an experience, the interior meeting of a person with the divine infinity that sustains him or her and all other being.'¹² In my view, Rahner's writings bestow confidence that ordinary, everyday life is the stuff of an authentic Christian life.¹³ Therefore, 'ordinary', 'banal', 'humdrum', 'routine' appear frequently in Rahner's writings, and grace is experienced in a person's body in ordinary, day-to-day existence.¹⁴ Also, Rahner favoured the description of God as Holy Mystery.¹⁵ In other words, for Rahner 'God is the depth dimension in experiences such as solitude, friendship, love, hope and death'.¹⁶ To speak of human is to speak of Divine. When we are in touch with ourselves authentically, we experience God.¹⁷ This assures us that we can find God in the simple tasks of walking, gardening or washing dishes.

In summary, a mysticism of embodiment includes ordinary, everyday, lived experience, connectedness with Holy Mystery in all things and experience of limitless belonging in relationship.

Editor's note:

As members of CEN, we gather in spirit at 4.00pm or thereabouts and extend our awareness to the needs and wounds of our world. This month we might be especially aware of the "mysticism of embodiment" which can bring our minds, hearts, and compassionate loving intention into oneness with that of the Holy One who holds all in one grasp of infinite, oneing desire for wholeness and healing.

¹² Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Dictionary of Theology, New Revised edition* (New York: Crossroads, 1990), 325.

¹³ Harvey D. Egan *The Mystical Theology of Karl Rahner* (U.K: The Way 52/2, April 2013), 46.

¹⁴ Karl Rahner and Edward Quin, trans. *Theological Investigations, volume 19. On the Theology of Worship* (UK: Crossroads, 1983), 147.

¹⁵ Declan Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1998), 55.

¹⁶ Annice Callahan, *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance: Karl Rahner's Insights for Spiritual Direction* (UK: The Way, 29/4, 1989), 341.

¹⁷ Callahan, *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance*, 341.