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THE IMMERSION EXPERIENCE: A CONTEMPLATIVE APPROACH TO
SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION GUIDED BY IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND
THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

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THE IMMERSION EXPERIENCE: A CONTEMPLATIVE APPROACH TO
SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION GUIDED BY IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND
THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

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ABSTRACT

The Immersion Experience: A Contemplative Approach to Spiritual Transformation Guided by Ignatian Spirituality and *Spiritual Exercises*

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The purpose of this project was to offer a spiritual formation program for leaders at Urban Church that introduced them to Ignatian Spirituality and the *Spiritual Exercises* with a view to providing a holistic, contemplative approach to spiritual transformation. Such an approach to formation is a rich alternative to the historic formation approach in a Pentecostal context which tends to focus on inspiration and education rather than transformation.

The first part of this paper discusses the history of Pentecostalism in Australia, with a particular focus on the genesis and subsequent development of the Australian Christian Churches (ACC) movement which is the Pentecostal denomination to which Urban Church belongs. Consideration was given to how within the Pentecostal church, discipleship has been heavily influenced by an evangelical emphasis on correct doctrinal belief and eschatological urgency. This section also provides a short history of Urban Church and demonstrates how Ignatian spirituality and a contemplative approach to formation supports the broader vision and mission of the church.

The second part of this paper focuses on the theological foundation for an Ignatian approach to spiritual transformation. This section includes a literature review covering Ignatian Spirituality, *The Spiritual Exercises* as well as touching on the teaching of Dallas Willard. Utilizing those sources, it is argued that an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation is not only appropriate, but an exciting and energizing one for a Pentecostal context.

The final part of this paper describes the content and evaluation of the Immersion Experience which was aimed at introducing participants to Ignatian spirituality, Ignatian discernment and the first movement of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The approach to the project was four-fold including teaching, individual and group exercises, personal reflection and communal exploration of the movements within the soul of the participants.

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INTRODUCTION

There must be more than this;
O breath of God, come breathe within
There must be more than this
Spirit of God we wait for You
- Tim Hughes

These lyrics from Tim Hughes's song "Consuming Fire" were an anthem of my early Christian experience and a regular addition to the song lists of the Pentecostal corporate gatherings I attended as a young adult. Those gatherings were for the purpose of passionately pursuing an inspirational encounter with the Holy Spirit in order to build faith and infuse our spirits with the power to undertake the evangelistic crusade we were now a part of. This crusade was of utmost importance in light of the eschatological urgency central to Pentecostal theology and spirituality.

Hughes's song goes on to petition the Lord to stir the heart with a passion for the name of Jesus and the implicit purpose of fuelling believers' efforts to fulfil the Great Commission, although the commission was more focused on producing converts rather than disciples given the imminent *Parousia*. At some point on my spiritual journey however, those lyrics changed from being petitionary in nature to being descriptive of the spiritual discontent I was experiencing.

The question "Is there more than this?" quietly yet persistently, emerged in my consciousness. This discontent, which I could not quite understand or articulate, was drawing me to something deeper, to an encounter with "I know not what," or with "Mystery itself."¹ My problem was I had no idea how I might explore or satisfy that

¹ William Barry, *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001), 5.

longing. What I did know, was that my current experience of faith was not quenching the thirst I could no longer ignore.

My approach to faith until that time had been entirely shaped by my Pentecostal context where the focus of spiritual formation was on the Sunday worship service, and discipleship was primarily concerned with doctrinal education and gift identification in order for service placement within the church. This was informed by an eschatological view of spirituality and mission where urgency fashioned the tenets of faith and being busy was honourable, particularly when busy in the evangelistic pursuit of working for the noble cause of introducing people to Jesus thus ensuring their eternal salvation. Burning out for Jesus was celebrated and any attempt to spend a lengthy time in prayer was labelled “navel gazing” and considered a somewhat selfish endeavour, unless of course it was to tarry for the return of Jesus. This resulted in fervent and passionate gatherings where those present experienced encounters with the Spirit but remained uninformed in how to integrate those experiences into life beyond the corporate gathering.

Other than these gatherings, which in themselves offered informal discipleship to the liturgical form of prayer and worship within the church, formal discipleship was centred on the importance of correct articulation of doctrine. Engagement with the heart for personal spiritual transformation and the pursuit of integration between real life and spirituality lacked. When I began to feel the longing for something “more,” it was accompanied by the intuitive sense that knowledge would only ever satisfy longing for God to a degree. I knew about God but desired to truly know him.

The longings for union that the Psalms² speak of and the intimacy Jesus demonstrated with his Father were awakened as possibilities, however formation practices that supported the quest into the depths of Christ that engaged my whole life had evaded me in my Pentecostal context. The only training workshops offered by the church I attended were focused on effective evangelism techniques and providing tools to introduce people to Jesus. However, as I reflect on that time, I recognise those workshops really only equipped me to introduce people to the church and not necessarily to Jesus himself. In truth, I did not personally know Jesus, therefore how could I introduce him to someone else? I knew the Pentecostal Church, I knew how to worship, I had quickly learnt the liturgy of the corporate service and I desired inspirational encounters with the Spirit, which all meant I belonged to a community and that belonging was enough - for a time. However, the stirring for more, the longings that would not be silenced grew and I recognised that the training programs focused on preparing people for service, would not suffice.

Around that time, I discovered the writings of the Christian mystics, or perhaps more accurately, they discovered me. They entered my world and gave me a glimpse of the spirituality and intimacy with Jesus I had been longing for. Christian mystics had a different way of being that captured my heart and resulted in hope that the “more” I had longed for, actually existed. My first companions were Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross who wrote about this shared longing and discussed Jesus in a way that was

² Psalm 84:2: “*Deep within me are these lovesick longings, desires and daydreams of living in union with you,*” The Passion Translation. This is one of my favourite Psalms and expresses beautifully the longings I had been feeling.

saturated with intimacy. Madame Guyon, the Seventeenth-to-early-eighteenth century French mystic then arrived to accompany me on my pilgrimage and her revelatory writings continued to awaken my heart to the possibility of a “with God” life that was exhilarating. Guyon’s *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*³ began to provide a pragmatic pathway that opened my heart to those depths.

Being drawn to practical pathways, I was introduced to Ignatius of Loyola who has since remained a constant companion on my pilgrimage into deeper contemplative spirituality. Ignatius had forged his own path into the contemplative depths of the Christian faith and while doing so wrote the *Spiritual Exercises*. The *Exercises* read as a rather dry instruction manual; however, they are not intended to be read in the way other mystical or theological texts are read. Instead, the practices contained in the *Exercises* are like doorways through which you enter, the doors being the means to the end, and the end being a transformative relationship with Jesus. They are instructive in terms of how to holistically engage with the gospel narrative, and thereby to deepen intimacy with Jesus. Awareness of the interior movements within the soul during the journey through the *Exercises* is vital to reveal the “disordered attachments” that are hindering surrender to the radical love of God displayed through Jesus’ life.

Over the past twelve months, I have been guided through the *Exercises* by a spiritual director with a group of three others and have found them to be life-giving and transformative as they have led into ever deepening relationship with Jesus. My passion for Ignatian spirituality has only grown as I have experienced the intimacy facilitated by

³ Jeanne Guyon, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*, (Jacksonville, FL: Seedsowers Publishers, 1981).

the *Exercises*. In addition to the *Exercises*, Ignatius's approach to the spiritual life including his way of proceeding and finding God in all things witnessed to the longing I felt. As I have pursued a more contemplative approach to spirituality through the Christian mystics and particularly through Ignatius's teaching, I have found it all to lead to a broader experience of spiritual freedom and Divine love I had been desiring.

In 2017, I began my doctoral program at Fuller Seminary which has continued to broaden my view of formation and spirituality, particularly through introducing me to spiritual direction, the Enneagram and teaching on living from the kingdom of God as guided by the writing of Dallas Willard. The knowledge and experience I have gained through the coursework undertaken in an ecumenical environment at Fuller, along with Ignatius's teaching and my personal experience of his *Spiritual Exercises* have all deeply enriched my formation and thereby provided the passion and framework for the "Immersion Experience" project discussed herein.

The Immersion Experience was undertaken at Urban Church which is the church my husband and I planted seven years ago and continue to lead. Urban Church is a Pentecostal church within the Australian Christian Churches (ACC) movement, which is also the movement in which I am ordained. While formation practices in Pentecostalism continue to be underdeveloped in my experience, there is great opportunity to engage Pentecostals in a holistic spiritual formation experience that uses Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* as they are highly experiential and centred on the life of Jesus. This approach will appeal to Pentecostals who have a strong desire for inspirational experiences and whose faith is anchored in Christocentric scriptural orthodoxy.

In recent years, there has been a shift toward spiritual transformation and deeper discipleship within my broader ministry context, however most transformative discipleship courses are marketed as “Supernatural Ministry” schools or training for activation in prophetic ministry. The supernatural and particularly prophetic ministry captures the imagination of the Pentecostal in a way the word discipleship does not. Prophetic ministry is highly regarded in Pentecostal churches with many people desiring the gift to be active in their own life. Further, there is a longing to receive a word from God delivered by a prophetic person as evidenced by strong attendance at services when a prophet is present to minister. In 2019, two local Australian Christian Churches (ACC) in Western Australia along with the ACC Victorian State Executive entitled their conferences “Prophecy,” with the goal of drawing large crowds who were hungry for the prophetic. Prophecy is considered to be an inspirational experience for the recipient and is a sought-after encounter with God that is highly regarded in Pentecostal churches due to its supernatural nature. I suggest however, that receiving a prophetic word, or even being trained to move in prophetic ministry, is not in itself, transformative. However, reframing discipleship programs as training for prophetic ministry and transformative experiences with the Spirit of God as being supernatural would be both appealing and appropriate in a Pentecostal community. Appealing as it draws on the hunger for encounter and appropriate because transformation is supernatural, requiring the uncreated grace of God to move upon the heart.

To that end, there is great opportunity within the Pentecostal context to reframe discipleship programs, which incorporate the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*, as being supernatural or training for a prophetic life. This would encourage participation in the

program while providing opportunity for deep spiritual transformation. To that end, there is scope to re-language the *Spiritual Exercises* as being training in living a prophetic life or even living a supernatural life as the elements of the *Exercises* and Ignatian prayer practices lend themselves to such re-imagination.

The Immersion Experience project had the overall goal of offering an experience of spiritual transformation through contemplative engagement with an introductory experience of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* including the Principle and Foundation, the First Week and the Call of the King. Secondary goals included: promoting an imaginative engagement with Scripture to deepen relationship with Christ; increased awareness of the role and importance of self-awareness in the process of spiritual transformation; development of understanding and experience of Ignatian discernment through increased awareness of consolation and desolation; development of a contemplative paradigm of finding God in all things; and understanding and responding to the love of God as foundational to spiritual transformation.

The project was limited to twelve participants drawn from the leadership of Urban Church who had expressed an interest in exploring an Ignatian approach to formation.⁴ Prior to the commencement of the project, participants attended an orientation day where various Ignatian concepts were discussed as well as teaching on Ignatian prayer practices to support the journey through the *Exercises*. Following orientation, the project utilised a fourfold approach including: Informing, Transforming, Reflecting and Exploring.

⁴ The group will consist of both male and female, ranging in age from late 20s to early 60s. Given the initial selection was through invitation and the fact I know them through working closely with each of them over a number of years, each will have demonstrated a level of spiritual maturity required to be ready to participate in the Immersion Experience.

Informing involved providing teaching each week on concepts related to contemplative spirituality and particularly Ignatian principles of spirituality. Transformation was anticipated through individual engagement with the exercises and prayer practices during the week including the daily *Examen*. Reflecting occurred daily through journaling and the use of the Enneagram as a tool for self-reflection which each participant was introduced to through a workshop offered prior to commencement of the project. The Enneagram was used as a tool to uncover the false self, thus identifying ways in which one turns from the love of God. The Enneagram was utilized specifically in weeks seven through nine of the project where participants moved through Week One of the *Exercises*, considering the presence and reality of sin both on a broader cosmic sense and personally in their own lives. Finally, exploring occurred through weekly communal contemplative listening groups where participants had the opportunity to share their experiences with the *Exercises*. Group sharing followed the format provided in Dougherty's group spiritual direction text.⁵

The Immersion Experience extended over twelve weeks where each participant was guided through preparatory exercises, the Principle and Foundation, Ignatian discernment, the First Week of the *Exercises*, and the Call of the King while being encouraged to participate in daily practices of prayer, meditation and contemplative imagination with assigned Scripture passages. Twelve weeks allowed enough time to offer an introductory experience of Ignatian spirituality and the *Exercises* and was considered to be a significant commitment to make in addition to the existing church

⁵ Rose Mary Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), Kindle.

commitments leaders already had. Therefore, those who agreed to be a part of the project for the full twelve weeks, which was a requirement for inclusion, demonstrated the necessary depth of desire to engage with the *Exercises*.

It was anticipated that introducing Urban Church leaders to contemplative spirituality specifically through introducing them to an Ignatian approach to spirituality and the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* would ignite a passion for deeper transformation and facilitate deepening intimacy with Jesus through partnering with the Spirit of Christ in a new and exciting way. This project was evaluated through pre and post-project self-assessment surveys that each participant completed as well as my own reflection on the process. Results of this project will inform future spiritual formation programs which will be offered to the broader church community and incorporate other spiritual exercises and prayer practices with a view to providing a holistic spiritual formation space within a Pentecostal context.

PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT

This chapter will seek to provide an overview of Pentecostalism in Australia with a specific focus on the Australian Christian Church (ACC) movement to which Urban Church belongs. Further, a discussion on holistic formation practices as guided by the writings of Dallas Willard will be offered, and finally, it will discuss how an Ignatian approach to formation could be suited to a Pentecostal context.

Pentecostalism

Providing a definitive definition of Pentecostalism is a somewhat difficult task¹ as there are various theological streams which have influenced Pentecostal theology and

¹ Keith Warrington notes that scholars generally believe a definite definition of Pentecostalism is difficult due to the nuances of belief according to country and even locality within that country. Even suggesting a shared doctrine of “baptism of the Spirit” is becoming increasingly difficult as there are variances in what that doctrine is and how it is lived out in Christian faith. Keith Warrington, “Encounter: The Pentecostal heartbeat in Pursuit of the s/Spirit of Pentecostalism.” Accessed October 2019. <http://www.wordandspirit.info/content/pages/documents/1539705212.pdf>.

spirituality around the world.² However it is generally considered that what unites Pentecostals is a shared doctrine of the “baptism in the Spirit.” Although, that once unifying doctrine is now nuanced according to locality and denomination and further, other denominations not traditionally considered Pentecostal are subscribing to an experience of the Spirit subsequent to conversion that is akin to Pentecostal baptism. Therefore, it is fair to say that Pentecostal identity is being reimagined in the twenty-first century as its distinctives are no longer considered unique to Pentecostals.³ Despite current doctrinal complexities, within the Australian Pentecostal context there remains a prevailing view of the gospel, salvation and spirituality that finds its theological roots in Evangelicalism, shaped by Wesley-Holiness doctrine, the Keswick or higher-life teachings from Britain and the healing movement. Cettolin states that early Pentecostalism in Australia was “in the main theologically Evangelical.”⁴ This evangelical foundation along with a strong eschatological orientation to mission defined Pentecostalism as it emerged in Australia at the turn of the twentieth century and both views continue to have an influence on contemporary Pentecostal Christian life and ministry in Australia.

In early Pentecostalism, the premillennial return of Christ fuelled the desire for Spirit baptism particularly to receive power for evangelism that the gospel may be preached to those whose eternal destiny was unsure due to their lack of profession of

² Angelo Cettolin, *Spirit Freedom and Power: Changes in Pentecostal Spirituality*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 32.

³ Shane Clifton and David Perry, “Introduction to Pentecostalism and Pentecostal Pneumatology,” lecture (Alphacrucis College, Perth Australia, WA, July, 22, 2015).

⁴ Cettolin, *Spirit Freedom and Power*, 25.

faith in Jesus Christ. Pentecostal groups understood themselves as missionary movements of the Holy Spirit with revival, baptism in the Spirit and the “urgency of the hour” all providing strong impetus for their missionary activity.⁵ Spirit baptism was intended to empower believers to “warn the apathetic ‘visible’ church and to evangelise all nations. It is an eschatological event in that it is a ‘sign’ of the imminent Parousia of Jesus Christ.”⁶ The centrality of missional imagination in light of the premillennial return of Christ resulted in the unifying experience of the baptism in the Spirit across Pentecostal churches producing an eschatological doctrinal centre rather than a pneumatological one.⁷ Eschatological urgency resulted in the gospel that was preached being primarily concerned with and subsequently reduced to focus on eternal destiny. Alongside this strong eschatological expectation, Pentecostalism was also influenced by the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Although, while the Wesleyan holiness emphasis on sanctification as a work of grace influenced Pentecostal Christian spirituality, of greater importance was holiness as preparation for the imminent Parousia.⁸ Here again, the influence of premillennial eschatology is evident as Pentecostalism indigenised holiness according to the centrality of the Parousia. Baptism in the Spirit, divine healing, the pursuit of spiritual

⁵ Wolfgang Vondey, “The Unity and Diversity of Pentecostal Theology: A Brief Survey for the Ecumenical Community in the West,” *Ecclesiology* 10, no 1 (2014): 16; Shane Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, (Leiden, NL: Brill Publishing, 2009), 36.

⁶ Steven Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 6.

⁷ William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought*, (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 18.

⁸ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 23; Jerome Boone, “Community and Worship: The Key Components of Pentecostal Christian Formation,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 8 (1996):130.

gifts and desire for holiness were all considered to be empowerment for “eschatological, apostolic ministry.”⁹

As a result of these doctrinal foci, teaching on the reality of the kingdom and the way in which that kingdom invites personal transformation in light of Jesus’ own life was, in the main, absent from Pentecostal teaching and continues to be an underdeveloped consideration of the “whole-life” gospel preached by Jesus.¹⁰ Willard states “The good news is not simply that people go to heaven when they die because they have professed faith in God’s forgiveness. The gospel means that people can live a transformed life in God’s kingdom now.”¹¹ It is this “whole-life” gospel that provides for holistic and transformative discipleship, rather than the so-called conversion gospel which is focused on eternal destination. Assuring eternal destiny might result in people becoming converts, but not necessarily Christians.¹²

Hunger for the whole-life gospel and the resulting transformative experience of the kingdom drives the impetus for developing a holistic and contemplative approach to spiritual formation which was the goal of this project. In my experience, such an approach to formation has been lacking given the foci of eschatological mission and church growth that became the central consideration of the Australian Christian Churches

⁹ Boone, “Community and Worship,” 130.

¹⁰ Keith Matthews, *Spirituality and Ministry*, lecture (Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, CA, June, 11, 2018).

¹¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 26, Kindle.

¹² Christians by definition are “little Christs,” therefore it is the practice of discipleship that leads us toward the path of becoming a Christian. Matthews, (Fuller Lecture).

(ACC) movement in the late - 1970s. In order to better understand the Australian Pentecostal context, and in particular the Australian Christian Churches movement, to which Urban Church belongs, a brief overview of the history of the movement follows.

A Brief Overview of the Development of Pentecostalism in Australia with a Particular Emphasis on the Australian Christian Churches (ACC) Movement

The story of the birth and growth of Pentecostalism in Australia parallels that from around the world. From inspirational encounters with the Spirit and unencumbered experiences of revival through to the flourishing of faith missions dedicated to evangelization and the rise of the mega church in the twentieth century, Australia's Pentecostal ecclesial development has mirrored that of other nations.¹³ More broadly the roots of the movement are traced back to the turn of the twentieth century when a series of revivals occurred in various parts of the world that were perceived to be the "latter rain" foretold of in the Bible.¹⁴

Given the geographic diversity of these revivals, Pentecostalism was not a uniform movement that expanded globally, but a series of moves of the Spirit that coalesced together and were interconnected around the world through similarity of experience among people groups.¹⁵ Anderson notes that "Pentecostalism emerged as the

¹³ Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 6.

¹⁴ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 42-43; Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 38.

¹⁵ Shane Clifton, "Ecumenism from the Bottom Up: A Pentecostal Perspective," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47, no 4 (2012): 25.

coalescing and interconnecting of distinct but related global Christian spiritual experiences and missionary impulses. Pentecostalism therefore, has had many beginnings and there are many Pentecostals.”¹⁶ What characterised the movement was shared spiritual experiences including baptism in the Spirit, along with speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*) which became the evidence of having been baptised in the Spirit.¹⁷ Baptism in the Spirit was, and is, still considered to be a second and subsequent work of grace following the first being salvation. This second work of grace is evidenced by speaking in tongues. The Australian Christian Churches (ACC) movement, the largest Pentecostal movement in the nation still requires its ministers to have received this work of grace and to therefore speak in tongues in order to receive ordination. Views of sanctification in Australian Pentecostalism are more reformed and understood as an ongoing process as opposed to the Wesleyan view of instant sanctification. However, the process of sanctification continues to be influenced by eschatology, thereby focusing on efforts to obtain personal holiness in light of the coming Parousia and the transformation of the mind through doctrinal education.

In Australia the most recognised genesis of the Pentecostal movement was with Charles Parham in Topeka Kansas and subsequently William Seymour who led the so-called Azusa street revival in the early-twentieth century at the Apostolic Faith Mission

¹⁶ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 153.

¹⁷ Joseph McAuley, “Pentecostalism Re-imagined: Reconfiguring Pentecostalism in Twenty-First Century New Zealand,” Doctor of Ministry Projects, 254 (2018), 15. Accessed October 2019 https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin/354/?utm_source=digitalcommons.fuller.edu%252Fdmin%252F354&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages.

in Los Angeles.¹⁸ The Azusa Street Revival is considered to be the place from where Pentecostalism emerged and is also considered to be the spiritual roots of the movement in Australia. In 2006, the centennial celebration of Azusa Street was enthusiastically celebrated by Pentecostal churches in Australia, with some well-known Christian leaders from Australia joining the celebration in Los Angeles.

Although Australian Pentecostalism considers Azusa Street its birthplace, it is not merely an extension of its North American counterpart. Far from being an American import, Australian Pentecostalism indigenised the Pentecostal experience to its own context while being enriched by a variety of overseas influences.¹⁹ Attesting to the unique expression of Australian Pentecostalism, particularly in recent decades, Australian voices and Pentecostal churches have made significant contributions to the development of the global movement.²⁰

When Pentecostalism began in Australia, Christianity was not new to the Australian landscape as the colonisation of Australia in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the British bring with them a variety of Christian expressions, including Anglican, Catholic and Methodist.²¹ Therefore, Australia had existing narratives of faith when Pentecostalism emerged that influenced the development of the movement across

¹⁸ Clinton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 27; McAuley, *Pentecostalism Re-imagined: Reconfiguring Pentecostalism in Twenty-First Century New Zealand*, 14.

¹⁹ Barry Chant, *The Spirit of Pentecost: The Origins and Development of the Pentecostal Movement in Australia 1870-1939*, (Lexington, KY: Emith Press, 2011), 103; Cettolin, *Spirit Freedom and Power*, 24.

²⁰ Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 27.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

the continent.²² Ultimately it was through Methodist Jane Lancaster that the Pentecostal experience of being “baptised in the Spirit” first reached Australian shores. What began as an interest in divine healing led Lancaster to order a pamphlet from England entitled “Back to Pentecost,” the contents of which convinced her that baptism in the Holy Spirit was still to be sought by the church.²³ After praying for the promised immersion in the Holy Spirit for two years, she received an experience of the “Spirit’s fullness” and discovered that people in other parts of the world were having similar experiences.²⁴ In 1909 Lancaster opened Good News Hall and earnestly began the mission of evangelism which included open air meetings and all night prayer meetings.²⁵ Her message centred on the fourfold gospel of salvation which included the message of Jesus Christ as Saviour, Sanctifier, Healer and soon coming King. Clifton notes that baptism in the Holy Spirit was seen, on the one hand, as an element of her fourfold gospel proclamation but, on the other and perhaps more prominently, as the symbol that set Pentecostals apart from other denominations.²⁶ The pouring out of the Spirit was a sign that the “end was nigh” therefore the Spirit was being given to empower believers to participate in the “end time harvest” and for “ministering divine healing.”²⁷ The focus on end time mission also

²² For a detailed exposition on the various Christian influences on Pentecostalism, refer to Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition* and Chant, *The Spirit of Pentecost: The Origins and Development of the Pentecostal Movement in Australia 1870-1939*.

²³ Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 53.

²⁴ *Ibid.*; Cettolin, *Spirit Freedom and Power*, 23.

²⁵ Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 65.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

meant that emerging Pentecostals were not interested in formal structures or institutionalising Pentecostalism as the world did not need more institutions, but rather a movement of believers who were committed to participating in evangelical “faith missions.”²⁸

In addition to her burgeoning assembly, Lancaster pioneered a magazine called *Good News* that featured articles relevant for the Pentecostal. This magazine had great influence on other assemblies²⁹ forming throughout the country which were united by this shared experience of the Spirit. Chant writes that the theme most prolifically written about in *Good News* was that of the second coming of Christ.³⁰ Other themes included those with strong revivalist tones including “rules for Christian holy living, explanations of the gospel and teaching on healing.”³¹ The strong eschatological emphasis produced a fear-based approach to personal holiness as one did not want to be “caught” doing anything that might inhibit the chance of entering heaven when Christ returns, which he could do at any moment. This had both positive and negative effect in that it supported wholehearted service to Christ, but also provided a set of rules for living that encouraged what could be referred to as “cosmetic” holiness. Cosmetic holiness is skin deep, focusing on behaviour or sin management rather than transformation of the inner life. “Holy” people refrained from habits such as smoking, reduced the amount of make-up

²⁸ Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 28.

²⁹ Lancaster resisted forming another “church,” instead preferring to be in relationship with other assemblies gathering throughout Australasia as part of her “Apostolic Faith Mission.”

³⁰ Chant, *The Spirit of Pentecost*, 476.

³¹ Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 55.

worn and dressed modestly.³² Of course, conforming to a set of rules does not necessarily result in authentic personal holiness which is the result of experiencing the grace received from spending time in the presence of Christ, rather than merely learning about him and obsessing over the timing of this return. The message of personal holiness then, tended towards legalism and behaviour management which does not always lead to long-term character transformation.³³

As Pentecostalism expanded throughout Australia, it became apparent that while Jesus was returning, he may not return tomorrow and therefore in order to maintain the momentum of the mission, ecclesial structure was required. Lancaster, with the assistance of South African Frederick Van Eyk, formalised the ties she had with other assemblies in Australasia and established the “Apostolic Faith Mission of Australasia.”³⁴ However in 1927 this affiliative movement collapsed due to doctrinal differences, the resistance to women in leadership and questionable conduct by Van Eyk. Following its collapse in 1929 in Melbourne, a large number of Pentecostal churches joined the newly formed Assemblies of God in Australia (AGA). The movement continued to grow and establish a leadership structure that included a National Executive made up of ministers from across Australia and state-based Executive teams that provided apostolic leadership to the movement.

³² Ibid., 96.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 65.

In the 1970s, the National Executive invited Yonggi Cho, who was at that time leading the largest congregation in the world in Seoul Korea, to be the keynote conference speaker at the national AGA conference. Dr Cho had established an organisation called “Church Growth International” that focused on teaching church growth strategies and methods.³⁵ That conference was to become something of a watershed moment for Australian Pentecostalism as church growth principles became firmly embedded in AGA ideology. These principles affirmed “a conservative reading of the Scriptures, local church autonomy, the priority of evangelism in mission, and a pragmatic orientation that was enhanced by the reduced focus on matters of doctrine.”³⁶ As a result, churches affiliated with the AGA experienced notable growth with the 1980s and 1990s seeing the emergence of the so-called ‘mega church.’ These mega churches became the standard by which other churches measured their own influence and therefore success.

The rise and subsequent influence of Hillsong Church in Australia during this time cannot be overstated. Not only did Hillsong become the model after which Australian Pentecostal churches aspired, but the leader of the church Brian Houston became the National President of the AGA in 1997. It was Houston who changed the name of the movement to Australian Christian Churches (ACC) with a view to becoming an umbrella movement for all Pentecostal churches in Australia.³⁷ This move was

³⁵ This organisation concentrated on four concepts vital for church growth: prayer, evangelism, leadership and cell structure.

³⁶ Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 154.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

ultimately unsuccessful as other Pentecostal movements in Australia including Christian Outreach Centre (COC) and C3 Australia Churches chose to remain independent. Despite this unsuccessful attempt to unify the various Pentecostal movements in Australia, they collectively continue to be the fastest growing churches in Australia, particularly among young people and are currently the second largest denomination behind Catholicism in the country.³⁸ As of November 2018, the ACC consists of over 1,036 churches with 374,000 constituents making it the largest Pentecostal movement within Pentecostalism in Australia.³⁹

Church growth and the model of the mega church remains a significant focus for the ACC with measures of conversions and baptisms the standard considerations of success. The Hillsong formula adopted and emulated by other churches within the movement is broadly considered to include the following elements:

Professionalism in contemporary praise and worship, with music being the primary medium through which one expects to encounter God; state-of-the-art facilities; set programs and the use of technology; image management that favours the young and chic, especially in regard to those who appear in front of the congregation; relentless positivity in terms of preaching and the individual's call to expectant faith in God; and an ultimate drive towards prosperity and triumphalism.⁴⁰

The prevailing culture of mega church success makes it difficult for churches within the movement to focus on creating intimate communities of transformation unless they also

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The largest denomination is Catholic. Source: Ruth Powell et al, *2018 ACC Census Headline Report*, (Sydney: NCLS Research, 2019).

⁴⁰ McAuley, *Pentecostalism Re-imagined: Reconfiguring Pentecostalism in Twenty-First Century New Zealand*, 21.

continue to experience substantial church growth. Transformation of the believer without accompanying church growth would be considered a failure in terms of established measures of success. Church growth principles have resulted in continuing focus on mission with a view to creating converts in order to report impressive quantitative results.

Transformative change resulting from spiritual formation and discipleship is difficult to quantify and so rarely considered in terms of church success. Carlson states “making disciples is not only difficult in practice and almost impossible to quantify making discipleship a wonderfully inefficient process that does not lend itself to mass production.”⁴¹ As a result, many Christian churches including those in the Pentecostal tradition appear to view discipleship as an optional extra after conversion.⁴² Further, image management both for the church and particularly for the pastor becomes central as comparison and competition are the natural outcome of a culture which values quantitative success. It is not unusual at leadership gatherings to find pastors answering the question “how are you” with statistical presentations of growth and conversions in order to appear successful and therefore feel valued. Such culture works against spiritual formation practices that require honesty, vulnerability and the dismantling of false images in order to discover and subsequently mature the true self in Christ. To create a culture of transformation and intimacy with Jesus is to move against the broader church growth culture, however that was the goal of this project and will remain the passion of Urban Church.

⁴¹ Kent Carlson and Mike Leuken, *Renovation of the Church: What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 40-41, Kindle.

⁴² Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 4.

Problem: Lack of Strategic Approach to Pentecostal Formation

Two elements that have contributed to the lack of a strategic approach to spiritual formation within the Pentecostal context in Australia include the reduction of soteriology to a post-life destination in light of an eschatological approach to mission, and the focus on conversion statistics as measures of success. Both have led to the aberration of discipleship from being about spiritual formation and inner transformation, to that which leads to outward service in the church. Discipleship has become a kind of pseudo spiritual formation that is actually focused on gift identification and training courses with linear, upward trajectories resulting in the participant being placed in appropriate church service teams.

Eschewing spiritual formation for service training is profoundly unsatisfactory in terms of personal and spiritual transformation for believers and has resulted in spiritual leaders being ill-equipped to lead either themselves or their congregants through times of pain, suffering or encounters with “the wall.”⁴³ When one has a “wall” experience or prolonged season of darkness, faith grows dim and pseudo-discipleship which has focused on head knowledge and identification of the individual’s gift for service is insufficient to guide that individual to move beyond the wall into the later or broader stages of faith. Huggett notes that it is not only sound head knowledge that guides you through such an experience, but an assurance of the love of God.⁴⁴ The love of God is not

⁴³ Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith* (Salem: Sheffield Publishing Company, 2005). “The Wall” is presented as a critical juncture in the stages of faith journey.

a concept to be understood, but a reality to be experienced. Further, Williams notes that simply gathering more knowledge about Christ is never the goal of discipleship, as knowledge will not truly influence you until it moves from cognitive understanding to ontological reality, or from head to heart. Change comes from being in the company of Jesus and so discipleship must involve an invitation to experience the various dimensions of the love of God, rather than a one-dimensional journey through a text or linear progression to a point of service.⁴⁵

In the Pentecostal tradition, community and worship have traditionally been considered key components of spiritual formation. Both of those components are experienced in the corporate gathering where being in the company of the Spirit of Christ is the focus of the service, and therefore individual spiritual practices to engage with the Spirit of God beyond the Sunday service are rarely taught or discussed. This has led to the Sunday service being the primary location for spiritual formation practice.⁴⁶ Despite Pentecostalism's aversion to liturgical form, there is a common liturgy for the Pentecostal corporate gathering that focuses on the freedom and spontaneity of the Spirit with the goal of human-divine encounter.⁴⁷ Boone notes the "single most important goal of any Pentecostal worship service is a personal encounter with the Spirit of God."⁴⁸ God is

⁴⁴ Joyce Huggett, "Why Ignatian Spirituality Hooks Protestants," *The Way Supplement* 68 (Summer 1990), 31.

⁴⁵ Rowan Williams, *Being Disciples* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2016), 256, Kindle.

⁴⁶ Boone, "Community and Worship," 108; Cettolin, *Spirit Freedom and Power*, 37.

⁴⁷ Cettolin, *Spirit Freedom and Power*, 37.

⁴⁸ Boone, "Community and Worship," 133.

expected to “turn up” and meet with those in attendance and, when He does, there will be a visible sign of his presence most regularly, speaking in tongues and spiritual gifts in operation. In those moments, God is considered to be intimately present and there is a tangible sense of his immediacy creating opportunity for a transformative experience.⁴⁹

However this could not be considered a strategic approach to formation, as simply being in the presence of someone, even having an inspirational encounter with them, does not necessarily lead to an intimate, interactive relationship unless there is intentionality and practices of shared communion that are nurtured in real life, beyond the Sunday service. Thomas Keating writes that these “high spiritual experiences” can in fact work against deeper transformation as they become a kind of tranquilizer, numbing the consciousness to our deeper value systems and unconscious motivations that animate our false self and require dismantling in order to experience spiritual freedom found in Christ.⁵⁰ Therefore, pursuing inspirational encounters at the corporate service as the main focus of the gathering could in fact work against deeper spiritual formation as these encounters provide a temporary panacea and distraction from the inner work required.

Other elements of the corporate service include prayer and the sermon, both of which are considered to contribute to Pentecostal spiritual formation. Prayer in a corporate Pentecostal context is vocal, petitionary and intercessory and “performed with the expectation of results.”⁵¹ While it is a discipline that is focused on the Lord, it is

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Divine Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2012), 13.

⁵¹ Boone, “Community and Worship,” 134.

rarely dialogical in that people tend to do all the talking, and in my experience, rarely approach prayer contemplatively or with a focus on personal transformation. However, prayer in any form, seeds the heart with faith that God is listening, is interested in our prayers and demonstrates an openness to the supernatural which is a classic Pentecostal position.

Finally, the sermon which is often considered the climax of the corporate gathering is designed to deliver biblical knowledge and inspire the hearer to be obedient to what is taught.⁵² Inherent in this approach is a reliance on head knowledge or an informational approach to discipleship that reflects the broader evangelical approach to formation that has influenced Pentecostalism. While orthodox belief is important in Christian formation, a more holistic approach is required to engage the heart which leads to the biblical sense of knowing God that was demonstrated through the life of Jesus.

While Pentecostalism has a strongly experiential element, discipleship programs have tended to focus on correct doctrine reflecting what Smith calls an “intellectualist model of the human person.”⁵³ Intellectual discipleship “narrowly focuses on filling our intellectual wells with biblical knowledge, convinced that we can think our way to holiness – it is sanctification by information transfer.”⁵⁴ Knowing about Jesus and actually knowing Jesus are two different things. Willard offers a theological reason why information rather than transformation has been the focus for the church:

⁵² Ibid., 135.

⁵³ James K.A Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 4, Kindle.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

History has brought us to the point where the Christian message is thought to be essentially concerned only with how to deal with sin: with wrongdoing or wrong-being and its effects. Life, our actual existence, is not included in what is now presented as the heart of the Christian message, or it is included only marginally...The only thing made essential on the right wing of theology is forgiveness of the individual's sins.⁵⁵

This is not to say that forgiveness of sin is unimportant, but knowledge alone of forgiveness does little for life transformation.

Spiritual formation is about learning how to live out of what we know, that we might experience and be transformed by the truth of that knowledge and not merely give assent to it. Willard describes disciples as “people who do not just profess certain views as their own but apply their growing understanding of life in the kingdom of heaven to every aspect of their life on earth.”⁵⁶ This is a holistic understanding of discipleship which extends beyond receiving an encounter with the Lord in order to receive power for mission. What is in view here is a life that is intimately shaped by Jesus himself leading to an experience of eternal life now and not just post physical death. In order to immerse oneself in the “with-God” life that Willard so aptly describes, Pentecostal formation must extend beyond the corporate gathering and holistically incorporate all of one's life to become “pervasively possessed by Jesus through constant companionship with him.”⁵⁷

To learn more of this holistic approach, we turn to the writing of Dallas Willard.

⁵⁵ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 41.

⁵⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2006), introduction, Kindle.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

Contribution of Dallas Willard to Holistic Spiritual Formation

An informational approach to discipleship has not only dominated formation programs in Pentecostalism but has been the primary approach across Protestant churches, particularly in the West. Further, focusing on preparing the believer for a missional life of service for Christ, has failed to teach how to live with Christ and from the reality of his kingdom. Willard writes that spiritual formation should be a whole of life matter consisting of a range of practices and disciplines through which an individual interacts with God to bring about a “new overall quality of human existence with corresponding new powers. A person is a spiritual person to the degree that his or her life is effectively integrated into and dominated by God’s kingdom or rule.”⁵⁸ This is a holistic approach that both includes and transcends the informational element of discipleship. Teaching orthodox Trinitarian doctrine for example, disciplines the mind, but guiding believers to live immersed in Trinitarian reality disciplines the whole person. Therefore, information focused discipleship lacks spiritual engulfment in Trinitarian reality.⁵⁹ Transformation occurs through ongoing immersion in Truth which is both a passive and active undertaking. Truth may find its entry point through the mind but is only transformative as we partner with the grace ministered to us by the Spirit, allowing that grace to transform our false images of God, self and the world.

⁵⁸ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 49.

⁵⁹ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 313.

Willard asserts that Jesus teaches that “we are unceasing spiritual beings with an eternal destiny in God’s great universe.”⁶⁰ Spiritual formation, then, is about discovering this identity through continual and intentional practices that open to his transforming presence.⁶¹ This is lifelong pilgrimage that occurs in partnership with the Spirit of God, but is not the result of “trying” to be transformed or “trying” to understand true identity in Christ, but rather partnering with God to be “trained” as an apprentice of Jesus as the only one able to lead us into an encounter with kingdom reality.⁶² It is grace that transforms, but it requires active participation to allow the Spirit of God to shape the “inner world in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”⁶³ Transformation, then, is not possible through obtaining more information, or by experiences of power, or even through baptism in the Spirit, as important as those things are particularly to Pentecostals. Rather, transformation occurs through participating in spiritual disciplines or practices that open to the transforming presence of Christ which include but are not limited to solitude and silence, prayer and fasting, worship and study. Spiritual formation must engage all of life and therefore extend beyond the Sunday gathering.

⁶⁰ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 19.

⁶¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of Disciplines*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988), 77, Kindle.

⁶² Keith Meyer, “A Pastor’s Lessons in Kingdom Life from a Master Apprentice of Jesus,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 3, no 2 (2010): 303.

⁶³ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 22, Kindle.

Undergirding Christian formation is the promise that the kingdom is not only an eschatological reality, but also a present one that Christians have been invited to live into, and through the empowerment of the Spirit can live from. Willard notes:

Jesus came to usher in a new way to live and his disciples can now begin to participate in this new reality. The good news is not simply that people go to heaven when they die because they have professed faith in God's forgiveness. The gospel means that people can live a transformed life in God's kingdom now. Therefore, when the gospel is reduced to the forgiveness of sins and ignores Jesus' teaching on the kingdom, a more holistic vision of salvation that addresses the transformation of life is overlooked.⁶⁴

Teaching people how to participate in this new reality and experience holistic salvation is the kind of discipleship that Willard refers to here and was the goal of this project.

Focusing on correct theological doctrine and empowering believers for mission in light of eschatological urgency has resulted in believers being ready to die in order to 'get into heaven' but having no idea how to live as though heaven is here now.⁶⁵ Living as though heaven is a current reality and fully participating in it as available now is not only possible, but Pentecostalism is uniquely placed to develop an experiential and interactive approach to relationship with God through its emphasis on encounter.

Opportunity: Pentecostal Spirituality's Focus on Encounter and Holistic Spiritual Formation

Pentecostal appetite for spiritual encounter provides an opportunity to frame spiritual formation as a process of ever deepening encounter with the Spirit for the

⁶⁴ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 26.

⁶⁵ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 238-239.

purpose of personal transformation and not just evangelistic inspiration. It also provides the impulsion for a contemplative approach to formation that incorporates Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* which aim to facilitate transformative encounters with Jesus that was the focus of this project.

Encounters with God typical in a Pentecostal context are often accompanied with an emotional response which can be, at times, quite intense. Emotion is a familiar and welcome response to an encounter with God for the Pentecostal, so much so that there is an implicit understanding that the presence of emotion is a sign of an intense presence of God. However, there is also a somewhat paradoxical message that pervades Pentecostal and evangelical spirituality that asserts "we walk by faith and not by what we feel." This assertion is the result of an intellectual, knowledge-based approach to faith formation that is suspicious of emotion. Huggett states that in the evangelical world, the distrust of feelings is the result of the elevation of facts as the only things that can be objectively trusted.⁶⁶ It would appear then, that emotion is welcome in corporate gatherings, but distrusted in the realm of personal spiritual formation.

Encounter with Jesus is central to the *Spiritual Exercises*, and the exploration of accompanying emotion is encouraged as a tool to uncover hidden or unconscious narratives, disordered attachments and images of self and God which are inhibiting reception of God's love and the return of love towards God. Incorporating an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation in a Pentecostal context then, is an opportunity to embrace the emotive aspect of encounter beyond the corporate gathering, that it might

⁶⁶ Huggett, "Why Ignatian Spirituality Hooks Protestants," 29.

become an important part of personal spiritual formation. Emotions can become for the Pentecostal, evidence of God's presence and useful tools to enhance self-awareness which is central to true transformation. Keating suggests that "emotions can be our best allies" in uncovering our unconscious motivations and revealing what is below the surface of our awareness.⁶⁷

Encouraging the Pentecostal to embrace their emotion as welcome messengers that point to areas of hidden brokenness and disordered attachments could be the first step in teaching Ignatian spiritual discernment. As emotions become a more familiar part of personal spiritual formation, becoming aware of contrasting superficial emotions with deeper affective response is an effective way of developing discernment practices. Ignatius taught that those affective movements which lead us toward God, are known as consolation and those away from God, as desolation. Ignatian consolation and desolation are reminiscent of the statement made by North American revivalist Jonathan Edwards who asserted that "true religion lies much in the affections."⁶⁸ These affections flow from the heart, or spiritual centre of the person who has encountered the transcendent but cannot find language to describe the experience. The affections are in one sense then, a form of language given to provide expression to the reality of the experience.

Bringing the mind and heart together through the contemplative approach that informed this project embraces the Pentecostal passion for encounter and accompanying affective response, viewing those internal affections as the language of the soul while

⁶⁷ Keating, *Invitation to Divine Love*, 23.

⁶⁸ Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 29.

simultaneously examining the experience within the framework of orthodox belief. Herein lies the value of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* which encourage the exploration of the affective responses that emerge as a result of imaginative engagement with the gospel narratives. Such an approach not only provides for holistic transformation through integrating body, mind and spirit but is also well suited to a Pentecostal context where there is a passion for affective encounters.⁶⁹

Along with the Pentecostal focus on encounter and experience, another defining feature of Pentecostal spirituality is that of expectancy. Christensen notes that Pentecostalism is "Christianity standing on tiptoe, expecting something to happen."⁷⁰ There is an anticipation that God will "do" something, particularly in the corporate gathering, however this anticipation has been somewhat formulaic in that if we prayed and/or believed enough then God would "show up."⁷¹ This is anticipatory but also impersonal, belying the truth that he is present to draw us into deeper intimacy with him and not only to demonstrate his power. Anticipation provides an opportunity to expound the identification of what God is "doing" independently of us, to anticipate his invitation to live in relationship with him, thus transforming one's very being. This kind of life is as Hollenweger suggests "an opportunity for believers to engage in an adventure in fellowship with the Holy Spirit and each other."⁷² That adventure must be broader than

⁶⁹ Huggett, "Why Ignatian Spirituality Hooks Protestants," 29.

⁷⁰ Larry Christensen, "Pentecostalism's Forgotten Forerunner," in *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins*, ed. Vinson Synan, (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1975), 27.

⁷¹ Vondey, "The Unity and Diversity of Pentecostal Theology," 5.

⁷² Walter, J, Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 45-5.

anticipating the presence of God in a corporate meeting where it is expected that he will heal or display his miraculous power. Anticipation should extend into daily life and the expectation that God will be present to each person personally, every day.⁷³ The *Spiritual Exercises* provide scope for such an adventure with the Holy Spirit as we anticipate meeting Jesus in the pages of the gospel narratives. This anticipation will go well with the Pentecostal who may approach the *Exercises* as their own personal adventure with the Holy Spirit believing he will indeed do something, say something or transform something within them personally as part of their own spiritual transformation.

Finally, there is opportunity for a contemplative approach using the *Exercises* in a Pentecostal context as Pentecostal spirituality is profoundly Christocentric as are the *Exercises*. While encounter and experience with the Spirit is central to Pentecostal spirituality, that encounter is not just with any spirit, it is with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The theological convictions of Pentecostalism are based on the biblical picture of Jesus and the “historical reality of Christ in which Pentecostals continue to participate.”⁷⁴ Calvary offered salvation, but Pentecost opened a door to an ongoing encounter with the Spirit of Christ that Pentecostals embrace as current reality.⁷⁵ For Pentecostals, the encounters with and experience of the Spirit all lead to greater knowledge of Jesus. As Wolfgang notes, “In the person of Jesus Christ, spirituality and doctrine meet. The central

⁷³ Vondey, “The Unity and Diversity of Pentecostal Theology,” 6.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁵ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 32.

confession of Christ dominates doctrinal narratives among Pentecostals. Or in other words, Pentecostal doctrine always expresses at heart a Christology.”⁷⁶

The *Spiritual Exercises* are entirely centred on the life of Jesus and therefore well suited to a Pentecostal context where encounters with the Spirit of Christ are anticipated and sought after. To reframe those encounters in a meditative and imaginative way will act to deepen relationship with Jesus, and not only knowledge of Jesus. Ignatius leads the participant through an imaginative stepping back into the historical moments of Scripture that have captured eternal truths and, when encountered holistically, become avenues of deep transformation.

Ignatian Formation in a Pentecostal context

The Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* provide an exciting avenue for Pentecostal formation as an experiential and holistic approach which engages the whole person while being entirely Christocentric. The *Exercises* have participation in the story of Jesus through imaginative contemplation at their centre, with transformation and spiritual freedom as their purpose.⁷⁷ They provide a way for moving knowledge stored in one’s head into the innermost being, the place the bible refers to as the heart, thus assimilating truth in a way that becomes directive for life.⁷⁸ Imaginative engagement is a particularly experiential approach to formation that integrates prayer, life and ministry in a way that

⁷⁶ Vondey, “The Unity and Diversity of Pentecostal Theology,” 10.

⁷⁷ John English, *Spiritual Freedom: From an Experience of the Ignatian Exercises*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1995).

⁷⁸ Huggett, “Why Ignatian Spirituality Hooks Protestants,” 25.

mutually influence one another. David Lonsdale notes “Ignatius’s approach...is to try to move toward a balanced, discerning integration of prayer, and life or ministry, such that one leads into the other and vice versa, and there is mutual nourishment and enrichment between the two.”⁷⁹

This integration was always the purpose of the *Exercises* from their inception.

John O’Malley writes:

[*The Exercises*] supplied the design for the basic course or movement the Jesuits wanted to make operative in whatever they did – a movement that in its first instance entailed turning to God in a new and more profound way, which brought with it a process of spiritual growth and an increasing recognition of God’s activity in everything in the world.⁸⁰

Although the imagination is the primary entry point into engagement with the story, Ignatius encourages holistic engagement through an awareness of emotion or movements of the soul, thoughts and dispositions thus providing the means for holistic transformation.

The *Spiritual Exercises* do not provide a fact-finding, informational approach to formation, but rather a quest of deepening intimacy with Jesus through engaging with gospel narrative. Such an approach is also in line with Willard’s assertion that “the fundamental idea of Jesus” is that we would live our lives as though Jesus himself were living through us.⁸¹ In order to do that, we must immerse ourselves in Jesus’ life, in fact,

⁷⁹ David Lonsdale, *Eyes to See, Ears to Here: Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000), 24.

⁸⁰ John O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 89.

⁸¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 273.

placing ourselves under his guidance thus learning how he would live our life if in fact he were living it. Learning the disciplines of Jesus, being attentive to his interactions and relationally listening to him are all ways of personal tuition that are available through the *Spiritual Exercises*. In fact, one might imagine that Willard had the *Spiritual Exercises* in mind when he discusses the need for holistic and bible-based formation:

For the gospels to be explained and ‘brought to life’ in such a way that Jesus becomes a permanent presence and possession of the mind of the disciple; that this wonderful person walked among us and suffered a cruel death to enable the disciple to have life in God; that the continuing incarnation of the divine Son among his gathered people continues today; and that Jesus is the master of the created universe and of human history.⁸²

It’s possible to track the Weeks of the *Exercises* and contemplative exercises provided within them to Willard’s statement here. Ignatius divided his *Exercises* into four Weeks which is not a reference to seven-day periods, but the way he chooses to make the distinction between the different stages or movements through the *Exercises*. Week Two of the *Exercises* has the exercitant walking with this “wonderful person” in an experiential and immersive way, then Week Three has the exercitant with Jesus “who suffers a cruel death,” the fourth Week centres on the experience of the continuing incarnation of the divine resurrected son. Finally, the contemplation to attain love results in seeing God in all things, which includes the created universe and human history.

Communal contemplative sharing of the experiences that each participant discussed through this program suited the Pentecostal environment where narrative

⁸² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 334-36.

expression of faith is nurtured through shared testimony. Scott Ellington observes that: “It has been widely argued in emerging Pentecostal theology that Pentecostalism is an orally based, narratively expressed tradition, and that testimonies of what God has done in the life of the individual believer and the local community of faith form an integral part of Pentecostal worship and faith.”⁸³ Therefore sharing experiences of the *Exercises* with another fits perfectly into a faith tradition where testimony and oral sharing has been the norm, particularly in corporate settings. Bringing that sharing into a communal, contemplative space provides for a different form of engagement with testimony that allows the story to breathe and be formed in the telling of it. The Immersion Experience provided an opportunity for communal sharing in a way that was both familiar and unfamiliar in a Pentecostal context, but with the goal of deepening relationship with Jesus and one another.

⁸³ Scott Ellington, “The Costly Loss of Testimony,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 16 (2000): 48-49, Cited in Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 14.

CHAPTER TWO

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Urban Church is located in the suburb of Mosman Park in Perth which is the capital city of Western Australia. Perth is the most isolated state capital in the world with the next closest capital city being Adelaide located some 2,700 kilometres away. Perth is closer geographically to East Timor and Jakarta than it is to Sydney.¹ Despite its geographical proximity to Asia, it has only been since 2012 that immigration into Australia from Asian countries has increased significantly with Malaysia now replacing Scotland among the top 10 countries of birth and those of Chinese descent making up 4.2 percent of the population.² Perth is the fourth largest state capital city in Australia with a population of over two million people.³ Greater Perth extends along the coast of Western Australia and eastward into the Darling Ranges which is a low escarpment surrounding

¹ Nicholas Gill, “Where is the World’s Most remote City?” *The Guardian*, (August, 19, 2015). Accessed November 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/aug/19/where-worlds-most-remote-city>.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Cultural Diversity in Australia”, *Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia – Stories from the Census, 2016*, (June, 28, 2017). Accessed December 2019. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Cultural%20Diversity%20Data%20Summary~30>.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Regional Population Growth, Australia 2018-2018*. (March, 27, 2019). Accessed December 2019. <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/3218.0>.

the city. The entire metropolitan area covers a distance of some 6,418 kilometres. The central city business district curves around the Swan River, which was so named due to the presence of black swans that frequent the waterways. Urban Church is located in the coastal suburb of Mosman Park which forms part of the region referred to as the “Western Suburbs.”

The Western Suburbs are some of the wealthiest suburbs, in terms of real estate prices and median income, within the metropolitan area. Mosman Park is located on the south end of this region bordering North Fremantle which is another affluent area. Nestled between the river and the beach, Mosman Park is a highly desirable location to live and as such real estate prices are high, attracting professionals and higher income families. Latest Census data indicates that the area has a high degree of residents with Bachelor or higher-level education and above average income.⁴ The broader demographics of the area reflect the traditional immigration patterns of Perth with many residents noting European and in particular English heritage. The Western Suburbs are home to the most elite private schools that were founded on faith-based education. Presbyterian and Methodist Ladies College, along with Anglican Scotch College and Christ Church Cathedral Grammar school are the most noted educational institutions in the area. However, those schools have moved away from their faith-based heritage to focus almost entirely on academics rather than spirituality. The 2016 Census data for Mosman Park reports that thirty-seven percent of the population considers themselves to

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Greater Sydney,” *2016 Census Community Profiles*, (October, 23, 2017). Accessed December 2019. http://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/communityprofile/1GSYD?opendocument.

have no religion, forty-three percent identify as Anglican, Catholic or Uniting and the other twenty percent were unstated.⁵ Therefore, the area has a strong history of faith based educational institutions and churches aligned with either the Anglican and Catholic denomination, yet a large percentage of the population who do not identify with any particular religion. It was into this coastal, well-educated and relatively wealthy suburb that Urban Church was planted and continues to grow.

The History and Growth of Urban Church

Urban Church was planted in September 2013 with a core group of one hundred adults and children who had been drawn particularly from Perth Christian Life Centre, the church in which my husband and I had served on staff for thirteen years. The Western Suburbs of the city was where God led us to plant a church as there were no Pentecostal churches operating in that region and it was a relatively central location for people to reach if they lived beyond the area. During the first four years of operation, most of the congregation travelled to Urban from outside the Western Suburbs as they were passionate about serving the area as well as being drawn to the core values of the church which are “Presence, Worship, and Kingdom”.

In the first years of the church, Urban was based in a local primary school hall where set up and pack down happened each week in true “start-up” church style. In the fifth year of operation, Urban was fortunate enough to find a permanent building which

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Mosman Park”, *2016 Census QuickStats*, (October,23, 2017). Accessed December 2019.
https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC50990?open=document.

was considered to be something of a miracle given the lack of affordable real estate in the area. Since moving into a permanent building, the church has more than doubled in size.

The leadership at Urban Church is passionate about spiritual transformation and focusing on building people, rather than church statistics. Given the Pentecostal environment in which Urban operates and the related quantitative salvific measures traditionally used to ascertain success, it would be fair to say it has been unsuccessful as most of the growth has come from Christians hungry for the style of community being cultivated at Urban rather than from new converts. Over the six years of operation, there has only been a small handful of people coming to faith for the first time, however there have been many who have shifted from a transactional view of faith to a transformational one. While there has been growth from people moving into the area, or immigrating to Australia, most of the growth has come through word of mouth and transfer from other churches. Recently, more residents from the local community have “discovered” Urban including the local Principal of one of the elite private schools in the area. This evokes hope that the church is beginning to be seen as part of the local community, which takes time in the well-established, elite suburbs of Perth.

In 2013 when the church began, there were three staff members, two of which were only part-time, including a youth pastor as reaching the local schools was seen as priority. Six years later, Urban now supports ten staff members and while most are still part-time, this reflects the growth the church has enjoyed. Leadership structures have naturally evolved as growth has required, from a team of six who oversaw the various departments of the church to a larger executive team, department and Sunday team leaders and various small group leaders who all work to fulfil the vision of Urban. Along

with the operational leadership, Urban has a governance board which provides financial oversight for the church as well as an eldership who act as spiritual oversight for the congregation and provide spiritual support to the senior leaders of the church. As the previous two years have seen substantial growth and change in leadership structure, focus on discipleship has been primarily through small groups and an inner healing prayer ministry established in 2018. With the introduction of the Immersion Experience through this project, spiritual formation and discipleship has become a strong focus for the leadership and it is hoped that this focus will eventually, influence the broader church in Perth. It is envisioned that Urban will be known in Perth for its approach to transformational discipleship and a resource for the broader church community who desire to explore contemplative and transformational spirituality.

Presence, Worship, Kingdom

The core identity of Urban is stated as follows:

We are a collaborative that is founded on intimacy with God expressed as a life of worship and hosting His presence. We welcome people in just as they are and partner with them to bring healing and restoration in their lives. We attract and raise up worshippers locally, nationally and across the nations, who are equipped to live a prophetic lifestyle and bring the Kingdom into their own spheres of influence inside and outside of the church environment.⁶

The core values which have shaped this identity statement of Urban are “Presence, Worship and Kingdom”. These values reflect the heart of the church and the way in which the leadership feels called to build our community.

⁶ Urban Church, *Core Identity Statement*, Unpublished pamphlet. Accessed November 2019. <https://www.urbanchurch.com.au/about#identity-statement>.

Presence: God is the desire of every heart and to live with an awareness of his presence is central to Urban's activity. Listening for, being aware of and seeking his presence is the central pursuit of both individual spirituality and corporate gatherings. This means that despite the traditional Pentecostal view of the sermon being the climax of the meeting in order to provide knowledge about God, Urban seeks to follow how God is moving in any particular meeting in order that we might know him through relationship. That means, if the worship time has a particular sense of the presence of God, we will continue to sing or even at times, be silent, rather than move too quickly onto the next element of the service plan. At times, our community can worship for up to an hour which is unusual for the Pentecostal movement of which we are a part because this is considered to be unsuitable for the unchurched person who other churches in our network cater their service toward.

Worship: Urban believes that worship extends to every part of daily life. Worship is far more than music and song; it is a lifestyle that honours God. In the community gathering on a Sunday however, music, song, dance and art are central to our worship expression and we have seen particularly gifted musicians, singers and artists being drawn to Urban as a result.

Kingdom: The truth and immediate availability of the kingdom is foundational to the teaching and the revelation we seek to build upon in and through Urban Church. Teaching provided on a Sunday service and through the small groups during the week is focused on leading the community to live as though his kingdom is a present reality, available now and not only after physical death. The work of Dallas Willard has been an influential source for the teaching and understanding of kingdom life at Urban Church.

Further, embracing a kingdom view of Christianity encourages the church to see herself as a part of the broader expression of the Christian faith in the city of Perth, so breaking the myopic view that our expression is the only one that matters, which is a view that can pervade and reduce our experience of Christianity. This kingdom view of Christianity supports the introduction of Ignatius' writings, which is an approach to spirituality that draws from the Catholic tradition. Catholicism is a tradition that Pentecostals have traditionally been wary of, yet through the Immersion Experience project this suspicious view of Catholicism has been challenged and demonstrated as flawed.⁷

Opportunity for an Ignatian Approach to Spiritual Formation at Urban Church

Urban's identity statement and core values have shaped what we refer to as our "purpose." The purpose of Urban and the opportunity it provides for an Ignatian approach to formation through the Immersion Experience is as follows:

We are focused on Jesus: We are founded on intimacy with God and the secret place. As a community of people who are seeking God, we are led by Him and built by Him both as a local church, and in the way that we impact the community around us.⁸

Intimacy with Jesus rather than knowing about Jesus is central to Urban's purpose. Bringing that desire and pursuit of intimacy into the community initially through the Immersion Experience provided an avenue for deeper intimacy through imaginative contemplation and the various prayer practices offered through this Ignatian-based

⁷ Kilian McDonnell, "Pentecostals and Catholics on Evangelism and Sheep-Stealing," *America* 180, no 7 (March 1999): 11.

⁸ Urban Church, *Core Identity Statement*, Unpublished pamphlet. Accessed November 2019. <https://www.urbanchurch.com.au/about#identity-statement>.

project. Martin notes that one of the core values of Ignatian spirituality is “being contemplatives in action,” thus providing further opportunity to outwork Urban’s purpose as we transform ourselves and the community around us through cultivating a contemplative approach to life and spirituality.⁹ Finding God in all things, including our work in the community is key to extending the kingdom in a practical and contemplative way.

We are Worshippers with Influence: Worship is a core part of everything we do. We see worship as far more than music, but as a lifestyle dedicated to honouring God, and keeping Him at the centre of everything we do. We are drawing people from all over the world who partner with us to record and release music that has an international influence through our own record label, albums, and web broadcasting.¹⁰

Cultivating a lifestyle of worship in our personal lives through the practice of the *Examen* and other Ignatian prayer approaches was a unique and new experience for those who participated in the project. Understanding worship as being a lifestyle that honours God and keeping him at the centre of everything, fits with a daily practice of the *Examen* that also seeks to identify how we have moved towards and away from God throughout the day. Using music as part of the contemplative exercises expanded how sound might influence our awareness of and interaction with God as worshippers who are seeking to deepen our intimacy with him.

⁹ James Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*, (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 9, Kindle.

¹⁰ Urban Church, *Core Identity Statement*, Unpublished pamphlet. Accessed November 2019. <https://www.urbanchurch.com.au/about#identity-statement>.

We Build Strong, Healthy People: Our transformation centre is a place of life, healing and restoration, bringing believers and pre-believers to a place of wholeness, health and strength through providers who speak into spirit, soul and body.¹¹

Urban's transformation centre currently offers prayer ministry for inner healing and has worked to provide a strong foundation for the vision of transformative spirituality. Prayer ministry for inner wholeness has set the tone for the Urban community where pursuing the true self and uncovering the false images and flawed narratives which have shaped one's life and faith is not only expected but celebrated. The Immersion Experience and its focus on transformative spirituality complemented the current prayer ministry offered through the transformation centre at Urban Church. Inner healing prayer has great merit, however in order to live from the place of wholeness, ongoing engagement with spiritual disciplines in order to renew the mind and accompanying thoughts, as well as transformation of soul and spirit is required on a daily basis. This promotes relationship with God rather than only providing an inspirational encounter which occurs in a one-off prayer ministry session.

We Equip, Disciple and Resource: Urban's school is gathering people who are hungry for Him and teaching and equipping them to be sent out to bring God's kingdom to the world around them.¹²

This purpose statement is focused on future endeavours as the Urban School is yet to be formally established. However, we currently host a ministry school for a partner organisation that focuses on inner healing and training in prophetic ministry.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

This ministry school appeals to Pentecostals through its focus on prophetic ministry and has seen many Christians drawn from other Pentecostal churches as well as Urban. Urban's primary discipleship activity has occurred through small groups and one-off teaching seminars offered by both internal and external teachers. The Immersion Experience was the genesis of a more formalised and structured approach to discipleship that brings together passion for transformation to fulfil the stated purpose of Urban.

We Impact our Community for Good: We are a collaborative of different ministries, campuses and outreaches that impact a diverse range of areas inside and outside of the Church but are joined in unity together to see the wealth of the kingdom touch those in many spheres of life.¹³

Community impact has been primarily focused on events and special services offered at Easter and Christmas. It is fair to say that this reflects an attractional model which encourages people to bring others with them to an event or church service at specific times of the year. However, we are seeking to shift the mindset of what mission at Urban looks like, from being something we do, to being something we are. Working to equip people to introduce others to Jesus, rather than the institution of the church is assisting in fulfilling this purpose. We desire to equip people to embody the kingdom in their everyday lives, bringing kingdom influence into whatever sphere they operate and subsequently introducing others to Jesus just through being themselves. Offering a contemplative approach to spirituality which is all about being rather than

¹³ Ibid.

doing is a sound start to produce disciples who look, think and act like Jesus, thus truly impacting the community for good.

Potential Obstacles to an Ignatian Approach to Spiritual Formation

Obstacles to an Ignatian approach to formation in a Pentecostal context, and specifically those elements of the *Exercises* that may cause some to question the content, included the fact that Ignatius, as a Catholic mystic, encourages various colloquies to Mary throughout the *Exercises*. Prayer directly to Mary is something most Pentecostals would take exception to as a result of our evangelical heritage. Evangelicals tend to treat Mary as a symbol of division post Reformation and even one of idolatry, as an “undue extolling of Mary obscures, if it does not contradict, the sole sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the unique Saviour and only mediator between God and human being.”¹⁴ Interestingly, Marian interest is increasing in Evangelical scholarship as it is becoming increasingly obvious that in reaction to excessive Catholic devotion to Mary, the pendulum has swung in Protestant/Evangelical churches to the opposite extreme.¹⁵ This has resulted in discussion about Mary often being received with dissent by Evangelicals and a subsequent lack of honour for her as one who embodied Christ and demonstrated obedience to the will of God in a way that should inspire every Christian.¹⁶ Evangelical discussions regarding the place of Mary in our narrative

¹⁴ Timothy George, “The Blessed Evangelical Mary: Why We Shouldn’t Ignore Her any Longer,” *Christianity Today*, (January 2003), 36; Tim Perry, “Evangelicals and Mary,” *Theology Today* 65, (2008), 226.

¹⁵ George, “The Blessed Evangelical Mary,” 36.

¹⁶ This has been my experience in my Pentecostal context where any discussion of Mary has been muted and treated with suspicion, lest idolatry of her emerge.

of faith is a welcome development, and while outside the scope of this project, perhaps discussing participants' preconceptions regarding Mary and how they might potentially influence their experience of the *Exercises* as a result could prove beneficial to their faith journey. For example, in the gospel scenes where Mary is present, preconceived notions about the danger of interacting with her might cause the participant to avoid considering how she could contribute to their contemplative experience. Through my own experience of the *Spiritual Exercises*, my spiritual director suggested that instead of Mary, I pray to the Holy Spirit so providing a trinitarian formula for prayer and colloquy that is better suited to my Pentecostal context.

Further obstacles include the at times, antiquated and non-inclusive, gender biased language of the *Exercises*. Such language presents difficulties, not only for the Pentecostal but for many contemporary Christian women. Urban Church has many female leaders who would prefer gender inclusive language in order to engage and feel welcomed into the experience of the *Exercises*. Another potential obstacle includes Ignatius's heavy reliance on ritual in terms of times for prayer and his "rules for eating" as well as the references to mortal and venial sins which is foreign to a Pentecostal understanding of sin.¹⁷ However, the *Spiritual Exercises* have existing adaptations written into the prologue with the assertion that they are amenable to changing with the context in which they are engaged. Therefore, those potential

¹⁷ For a Pentecostal, 'sin is sin' – there is no distinction between levels of sin.

aversions can be addressed through adapting the *Exercises* in order to engage the Pentecostal in the experience.

Finally, the aversion to the word “contemplation” occasionally arises in my ministry context. It would appear that contemplative practice has come to be seen as belonging exclusively to the realm of “new-age spirituality” and is therefore received with some suspicion by Pentecostals. Demonstrating the long Christian history of contemplative prayer and practice provides a firm foundation to re-introduce the church to these ancient wells thus assisting in the development of contemplative faith and maturing of spiritual experience. Expanding the myopic view of Pentecostalism in this way allows for ancient truths and practices to re-emerge in contemporary spaces which was my passion and hope for this project.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Three provides a literature review of sources relevant to Ignatian spirituality, the *Spiritual Exercises* and one source that covers Dallas Willard's practical approach to spiritual formation. This chapter begins by exploring two texts including David Fleming's *What is Ignatian Spirituality* which provides an overview of Ignatian spirituality and Wilkie and Noreen Cannon Au's *The Grateful Heart: Living the Christian Message* which expounds on the theme of gratitude from a distinctly Ignatian perspective. Then a specific focus on the *Spiritual Exercises* is considered through David Fleming's *Draw me into Your Friendship* which provides both an original and contemporary translation of the *Exercises*. This text will be offered as an additional resource for those participating in the project. Continued focus on the *Exercises* is considered through William Barry's *Finding God in All Things* which explores the *Exercises* as an approach to spiritual formation in the modern world, as well as his text *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* which is a guide for directors based on Barry's 30-years of experience in leading the *Exercises*. Finally, Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin and Elizabeth Liebert's text *The Spiritual*

Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women is reviewed with a view to demonstrating how the *Exercises* can be reframed through the hermeneutic lens of women's experiences in a way that honours the original text while also embracing that particular interpretive perspective. Finally, Willard's *Renovation of the Heart* provides a practical application of spiritual formation practices that lead to character transformation through a deeper relationship with Christ.

Ignatian Spirituality

What Is Ignatian Spirituality, by David Fleming¹

David Fleming (1934 – 2011) was a Jesuit priest, retreat leader, spiritual director and author of several books on Ignatian spirituality. In *What is Ignatian Spirituality* Fleming provides an overview of Ignatian spirituality utilising the *Spiritual Exercises* as his framework. Rather than focusing on specific pragmatics of the *Exercises*, Fleming expounds Ignatian spirituality in a way that reflects the Ignatian “way of proceeding,” an approach to life and faith based on the thought of Ignatius of Loyola. This “way” reflects Ignatian spirituality as it is more interested in holistic engagement with spiritual principles than prescribed rules for “thinking, praying and behaving.”² Fleming attempts to capture the spirit of this way through a series of short chapters that surmise key themes foundational to the *Exercises* rather than through systematic rules or practices that actually inhibit holistic engagement with the thoughts presented.³ The idea behind his

¹ David Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008).

² *Ibid.*, vii.

³ *Ibid.*

approach is to encourage personal reflection and appropriation of these themes which is more in line with Ignatius's contemplative approach to spirituality.

Ignatian spirituality is a lived experience of faith, a way of being that “offers a vision of life, an understanding of God, a reflective approach to living, a contemplative form of praying, a reverential attitude to our world and an expectation of finding God daily.”⁴ Finding God in all things is at the centre of Ignatian thought. There are as many ways to respond to the invitation to find God in all things as there are human beings. Every person is a unique expression of the image of God after whom they were created and so their response to his invitation and the way in which they interact with him is correspondingly unique. While this interaction cannot be outside the bounds of orthodoxy, there is room for individual expression and as such, Fleming provides for this through presenting the themes in this less systematic and academic manner. His hope in writing this text was to promote an ever-increasing generosity of response to the extravagant love of God and his invitation for deeper relationship.⁵

The unifying vision that underpins Ignatian spirituality is “a vision of life, of work, and of love – a three-part vision that helps us to see what is really true about God, and about the world he created.”⁶ In order to engage with, reflect on and appropriate this vision, Ignatius presents three interrelated meditations that occur at specific times throughout the *Spiritual Exercises*. These meditations are known as the “Principle and

⁴ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* vii.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 1.

Foundation,” the “Call of the King,” and the “Contemplation to Attain Divine Love.”⁷ Each of these meditative exercises calls for reflection and response from the participant as they are presented with questions of purpose, love and contemplative engagement with the world. Engaging with these questions uncovers understandings of self, God and the world that are disordered while simultaneously inviting the participant into the freedom offered through Christ. Fleming orders his book and discussion of the corresponding Ignatian themes under the direction of these three crucial exercises.

Beginning with the Principle and Foundation, Fleming writes that Ignatius is providing for engagement with the truth that “creation is a gift, coming from God and leading toward God.”⁸ Creation itself then, is designed to lead the retreatant to their ultimate end to know, experience and serve the Divine Majesty.⁹ The Principle and Foundation is designed to awaken the retreatant to this truth and so provide the foundation required to explore the ways in which they have turned from their purpose and pursued their own path. The Principle and Foundation is a broad vision of life, asking “what is life all about” while pointing to the source of life as the clear answer.¹⁰ It continues to ask questions of work and life and the values underpinning why one does what they do. Still, the “doing” is not about the specifics of the work, but about whether one is living and working with Christ, in relationship with him, responding to him who is

⁷ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* vii.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹ This is a title Ignatius uses for God and is used in the preparatory prayer undertaken before each exercise.

¹⁰ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* 3.

always active and offering the invitation into partnership with his divine call and vision for the world.¹¹ Finally, the Principle and Foundation presents a vision of love, introduced in this early meditation and consummated in the final “Contemplation to Attain Divine Love.” Love, according to Ignatius is evident through deeds and a shared communion of giving and receiving. Fleming notes: “Lovers love each other by sharing what they have, and this sharing is a form of communication. God is not just a giver of gifts, but a lover who speaks to us through his giving. God holds nothing back.”¹²

God is “love, loving” and the spiritual pilgrimage is about coming to a greater understanding and experience of this love. The image of God as lover is unmistakable in Ignatius’s work and one’s readiness to accept, embrace and respond to this love will affect the way one lives into the invitation of divine communion. This is the purpose of the *Exercises*, and Fleming quotes Ignatius asserting that “they are good for strengthening and supporting us in the effort to respond ever more faithfully to the love of God.”¹³

In light of this foundation of God’s love, sin is seen as a turning away from the face of God who mercifully loves every soul. Such a view results in sorrow for sin, but not shame that brings feelings of unworthiness and can in fact, inhibit response to God’s love.¹⁴ Ignatius provides tools for the spiritual pilgrimage into greater understanding and experience of love through promoting increasing attentiveness to the ways in which God

¹¹ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

is always “inviting, directing, guiding, proposing, suggesting.”¹⁵ Fleming gives an overview of the tools provided by Ignatius to live with ever increasing attentiveness to the presence of God in one’s life and world, including the *Examen*, imaginative contemplation, discernment and missional invitation.

Concluding the text is a restatement of the central consideration of the *Exercises*, which is intimacy with Jesus. The final Contemplation to Attain Divine Love turns attention towards the considerable blessings of God found throughout the world, which Ignatius presents as “love gifts” provided by God, and there to direct us to our ultimate end. In light of such extravagant love, how could we hold anything of ourselves back from this God. Jesus is “all heart” and Fleming concludes by stating,

Heart-of-Christ devotion is truly integral to Ignatian Spirituality. It focuses our attention on the hold-nothing-back love that Jesus has for us. It directs us to the nature of our response to this love – a response of the heart, a whole person response, a response that holds nothing back.¹⁶

Limitations

This text provided a broad overview of the themes of Ignatian spirituality. Whilst useful as an introductory text to Ignatius and his approach to spirituality, its generality does not lend itself to deeper exploration of those themes. Further, it does not provide pragmatic details of how to engage with the *Exercises* in order to experience or cultivate

¹⁵ Ibid., 38.

¹⁶ Ibid., 107.

the themes presented. It assumes an experiential knowledge of the *Exercises* in order to fully engage with the material discussed.

The Grateful Heart: Living the Christian Message, by Wilkie and Noreen Cannon Au¹⁷

Wilkie Au is Professor Emeritus of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University as well as being a spiritual director and an accomplished author of several books about Christian spirituality. Noreen Cannon is a Jungian therapist, an adjunct professor in the Department of Theology at Loyola Marymount University and has co-written several books with Wilkie. Their books are informed by an Ignatian approach to spirituality and demonstrate how Ignatian themes can shape spiritual transformation. In their book *The Grateful Heart*, they particularly focus on the theme of gratitude and argue that gratitude is foundational in the pursuit of inner maturity and spiritual stability. Gratitude when viewed through this referential frame, is not a fleeting feeling experienced in response to external stimuli, but an internal disposition that requires “a progressive transformation from the external behaviour of ‘good boys and girls’ intent on adult approval to a deeply internalised value of mature adults.”¹⁸ The development of a disposition of gratitude is therefore the path to “loving like Jesus.”¹⁹

Drawing on the fields of positive psychology and theology, together with Ignatian spirituality, Au and Au demonstrates the benefits of a disposition of gratitude for the

¹⁷ Wilkie and Noreen Cannon Au, *The Grateful Heart: Living the Christian Message*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2011). Kindle.

¹⁸ Ibid., introduction, sec 2.

¹⁹ Ibid., introduction, sec 5.

Christian who thirsts for spiritual transformation. The introduction includes an engrossing discussion about the practicalities of a life of love, framed as “Living Christian Faith” which embraces both the ascetical and aesthetical approaches to faith and results in “a spirituality of gratitude.”²⁰ Further, they argue that a spirituality of gratitude is matured through undertaking Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises* which encourages the retreatant to “remember the benefits received, of creation, redemptions and particular gifts.”²¹ The text goes on to note “The *Spiritual Exercises* provides a rich illustration of how gratitude enables us to acknowledge the love of God in all its manifestations – not only in creation, but also in life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.”²² For Ignatius then, it was gratitude that opened the path to experiencing the love of God in a way that lead to spiritual transformation. This transformative path is particularly made available through an experience of the *Spiritual Exercises* and therefore, his *Exercises* aimed to foster a disposition of gratitude in the retreatant through meditation and contemplation of the various manifestations of the love of God that are both evident in the biblical witness, and also in and around daily life. Awareness of the demonstrative love of God naturally evokes gratitude in the retreatant which Ignatius believed was the appropriate response.

Chapter One discusses gratitude as a “life-giving practice” and begins by offering the grateful leper in Luke’s gospel as an example of one who demonstrated a disposition of gratitude that both included and transcended his being grateful for his physical healing. The leper recognised the blessing of his healing but beyond that, experienced an

²⁰ Ibid., introduction, sec 5 – 7.

²¹ Ibid., introduction, sec 9.

²² Ibid.

awakening to the goodness of life.²³ This awakening was the outcome of a grateful disposition that predisposes the heart to notice the prevalence of beauty and to be sensitive to the presence of God in all things. Spirituality with gratitude at its centre “recognizes the gift-nature of everything,”²⁴ and allows its influence to reverberate throughout our being in a way that William C. Spohn called “the echo of grace.”²⁵

William (Bill) Spohn was a personal friend of the Au’s and the story of his journey toward physical death due to brain cancer provided the framework for chapter two. Chapter two details the immediate influence that the *Spiritual Exercises*, which “Bill” completed twice during his lifetime as a Jesuit of thirty-two years, had on this poignant time. The depth of transformation that the *Exercises* afforded Bill is testament to their power as Au and Au note “The *Spiritual Exercises*, can facilitate an experience of spiritual transformation by deepening our faith in God’s love and by expanding our awareness of how richly we have been blessed by a good and giving God.”²⁶ One’s response to this revelatory experience of God’s love is naturally gratitude which Ignatius saw as the avenue to spiritual transformation.

Moving through the various weeks and contemplations of the *Exercises*, Au and Au demonstrate how gratitude is at the heart of them all and so provides the impetus for transformation in the person who engages with them. For Bill, the impact each movement of the *Exercises* had on his spiritual life provided the strength he required to end his

²³ Ibid., chap 1, sec 2.

²⁴ Ibid., chap 2, sec 1.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., chap 2, sec 2.

earthly sojourn with peace and dignity that not only infused his spirit, but the spirit of the others who were fortunate enough to walk with him during that time. The text goes on in chapter two to suggest Bill was able to embrace his own death with such faith because he had a knowledge of the love of God that was more than “conceptual or notional”²⁷ it was “heart-felt and affective.”²⁸ This is the intended end of the *Exercises*, and as Bill had moved through them twice, they provided him with an experiential knowledge of love that sustained him to the end.

Chapter three highlights how gratitude must permeate the lens through which one views the world in order to anticipate God being present in all things. One of the ways this vision is nurtured is through imaginative contemplation that engages the imagination to experience how God is present through the biblical stories, which in turn trains one’s awareness to notice how he is present throughout our own story.²⁹ The transformative power of this practice cannot be overstated as they state “When our contemplation shifts from imaginative role-playing to spontaneous identification, we are drawn into a graced encounter with the risen Christ today.”³⁰ This builds intimacy and relationship that extends beyond the pages of Scripture and into our lives which effectively transforms our life experiences into encounters with grace.

²⁷ Ibid., chap 2, sec 5.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., chap 3, sec 2.

³⁰ Ibid.

The other chapter that has particular relevance for this project is the final chapter entitled “Ordinary Mysticism and Gratefulness” which opens with a quote from the twentieth-century Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner “The Christian of the future will either be a mystic, one who has experienced something, or he will cease to be anything at all.”³¹ Essentially, this statement views the mystic as one who has an experiential knowledge of God, cultivated through firsthand encounter. Therefore, it could be argued that this project, with the goal of developing a contemplative paradigm of finding God in all things, understanding spiritual transformation as necessitating holistic engagement and based on the Pentecostal expectation of encounter, invited participants into a “mysticism” of everyday life. Au and Au supports this view of mysticism, asserting that it is something which enables “ordinary Christians, who are alert, awake, and attentive, to experience the movements of God’s Spirit in the encounters of daily life.”³² One of the ways of cultivating this approach to life and spirituality is the practice of the *Examen* which is outlined in the final chapter and was an important practice for this project. This chapter concludes with an overview of the contemplative paradigm of finding God in all things which requires “growing in gratefulness”³³ and according to Ignatius “requires us to spot traces of grace that saturate our world, to recognise in concrete ways that grace abounds in our lives – in small and big ways.”³⁴

³¹ Ibid., chap 7, sec 1.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., chap 7, sec 2.

³⁴ Ibid.

Limitations

The early chapters of this text provided a strong foundation for gratitude as an Ignatian practice and theme which underpins Ignatian spirituality. In particular, chapter two which takes the reader on a journey with “Bill” who draws on his Ignatian heritage and experience of the *Exercises* to face his impending physical death, provided valuable insight into the profound impact that the lived experience of Ignatian spirituality can have on an individual. However, the central chapters are more general in nature and did not provide specific input for this project. While there is a return to overt discussion of Ignatian themes toward the end of the text, particularly in the final chapter, the value of this text for the Immersion Experience project was primarily found in the early chapters and informed the teaching on gratitude in week four of this project.

The Spiritual Exercises

Draw Me into Your Friendship: A Literal Translation and Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises, by David Fleming³⁵

David Fleming provides both a literal and contemporary reading of the *Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius* in this text. His purpose in writing this text was to “provide a truly contemporary reading which allows directors and retreatants an easy identity and application.”³⁶ The traditional and gender-biased language of the original *Exercises* can

³⁵ David L. Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship: A Literal Translation and Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises*, (St Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, v.

be both intimidating for retreatants and potentially offensive for women who could feel excluded by the masculine dominated language. Therefore, this text is a valuable resource for those who feel more comfortable with this accessible and inclusive language.

The *Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius* are based on a thirty-day retreat that involves various spiritual practices with the purpose as stated by Ignatius to be:

The first annotation is that by this name of Spiritual Exercises is meant every way of examining one's conscience, of meditating, of contemplating, of praying vocally and mentally, and of performing other spiritual actions...[for] disposing the soul to rid itself of all the disordered tendencies, and, after it is rid, to seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one's life for the salvation of the soul.³⁷

The various practices found within the *Exercises* are provided to lead the participant into greater spiritual freedom and increased capacity to respond to the leading of God in their life. To this end, Ignatius organised his *Spiritual Exercises* into three primary sections. The first is what he refers to as "Annotations," which contain guidelines for the director as well as providing various adaptations that may be required according to the context and circumstance in which the *Exercises* are undertaken. Annotation nineteen allows for the *Exercises* to be undertaken in daily life rather than the full thirty-day retreat as per the traditional engagement. Fleming refers to these adaptations as "Some Preliminary Helps" offered to support directors and retreatants through providing greater insight into the four Weeks that follow.

³⁷ Ibid., 4.

The *Exercises* themselves are organised into Weeks, although that term is not used as reference to seven days per se, but as a measure of time that separates the meditations into the various stages of Christ's earthly life. Fleming states,

The first week is set in the context of God's creative love, its rejection by each of us through sin, and God's reconciling mercy in Jesus. The second week centers on the life of Jesus, from its beginnings through his public ministry. The third week fixes upon that very special time in Jesus' life – his passion, crucifixion, and death. The fourth week considers the risen Christ and the world which has been renewed in his victory.³⁸

Scattered through the Weeks are three meditative exercises described in Fleming's previously considered text *What Is Ignatian Spirituality*, that include "The Principle and Foundation," "The Call of the King" and "The Contemplation to Attain Divine Love." The third section of the *Exercises* contains supplementary material covering methods of prayer, guidelines for discernment, for sharing of wealth and possessions and finally guidelines for re-engagement with the world and the church following the retreat.

The *Spiritual Exercises* were the central text for the Immersion Experience as the project focused on taking participants through the first Week of the *Exercises* as per the nineteenth annotation. Fleming's contemporary translation was offered in addition to the traditional text to provide greater opportunity for engagement, particularly for those who are uncomfortable with the traditional language. His text helped to bridge the gap between sixteenth century language and contemporary application. The participants of the Immersion Experience were taken through the Principle and Foundation, the First Week or movement of the *Exercises* and the Call of The King meditation as introductory

³⁸ Ibid., 7.

experiences to the *Exercises*. In addition to these elements, participants were introduced to discernment for decision making as well as being continually encouraged throughout the exercises to develop an increased awareness of the movements within their soul that Ignatius refers to as consolation and desolation. It was anticipated that these practices would provide the foundation for discernment as a way of life.

Limitations

This text is presented for the original thirty-day retreat format of the *Exercises* and therefore required adaption to be used as per the nineteenth adaptation for daily life. Further, it did not provide any preparatory exercises which would have been useful for the opening weeks of the project. Finally, adaption of the specific exercises was required in order to appropriate the Catholic theology and practice within. For example, prayer to Mary was not be suited to a Pentecostal context. However, the generosity of Ignatius's openness to adaptation demonstrates the spirit of the *Exercises* which is to invite all who would answer the invitation to deeper relationship through participation in this glorious pilgrimage.

Finding God in All Things: A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, by

William Barry³⁹

³⁹ William A. Barry, SJ, *Finding God in All Things: A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*, (Ave Maria Press: Notre Dame: IN, 1991). Kindle.

William Barry is a Jesuit priest, spiritual director and writer. Barry's purpose in providing a companion text to the *Spiritual Exercises* was to counter the view that the *Exercises* are something "esoteric, something reserved for novices or vowed members of religious communities, for holy people, or at least for people who can get away to a retreat house for an extended time."⁴⁰ This view renders the *Exercises* inaccessible and potentially irrelevant to the contemporary church meaning the treasure they are has been kept from the church.⁴¹ His goal in writing this text was to "invite readers to consider how they might use the Spiritual Exercises to benefit their relationship with God."⁴² Each of the ten chapters covers a section of the *Spiritual Exercises* demonstrating how they assist people to find God in all things. "Ignatius believed that we encounter God at every moment of our existence. The Spiritual Exercises are various methods to help us to become more and more aware of this ever-present God."⁴³

The first chapter provides a particularly useful summary of some of Ignatius' presuppositions which underpin his approach to spirituality and can be identified flowing through the *Exercises*. One of the main and foundational Ignatian presuppositions is that God desires a personal relationship with every human being and so his every action in the world, including the act of Creation is intended to bring about deeper relationship with him. The *Exercises* rest on "the theological assumption that God creates this universe

⁴⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 20.

precisely in order to invite other persons into the relational life of the Trinity.⁴⁴ They are therefore designed to bring us into greater awareness of this truth, thus amplifying our desire to develop a deeper relationship with this “self-communicating God.”⁴⁵

Throughout each chapter of this text, Barry provides practical examples of how people have experienced and benefited from the various elements of the *Spiritual Exercises*, making them both relevant and accessible for the church today and a valuable tool for this project.

Chapter one begins by exploring one of the more common forms of resistance to intimacy with God all of which are the result of “false or inaccurate teachings about God” producing false or inaccurate images of God embedded often in the subconscious mind of the retreatant.⁴⁶ The desire to participate in the *Exercises* is one thing, but pressing deeper into a relationship with a God who is perceived to be judgemental or cruel is another. Barry discusses Pierre Favre, a friend of Ignatius who desired to journey through the *Exercises* but was refused by Ignatius until he was able to let go of his belief that God was a “terrifying snoop,” ready to unleash his wrath upon Favre at any time.⁴⁷ After years of working with Favre to release this image, Ignatius eventually took him through the *Exercises* as he genuinely desired closeness to God, who he now perceived as loving and kind. While working through deeply embedded images of God was beyond the scope of

⁴⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

this project, it was important to recognise that each participant came into the experience with presuppositions about God that may have influenced their ability to continue. Barry states that “ultimately, in order to desire with real passion more intimacy with God we need to love God, to be attracted to God. No one is attracted to a snoop or a tyrant. We need a deep experience of God who really is attractive.”⁴⁸ The Immersion Experience had the goal of the “enjoyment of God” at its centre and so sought to ensure each participant experienced love as the foundation of holistic spiritual formation.

In the second chapter Barry discusses the Principle and Foundation as the Ignatian vision for the spiritual life, demonstrating how this potentially dry, theological statement is actually highly experiential and grounded in everyday life. If God is able to meet the longings of every heart, while being the author of those longings, then he is to be found in the experiences of everyday life and not in dry theological statements. One of those experiences considered universal within humanity is “desire,” specifically the desire for “I know not what, experiences which are also accompanied by a feeling of great well-being.”⁴⁹ Such experiences have drawn great thinkers such as C. S. Lewis into relationship with God and continue to call the hearts of people desiring purpose, love and the fulfillment of a “with-God” life that Jesus offers.⁵⁰ Identifying, embracing and exploring desire was a strong component of the Immersion experience.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 34.

Chapter three discusses the importance of understanding the love of God as foundational to the experience of the *Exercises*. This is particularly important when considering sin and the way in which one has turned from that love in Week one. Without the belief that we are all “loved sinners,” the images of God as judgemental and vengeful will inhibit full engagement with the *Exercises* which is why “it is important to spend so much time helping people to have a foundational experience of the God who creates us out of love, who desires us as the apple of his eye.”⁵¹ This understanding evokes a sense of sorrow for sin, but not despair as it is considered in light of the “love for a God who has been so good to us even though he knows us through and through.”⁵² Freedom from the weight of sin begins to be a felt reality as this truth is embraced.

Chapter six discusses how Ignatius recognised that God used his imagination to “draw him to God’s service. If God can be found in daydreams, then God can be found in every human experience.”⁵³ Imaginative contemplation forms a large part of the experience of the *Exercises* as a result of Ignatius’s own experience, who realised that the imagination was a doorway into the world of the gospel stories, thus providing a space for encountering Jesus.⁵⁴ Utilising the imagination provides for an experiential approach to formation as retreatants explore how they respond to the scene in front of them. As that occurs, and through ongoing reflection, disordered attachments and resistances to deeper relationship are uncovered which are inhibiting spiritual freedom. Overall, Barry’s text

⁵¹ Ibid., 44.

⁵² Ibid., 51.

⁵³ Ibid., 77.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 78.

was a useful practical guide contributing to the experience of the Immersion Experience as it provided an overview of each key component as being both accessible and easy to engage with.

Limitations

William Barry discusses the importance of ensuring people are ready to participate in the *Exercises*, and even highlights some of the common issues that arise for people such as dysfunctional images of God and disordered attachments. However, he assumes an experiential knowledge of the *Exercises* in order to fully appreciate this discussion and so does not provide specific practices to counter the issues that may arise throughout the journey.

Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, by William Barry⁵⁵

William Barry notes that he writes this text for directors guiding people through the *Spiritual Exercises*, with the purpose of “stimulating their own creative directing or by being a foil against which they can joust to deepen people’s understanding and experience of this tremendous tool.”⁵⁶ Drawing on his own extensive experience of guiding the *Exercises*, Barry presents the way he leads people through them in the hope that it might provide a tool for “people who seek God, who want to let the Creator deal

⁵⁵ William A. Barry, SJ, *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, xi.

immediately with them.”⁵⁷ Therefore, while the specific target audience is directors, there is also scope for the text to encourage all people who hunger for God and are open to having God satisfy that hunger.⁵⁸ While the approach provided in this text specifically covers the thirty-day retreat, the elements discussed are applicable to any annotation of the *Exercises* as Barry describes his approach.

Assuming those undertaking the *Exercises* have a strong desire to develop and deepen their relationship with God, Barry begins with what he describes as the “affective” Principle and Foundation. The premise behind this approach is that as retreatants remember experiences of “desiring we know not what, periods of great well-being accompanied by a yearning for Mystery itself,”⁵⁹ those memories and related affections are brought to the fore, creating a favourable disposition to engage in the practices that follow. This is so important for Barry, that he seeks to ascertain whether a person has had adequate positive experiences of God before agreeing to direct them through the *Exercises*. If not, there are a number of Psalms that focus on being desired into existence that Barry has the retreatant meditate on in order to build a foundation of love for what follows.

After providing a general overview of each of the Weeks and the approach taken to move through them, Barry then discusses the role of desire in the *Spiritual Exercises* and specifically how desire can be used as a diagnostic tool to determine which stage of

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 5.

the *Exercises* someone is currently in. Determining desire will determine whether a retreatant is in, or ready for a particular week. Without a desire to truly know God, which can only be present if there is a belief that God is good and loving, it is not recommended to move into the first Week. Further, a desire to really know Jesus, “his values, his emotions, his dreams, his apostolate” is required to fully enter the second Week.⁶⁰ Again, desire determines entry into the third Week, where here it is to contemplate and as far as possible, to share in Jesus’ passion.⁶¹ Therefore, the continual consideration of desire to determine a retreatant’s readiness for each stage is crucial both for retreatant and director.

The final chapter considers the “Contemplation to Attain Divine Love” which Barry suggests is an apt conclusion to the *Exercises* although, while it provides four points as per previous meditations, this is specifically a contemplation and should be approached as such.⁶² “Ignatius expects that retreatants will have arrived at the point where they desire experiences of God that will inflame their hearts with a greater love for God.”⁶³ This is an experience of awakened consciousness and profound awareness of the presence of God in one’s life that calls for generous response on behalf of the retreatant.⁶⁴ This experience has a mystical sense resulting in “interior knowledge” as a response to the divine revelation.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 175.

⁶³ Ibid., 176.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Interior knowledge is not accessible through study of the gospels or theology, it is a gift given by God rather than obtained through personal effort. Ignatius believed these experiences of God, of “interior knowledge” are available to all who so desires, as he himself experienced a mystical encounter with God while still a spiritual novice and without theological training.⁶⁶ Barry writes,

I have recently come to believe that God’s intention for the universe, God’s kingdom or rule, if you will, comes not so much by heroic deeds of the saints, not so much by action to create a more just world, but by the willingness to each one of us to let God come close, to let God become our intimate friend. The rule of God comes about through friendship, through the love of friendship. As each one of us accepts this friendship, we are transformed. The more intimate we allow God to become, the more like God we become.⁶⁷

This is a simple, yet profound statement that sums up the invitation the *Spiritual Exercises* offer in terms of spiritual formation. Viewing transformation as the natural overflow of an intimate friendship with God removes the trying, the striving and the formulaic nature of formation that can influence Pentecostal spirituality. Taking this approach opens a new and contemplative approach to formation as we determine to “let God come close.”

Limitations

This text is specifically written for experienced retreat guides who lead the original thirty-day retreat. Therefore, adaption for daily life and for a more introductory

⁶⁶ Ibid., 177.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 183.

experience which this project offered had to be considered. Barry speaks of the role of desire in determining whether a retreatant is ready for each successive movement within the *Exercises*. He provided some detail about an “affective Principle and Foundation” exercise which is a useful preparatory task to undertake prior to commencing the First Week, however he did not offer any further practical advice on how to discern adequate desire present within a retreatant to move them through the subsequent Weeks.

The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women, by Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin and Elizabeth Liebert⁶⁸

Katherine Dyckman (1931-2015) and Mary Garvin (1939-2013) and Elizabeth Liebert are all Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (S.N.J.M), spiritual directors, academics and authors. Elizabeth Liebert is currently Professor of Spiritual life, Emerita at the San Francisco Theological Seminary. These three women share a passion for the way in which the *Spiritual Exercises* invite people into a “direct experience of God,”⁶⁹ in a way that results in radical spiritual transformation. However, the *Exercises* were unavoidably influenced by the worldview and outlook of Ignatius’s day which is reflected in his text. In particular, the hierarchical power of the church, the military-heavy metaphors employed throughout, and the male gendered language of the *Exercises* may cause contemporary seekers to overlook the text, critiquing their applicability to contemporary spirituality and in particular, the spirituality of women. In response to this

⁶⁸ Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin and Elizabeth Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Liberating Possibilities for Women*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), Kindle.

⁶⁹ Ibid., preface, sec 1.

critique, Dyckman, Garvin and Liebert set out to explore the *Exercises* through the “hermeneutical key” of women’s experience in order to reclaim them as they believe that they continue to offer both women and men a liberating spiritual experience today. To that end, they state that their book “springs from a desire to help redress an ancient imbalance and to open new perspectives on what it means to come ‘to the measure of the full stature of Christ’ (Eph 4:13).”⁷⁰

The text is effectively organised into three sections. The first five chapters are foundational for the commentary on the *Exercises* to come. Chapters six through to nine explore the four Weeks of the *Exercises*, and ten to twelve cover the rules for discernment of Spirits, the matter of election and the rules for thinking within the church. Included as an appendix is a unique “imaginative reappropriation of the Spiritual Exercises” in the form of a morality play where the central character “AnyWoman” is introduced to the characters and companions she will encounter through her journey through the *Exercises*. This play provides an overview and experiential encounter with the *Exercises* in a creative and imaginative way for the reader who is encouraged to place themselves in the story as “AnyWoman.”

The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed provides a useful guide to engage with the *Spiritual Exercises* themselves and is particularly useful in demonstrating their adaptability through the application of a feminist lens which breaks down the perceived barriers to engaging with them in a contemporary context. In fact, the authors open the first chapter with the bold statement that “The *Spiritual Exercises* have surprisingly

⁷⁰ Ibid., preface, sec 2.

liberating possibilities for contemporary women.”⁷¹ Of course, those possibilities do not negate the difficulties already noted and while they should not be ignored, the spirituality that flows from the *Exercises* supersedes the difficulties implicit within. That spirituality flowing from the *Exercises* promotes the following values,

- 1) The value of the human experience shared with another; 2) the value of a spirituality of the whole person; 3) the value of a spirituality grounded in Scripture; 4) the value of prayer in life, of contemplation in action; and 5) the value of adaptability and flexibility as signs of authentic spirituality.⁷²

These values were particularly applicable to the Immersion Experience as participants shared their experience with one another; the project promoted a holistic approach to spirituality; Scripture was central to the exercises engaged with throughout the project; prayer and contemplation was a continual theme for this project; and adaptability and flexibility were foundational concepts. Dyckman et al discuss these values in the opening chapter, which along with chapters three to six were most relevant for this project.

In chapter one, the discussion around how “stories shape lives” and particularly how the opportunity to tell one’s story in a communal setting is a liberating spiritual experience provided insight not only into how important this practice is for women who would not ordinarily have space held for them to speak without the hinderance of time or judgement, but for all participants of this project, both men and women who had such an opportunity through the contemplative listening groups. Dyckman et al note “in the context of the *Spiritual Exercises*, each person *listens* to her own experience in all its

⁷¹ Ibid., chap 1, sec 1.

⁷² Ibid.

aspects, not just in areas she would name as religious.”⁷³ This validates her experience and contributes to the development of the contemplative paradigm of finding God in all things. Giving voice to one’s experience in a shared space where there is mutual validation is a potentially life-giving experience for all. It is values like these which continue to make the *Spiritual Exercises* a relevant and attractive prospect for contemporary spiritual seekers.

Chapter three explores the way in which the *Exercises* can and should be adapted for those who undertake them. This is explored through the hermeneutic of women’s experience which flows throughout the text and in so doing, provides for a Pentecostal hermeneutic which would grapple with the same issues of language, church structure and the military heavy metaphors. Dyckman, Garvin and Liebert note that the one facilitating the *Exercises* has the responsibility for adapting them so to “reverence the culture of the *Exercises* from deep personal experience and love, to reverence the reality of the one desiring to make the *Exercises* and to bring these two ‘cultures’ together in a way that respects both.”⁷⁴ This project attempted to draw together Ignatian and Pentecostal spirituality and so required adaptation of the *Exercises* with a responsibility to ensure both Ignatian and Pentecostal cultures are honoured in the experience of those participating. This text provided permission for such an endeavour through the hermeneutical lens the authors have adopted, thus demonstrating a sound prototype for

⁷³ Ibid., chap 1, sec 2.

⁷⁴ Ibid., chap 3, sec 9.

exploring the *Exercises* using a unique, and in this project's case, a Pentecostal hermeneutic.

Chapter five provides an overview of Ignatian approaches to prayer and explores problems and possibilities for women present in each approach. Those problems and possibilities are easily identifiable and could be applied to all participants of this project, both men and women. Therefore, the ways to address each problem was also applicable for the Immersion Experience, and perhaps particularly so in the area of imaginative contemplation. Many people struggle to believe they have a visual imagination, or in a Pentecostal context, are suspicious of its influence. The authors suggest some ways to demonstrate how the imagination is always active and how it can contribute to deeper engagement with Scripture and an intimate relationship with Jesus. To address this difficulty, the authors offer an example of a guided imaginative encounter between a woman and a crafted statue of herself. In this encounter she is asked to contemplate this statue while standing in the presence of Jesus. This guided encounter often results in revelatory and liberating experiences as the participant encounters God through the avenue of their imagination. Therefore, this exercise opens the possibility that Jesus can, and is speaking through the imagination which acts to make participants more comfortable with the Ignatian prayer practices employed throughout this project.

Limitations

This text provided a unique perspective on the *Exercises* through the particular hermeneutical lens it employed. That perspective was useful as it provided permission to reimagine the *Exercises* for a contemporary context in a way that honoured the original

text and present-day Pentecostal spirituality. However, the Immersion Experience included both men and women and took place in an Australian context, so there were some elements of this text that did not immediately translate. Further, given the text goes through the entire *Exercises* and this project only moved through the first movement, there were only select chapters which were immediately applicable. That said, there is much insight to be gained from these three women who demonstrate a passion for the transformative experience of the *Exercises* and provided a space for the marginalised voice of women in Ignatian spirituality writing.

Spiritual Formation

Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ, by Dallas Willard⁷⁵

Dallas Willard (1935 – 2013) was a philosopher and a highly respected author who has written a number of books exploring spiritual formation and discipleship practices for the Christian life. In *Renovation of the Heart* Willard states that the promise of divine life and the divine world as presented in the New Testament is not only a future promise, but present reality, available to the Christian today. However, despite its ready availability, most Christians “generally only find their way into this divine life slowly and with great difficulty, if at all.”⁷⁶ This suggests there is a general lack of comprehension regarding the “with God” life and more specifically how to live that kind of life among Christians today. Desire and intention for the divine life is one thing, but without the

⁷⁵ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), Kindle.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

understanding of “exactly what needs to be done and how it can be accomplished,” the realisation of such a life will be lacking.⁷⁷ The Christian must live as apprentices to Jesus, learning his ways, gleaning his thoughts and allowing it all to transform the inner world in order to live into and from the divine life promised through Jesus. Ultimately, this transformation is one of the heart or spirit, that invisible part of ourselves which drives and organises our lives, hence the title of the book *Renovation of the Heart*.

This renovation is another term for Christian spiritual formation which Willard describes as “the Spirit-driving process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”⁷⁸ Therefore, the transformative process is entirely focused on Jesus and occurs through interaction and intimacy enjoyed with him.⁷⁹ Willard divides the book into two halves with the first exploring themes of spiritual formation and the second unpacking how the ‘six basic elements of the human life’ are impacted or transformed through this process. Those six elements include,

1. Thought (images, concepts, judgments, inferences)
2. Feeling (sensation, emotion)
3. Choice (will, decision, character)
4. Body (action, interaction with the physical world)
5. Social context (personal and structural relations to others)
6. Soul (the factor that integrates all of the above to form one life)⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 29-30.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 30.

The goal of Christian formation is to organise each of these elements around God, so loving him with all of the heart, soul, strength and mind and our neighbour as ourselves.⁸¹ Understanding the process of transformation through exploration of these elements provides a holistic and whole-life approach to the gospel which is a theme Willard so aptly writes through many of his books. The discussion of each element of human life and how it is transformed through relationship with Christ was explored through the Immersion Experience project.

Throughout the project, the experiences arising from the *Exercises* were understood through the lens of whole life transformation as discussed by Willard. His presentation of transformation in this text demystifies spiritual formation and provided a pragmatic exploration of ongoing sanctification, which is the ACC, Pentecostal position. While Pentecostals give assent to progressive sanctification, there is little teaching on how this process actually occurs. Willard fills that gap here and writes, “once the spirit comes alive in God, the lengthy processes of subduing all aspects of self under God can begin. This is the process of spiritual formation viewed in its entirety.”⁸²

The practical dimension of spiritual formation is the focus of chapter five where Willard discusses the VIM (vision, intention, means) model of formation. The vision is of the “with-God” life, or life in the kingdom. Kingdom life is a life lived under the reign of Christ, enjoying his presence, partaking of the divine nature and

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 41.

participating in the activity of God as it occurs now, on earth (2 Pet 1:4; 1 Jn 3:1-2).⁸³

But vision alone is not enough, there must be intention to see it realised. Intention is the fuel required to pursue the seen reality. Intention is a mechanism of our will; it is a choice we make that will determine whether or not the vision is fulfilled. The final aspect of the model is the means. The means are all the ways by which we pursue the vision, however it is never about “trying” or striving, nor about gritting our teeth or clenching our fists in fierce determination that ultimately sees us attempting spiritual transformation in our own strength. Rather, the means are all the spiritual practices that open one to the transforming presence of Christ on a regular basis. The futility of attempting to live like Jesus in our own strength is evident when we attempt to respond to a situation as Jesus would yet discover we do not have the inner disposition to do so. What is required is “training off the spot,” engaging each of the elements of life in the process of transformation to truly live the kind of life Jesus would if he were living ours.

Throughout the second half of the book the six elements of human life are considered in light of the VIM model with a view to how it leads to holistic spiritual transformation. This assists in the process undertaken through the *Exercises* nicely through providing a practical framework through which to consider the areas of life that might be under the influence of a disordered attachment or are not free to respond to the vision of a “with-God” life. Willard breaks each component down demonstrating

⁸³ Ibid., 86.

how one can move from “self-worship to Christ-centred self-denial as a general condition of life in God’s present and eternal kingdom.”⁸⁴

In chapter six he discusses the transformation of the mind and in particular how that process uncovers images of God and self that are disordered or in opposition to the vision of kingdom life. This was a particularly useful chapter for the opening weeks of the Immersion Experience as the participant’s images of God and underlying beliefs about his goodness and love were crucial for those participating in the *Exercises*, as per William Barry and John English’s text. Willard’s quote of Tozer sums up the importance of the images of God as follows,

That our idea of God corresponds as nearly as possible to the true being of God is of immense importance to us. Compared with our actual thoughts about Him, our creedal statements are of little consequence. Our real idea of God may lie buried under the rubbish of conventional religious notions and may require an intelligent and vigorous search before it is finally unearthed and exposed for what it is....A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practice Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple.⁸⁵

Limitations

Dallas Willard provides a thorough overview of a holistic approach to formation in this text; however, he does not specifically discuss Ignatian spirituality or provide comment on the *Exercises*. Therefore, the themes of formation he discusses

⁸⁴ Ibid., 77.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 99, quoting A.W Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 10.

needed to be applied to the specific context in which this project was undertaken with both Ignatian and Pentecostal spirituality shaping the formation experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

A THEOLOGY FOR THE IMMERSION EXPERIENCE

The Immersion Experience was developed in light of theological concepts that inform Ignatian Spirituality and Christian spiritual formation, as well as those which have shaped the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*. Specifically, the project focused upon the felt knowledge or experience of the love of God as fundamental to spiritual transformation and the importance of self-awareness to that transformative process. Self-awareness was explored through the Ignatian concept of being “a loved sinner” as per the central theme of the First Week of the *Exercises*. In addition, the contemplative approach to spirituality referred to as finding God in all things was considered along with the way in which Ignatian prayer practices facilitated such an approach to the spiritual life.

The theological concepts which were central to this project were easily translated into the Pentecostal context in which this project was implemented. This was particularly so for Ignatian prayer practices and the *Spiritual Exercises* once they were reframed as being prophetic practices or tools for training to live a prophetic life. When viewed through this prophetic lens, they hold particular appeal for the Pentecostal as discussed earlier. Living a prophetic life is another way to describe a conversational relationship

with God, or a life of intimate communion developed through cultivating an intentional awareness of his presence. Therefore, Ignatian spirituality and the contemplative approach to spiritual life that it nurtures has much to offer the Pentecostal.

The Love of God as Foundational to Spiritual Transformation

The apostle John writes in his first epistle “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8)¹ as a description of God’s very being. Love is not an attribute he possesses - it is his very definition. Wilkie and Noreen Cannon Au, quoting French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil say “‘God is love in the same way an emerald is green.’ This means that God is love through and through.”² John’s gospel continues by asserting that those who truly know God are not only acquainted with his love, nor merely given their cognitive assent to God’s love as a concept, instead, they have experienced the love of God and allowed it to transform their being as evidenced through how they live and love - both themselves and others. The process of spiritual transformation then, is precipitated through consistently experiencing God’s love and allowing that experience to reveal one’s true identity as a sinner who is mercifully loved.

Paul writes about the holistic transformation that the experience of God’s love offers to believers in his letter to the Ephesians 3:17-19, where he prays that they would be “rooted and grounded in [God’s] love” that they might “know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you might be filled with the fullness of God.” The knowledge

¹ Scripture references will be drawn from the English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise stated.

² Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au, *God’s Unconditional Love: Healing Our Shame*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), chap 2, sec 3, Kindle.

that fills, referred to in this verse, is experiential rather than informational. This is evidenced by Paul's use of the Greek word *gnosis* (a knowing) in verse 19 which means "knowledge gleaned from firsthand (personal) experience; or an experiential knowing."³ This experiential knowledge then, is the very foundation for a life filled with and transformed by Christ. Benner writes that "a little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about him. Transformational knowing of God only comes through an intimate personal knowing of Divine love. Because God is love, God can only be known through love. To know God is to love God, and to love God is to know God."⁴ Therefore, to commune intimately with God is to be transformed, as any encounter with divine love that "fills" one's being, is by nature, transformative.

Love provided the impetus for God's most stunning action - the incarnation, when love became embodied in the person of Jesus Christ who demonstrated the love of God as both inexhaustible and incomprehensible. It is incomprehensible in so far as it is a love that surpasses knowledge, or "stretches beyond" (head) knowledge (Eph 3:19) and is inexhaustible through its belonging to the supernatural realm, a realm that is "other than" the natural. Yet the wonder of it lies in the reality that it can transform every aspect of our being as this supernatural love intersects with the natural, ordinary world of lived experience.

³ Bible Hub, *Interlinear Bible: Strong's Concordance: 1108. gnosis*. Accessed April 2020. <https://biblehub.com/greek/1108.htm>

⁴ David Benner, *The Gift of Becoming Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 34, Kindle.

The incarnation offered humanity the opportunity to experience unmediated communion with the Father, which is an intimacy unknown since the fall. John writes in his gospel “God so *loved* the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16-17, emphasis added). John continues in chapter 17:3 “And this is eternal life, that they know you, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Eternal life then, is defined by John as an intimate relationship with God and that relationship was the motivating factor for his loving act in giving his Son. Eternal life is a relational reality first, and not just a post-life destination upon which the reductionist gospel has focused much attention. Thus, it is the “whole life” gospel that offers transformation through inviting the believer into an embodied, or lived experience of eternal life now, rather than a focus on eternal destination which reduces the gospel to a ticket to heaven and considers discipleship an optional extra.⁵

God’s love seeks to engage the heart even though it escapes cognitive comprehension, as the heart is the locus of transformation. Transformation is not facilitated by what the head agrees to, but through what the heart believes; therefore, the journey from giving cognitive assent to God’s love to that of experiential knowing, or the journey from head to heart, is foundational for spiritual transformation. Au and Au note, “Faith can come alive for us when the beliefs we hold in our heads make their slow way into our hearts...Belief in God’s love is life-giving only when we feel it in our hearts. Spiritually, the longest journey that we must make is the eighteen inches between our

⁵ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 4.

heads and our hearts.”⁶ Benner agrees by stating that transformation simply cannot progress “unless it begins with a knowledge of how deeply we are loved by God, until we believe Romans 8:31-39, we remain in the elementary grade of the school of Christian spiritual transformation.”⁷

The fact that God “cannot help but see you through the eyes of love”⁸ is a truth deeply yearned to be believed yet often difficult to accept for a number of reasons. First, it is a struggle to believe the radical nature of this love, not only due to its incomprehensibility, but also due to the fact that it is somewhat illogical to accept that Christ would choose to die for humanity while still sinners (Rom 5:8). However, until the heart believes there is nothing that can separate it from God’s love, not sin, nor shame, nor any spiritual power, there will be reluctance to opening the soul to the transforming presence of Christ to the measure required for significant change. Transformation begins with the realisation that the love of God is not exhausted by or disgusted at sin, as it is “absolutely unconditional, unlimited and unimaginably extravagant.”⁹

The other reason the journey from head to heart is difficult is due to the fact that throughout life, people create false ways of being in order to be accepted, loved, or protected. This is a type of negative formation that results in distorted images of self and God that while unable to hold the soul in peace nor offer the freedom desired – still feel

⁶ Au and Au, *God’s Unconditional love*, introduction, sec 3.

⁷ Benner, *The Gift of Becoming Yourself*, 46, Kindle.

⁸ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 46, Kindle.

⁹ Benner, *The Gift of Becoming Yourself*, 46, Kindle.

like truth. The overwhelming love of God demonstrated by Jesus is often so “other” than the experiences of the world which have shaped one’s identity up to the point of salvation that it takes time to embrace his Truth as ultimate reality. “The gospel message of God’s unconditional love, however, challenges us to put aside our defences and allow God to love us just as we are. This is not easy to do, since we are accustomed – in our insecurity and fear – to hiding behind our many pretences.”¹⁰ Yet, when the love of God is encountered, the result is the discovery of the soul’s true identity as the beloved of God, thus “reforming” that person into the image that God knew before he laid the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4).

The journey of transformation then, is about letting go of false ways of being, or the immature, and at times, destructive views of self that have dominated one’s life until the point of salvation. Within the Scriptures, passages like the one Paul writes in Ephesians 1:4-5, “just as He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the kind intention of his will” provide revolutionary truths that invite deeper communion with the love of God and in doing so, confronts the immature views of his love which maintain fear and destructive ways of being. In this passage, Paul writes that every person began as a desire in the heart of God who, as Creator, was intimately involved in the genesis of their existence. That means despite the temporal circumstances of one’s birth, “in and through them resonates a decision by the Creator to love you in all your uniqueness...In the gaze of your Creator,

¹⁰ Au and Au, *God’s Unconditional Love*, chap 1, sec 6.

you are a work of love, a love that will never be withdrawn.”¹¹ Therefore, all new life is a “story of God’s love, faithful beyond any human love.”¹² While the circumstances of life are “real,” there is a reality beyond the temporal that provides the foundation for the freedom and transformation longed for. That reality is the love of God. Love was the motivating factor behind creation in the first place, and it is love that continually sustains every human being. This truth encourages the letting go of false ways of being and the destructive habits that inhibit the return of love to the Creator. “Discovering who we are in light of who God is – this is, perhaps, the most important aspect of spiritual growth and transformation.”¹³ Faithfully engaging with spiritual disciplines that turn the heart toward God, results in a renewed discovery of his love, or the discovery that love is waiting there - every time. This takes the truths from the pages of Scripture and enlivens them again and again, encouraging the entrusting of oneself to the God who continually reaches into lives and changes hearts, despite every limitation and failure one has experienced.

The love of God is fundamental to the spiritual journey, however, Christians must come to think of themselves first and foremost, as deeply loved by God in order to trust the journey of spiritual transformation. The spiritual journey is one of discovering both who God is and who we are - in him. Benner notes that “there is no deep knowing of God without a deep knowing of self, and no deep knowing of self without a deep knowing of God.”¹⁴ What continues to draw the Christian into the transformative journey is the

¹¹ George Aschenbrenner, *Stretched for Greater Glory*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004), 40.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Au and Au, *God’s Unconditional Love*, chap 2, sec 1.

¹⁴ Benner, *The Gift of Becoming Yourself*, 22.

ongoing revelation of a loving God as well as the simultaneous discovery of one's true identity as a radically and mercifully loved person. There is nothing anyone can do to earn this love; humanity is loved simply because we have all been, and continue to be, created by God.

Jesus's baptism (Matt 3:17) demonstrates the primacy of being the beloved of God to the formation of identity. The Father reveals Jesus as his beloved son before he had begun his public ministry, before he had demonstrated his spiritual power and despite his lowly status. His identity was first one of "Beloved Son" and it was that revelation that held Jesus through his daily life, including the trials, tribulations and the joys.¹⁵ We too, as Christians, come to understand ourselves as the beloved of God through the spiritual journey and it is this same revelation that deeply transforms our being and holds us through all of life's circumstances. Benner writes the following summative overview of how the central love is to our very existence and to the definition of our identity,

The generative love of God was our origin. The embracing love of God sustains our existence. The inextinguishable love of God is the only hope for our fulfillment. Love is our identity and our calling, for we are children of Love. Created from love, of love and for love, our existence makes no sense apart from Divine love.¹⁶

Every human being was loved into existence and that same love continues to offer an invitation to transformation, an invitation to perfect peace, the driving out of all fear, and the provision of hope for our ultimate consummation at the end of our earthly sojourn.

¹⁵ Aschenbrenner, *Stretched for Greater Glory*, 40.

¹⁶ Benner, *The Gift of Becoming Yourself*, 46.

Ignatius of Loyola and the Love of God

Ignatius was acutely aware of the love of God and how it had providentially entered his life during his recuperation from injuries sustained in the battle at Pamplona.¹⁷ The love of God entered his life despite his lack of religious experience or dedication prior to that point. He became increasingly aware of the presence and movement of God in the interior space of his heart, as well as through the people and events of his daily life. This growing awareness facilitated the development of his contemplative approach to life surmised in the Ignatian phrase finding God in all things. As a result of his growing awareness of these movements as God's loving communication to him, Ignatius knew that God was a God of love who chose to reveal himself despite Ignatius's personal orientation toward self and his own vanity at the time. Ignatius "experienced God as an intensely personal, active, generous God, God as Love Loving."¹⁸ Therefore, the love of God is so foundational for Ignatius that it pervades his writing and strongly informs his *Spiritual Exercises*. In fact, the *Exercises* have as their purpose an encounter with the love of God in order to overwhelm any disordered attachments or loves that might otherwise influence decisions; prevent a full reception of the love of God; and/or inhibit the return of that love.¹⁹

¹⁷ For more on the life of Ignatius, his autobiography: *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985) provides a thorough overview.

¹⁸ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

This personal and in Ignatius's view, unwarranted attention from God in the midst of his life that had not been directed toward the Lord until that point, provided an experience of the unconditional love of God and so taught him that it was not something "we earn, we buy, or bargain for."²⁰ For Ignatius then, the love of God was never an abstract philosophical concept, nor was it a scriptural truth he attempted to believe, it was an unexpected, yet welcomed experience that changed his entire life and so informed his spirituality.

Another sixteenth century mystic, the Carmelite nun St Teresa of Avila also writes of the transformational experience of encountering the love of God through her classic work *The Interior Castle*. In her text she describes the spiritual journey as a pilgrimage to the centre of the soul, to the place where her Beloved dwells. Teresa describes the soul as a castle with seven chambers, each one leading into a deeper place of intimacy and each one providing its own challenge or resistance to the inward journey. However, it is the love of God emanating from the centre of the soul which ignites the longing in the seeker to continue to push beyond the challenges found in each chamber as they taste of the love which calls deeper into that place of intimacy.²¹

The love of God is a central theme that flows throughout much of the classic Christian mystic literature, calling the seeker into transformative experiences with Divine love and so, as in *The Interior Castle*, love is the thread that flows through the *Spiritual Exercises* which Ignatius saw as facilitating "an experience of spiritual transformation by

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, Reprint Ed. Translated by Mirabai Starr. (New York: Riverhead, 2004), 23.

deepening our faith in God's love and by expanding our awareness of how richly we have been blessed by a good and giving God."²² The love of God is the prominent theme of the Principle and Foundation as well as the First Week of the *Exercises*, where the "loved sinner" is central.

The theme of the loved sinner accentuates another element important in the transformative journey, that of self-awareness. Ignatius encourages the exploration of sinfulness in a way that evokes awe and gratitude for the love of God which is undeterred by sin. This skilfully acknowledges sin as being a present reality in our lives, but quickly shifts awareness away from the emotion of shame and guilt, which could inhibit further exploration of sin, and onto the radical forgiveness offered by God who is "love, loving."²³ In the presence of such radical love, disordered attachments, sin and dysfunctional images of God and self are laid bare, so they may be transformed through an encounter with Love, loving. O'Brien notes that "In the first days of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius has us praying through the basic truth of God's love – the truth is so deep that it takes a lifetime to appreciate fully; with a love as deep as God's, it's no wonder we never really figure it out. But we do live these truths – we can see them in action."²⁴ In the Immersion Experience, the Principle and Foundation and the First Week were included as part of project and the way in which love is foundational to these movements is explained below.

²² Au and Au, *The Grateful Heart*, chap 2, sec 2.

²³ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* chapter 2.

²⁴ Kevin O'Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011), 36.

The Love of God and the Spiritual Exercises

The Principle and Foundation

The Principle and Foundation provides insight into love as a central theme for Ignatian spirituality and his *Spiritual Exercises*. It is found after the opening annotations and before the first Week of the *Exercises*. It is placed prior to the commencement of the First Week as Ignatius believes it was vital for the retreatant to meditate on the fundamental truth of God's love as a pre-requisite to making the *Exercises*. O'Brien states that in order to undertake the *Exercises*, "you have to have a grasp on this fundamental truth: that God, the Creator of all, loves us unconditionally, and we, in our beauty and even our limitation, enjoy a special worth and dignity in the eyes of God. Our Creator reminds us of this divine embrace by lavishing on us so many gifts: in nature, in our own talents, in the people around us, in the gifts of the earth."²⁵ Following is a contemporary reading of the first two sentences of the Principle and Foundation:

God who loves us creates us and wants to share life with us forever. Our love response takes shape in our praise and honor and service of the God of our life. All the things in this world are also created because of God's love and they become a context of gifts, presented to us that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily.²⁶

The Principle and Foundation goes onto to describe how the retreatant is to interact with these gifts in a way that deepens relationship with God, rather than hindering it; how one should hold themselves in balance²⁷ before it all, which is a

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, 27.

²⁷ The traditional word for balance is "indifference" and describes a state of detachment from anything other than the will of God and anything that would draw you away from his will.

description of true spiritual freedom; and how the gifts given by God should evoke choices that lead to deepening intimacy with him. This is a meditation on the love of God as demonstrated through his creative acts - of which we are all one. He created our very being as well as everything else in the world, and that “everything else” is considered to be a gift from God, given as an invitation to experience his love.

Love is the energising force behind God’s creative activity. This reflects the Ephesians 1:4 passage discussed earlier, reminding the church that God’s love was the generative power that brought every soul into existence, therefore every soul has been “desired into being.”²⁸ The Foundation is designed to help the retreatant experience the truth that God’s personal love for them is demonstrated through his creation of them.²⁹ For Ignatius, the term “God who loves us, creates us” is not a bland theological statement, but rather as Joseph Tetlow, S.J states “The elegantly spare sentences of the Principle and Foundation both express and conceal a religious experience crucial to the *Spiritual Exercises* – the experience of my intensely personal relationship with God my Creator and Lord, not only as the One who loves and cherishes and forgives me, but also and even more as the One who is at every moment making me, my life world, and myself.”³⁰

²⁸ Dyckmann et al, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, chap 4, sec 9.

²⁹ Philip Sheldrake, “The Principle and Foundation and Images of God,” *The Way Supplement* 48, (Autumn, 1983): 91.

³⁰ Joseph Tetlow, “The Fundamentum: Creation in the Principle and Foundation, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 21, (September 1989): 2.

The overwhelming truth that Ignatius has the retreatant consider here at the opening of the *Exercises* is that God has, and is, continually creating their being as an act of love. Giles Cusson writes that the Principle and Foundation provides a succinct overview of this prominent Ignatian conception, “God, Creator and Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is he who, both triune and one, in a gesture of an ever-present love, creates, gives life and gifts of every kind. For Ignatius, God is a continual act of love offered to the creature and calling for the hearts of women and men.”³¹ The appropriate response as the retreatant considers God’s continual act of love during this opening phase of the *Exercises* is one of desire, specifically a desire for deepening intimacy with this ever-loving, ever-present God.³² Ignatius wants to ensure that the retreatant has an image of God as a loving presence from the outset, rather than a tyrannical, overbearing or judgemental figure that does little to encourage opening the heart in a way that leads to transformation.

When negative images of God are held by the retreatant, they can limit the transformative journey ahead through the *Exercises* through inhibiting the way in which the retreatant opens to, listens for and responds to the voice of God.³³ Desire to open and respond in loving surrender to a tyrannical judge is far less likely than desiring to open to the presence of a God who “draws us out of ourselves by revealing himself to us”³⁴ as

³¹ Giles Cusson, *Biblical Theology and The Spiritual Exercises*, (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1994), 53.

³² Dyckman et al, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, chap 4, sec 9.

³³ Sheldrake, “The Principle and Foundation and Images of God,” 92.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

incomprehensible, yet irresistible love. “Our images of God include our religious experiences because we meet God as the one whom we image God to be. Paying attention to our perceptions of God, therefore, is critically important for sound spiritual health and development.”³⁵ Therefore, preparatory exercises are often required before the meditation on the foundation to ensure the retreatant is acquainted with God as a God of love who is for them and desires to lead them into spiritual freedom. God as loving Creator is the image Ignatius proposes as necessary for a fruitful journey through the *Spiritual Exercises*.³⁶

As the experience of God’s love grows throughout the journey of the *Exercises*, “the indifference and radical freedom that Ignatius describes stretches your heart in eager desire.”³⁷ The Foundation places love as central to what follows in the Weeks ahead and enlarges the retreatant’s vision of how God’s love is present, not only in the immediacy of their being, but also through the provision of his created gifts that surround them. Understanding the love of God is crucial for the retreatant to then enter the first ‘Week’ where the reality of sin is inescapable. Sheldrake writes,

The *Exercises* are a way to freedom, but freedom is reached through truth. Truth is often hard and hence the need for that safe ground. The Foundation ensures that a person has a secure sense that freedom is, it not yet fully present, at least possible and believable. It also establishes the paradox that in order to be truly free one must give up control and be in the hands of God.³⁸

³⁵ Au and Au, *God’s Unconditional Love*, chap 2, sec 7.

³⁶ Sheldrake, “The Principle and Foundation and Images of God, 95.

³⁷ Aschenbrenner, *Stretched for Greater Glory*, 47.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

The Loved Sinner in the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises

The first Week of the *Exercises* begins with the retreatant considering the reality of sin. Sin is initially considered objectively in terms of its cosmic scope, but within days becomes a very personal, subjective reflection. Sin is not only an objective reality, but present in one's life and Ignatius has retreatants consider how sin has influenced their personal story through engaging the three powers of the soul in a systemic and holistic way, so that the presence of sin cannot be denied or sanitised in order to avoid the pain that might accompany its revelation. This requires a depth of self-reflection that refuses to turn from feelings of shame or vulnerability which while unpleasant, must be embraced in order to be transformed. Benner writes: "Genuine transformational knowing of self always involves encountering and embracing previously unwelcomed parts of self."³⁹ Without this exercise, those previously unwelcomed parts of self will remain hidden yet continue to influence images of God and self which require reformation.

While the consideration of sin and evil in the world is confronting, and the further recall of the retreatant's personal sin history even more so, this exercise is undertaken in light of the gaze of Jesus on the cross.⁴⁰ The ultimate act of the love of God provides the backdrop for the entire First Week which produces something of a paradoxical experience. The admission of sin evokes an inescapable and deeply uncomfortable feeling, however that feeling is simultaneously overwhelmed through the experience of imaginatively standing before and speaking with the dying saviour who is

³⁹ Benner, *The Gift of Becoming Yourself*, 45.

⁴⁰ Jim Manney, *God Finds Us: An Experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2013), 50, Kindle.

undeterred by sin, choosing to die for each of us even while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:8). Katherine Dyckmann writes “In confronting sin, the presence of goodness becomes more visible, causing an aversion to everything not of God. In the First Week, a person’s prayer moves from awareness, confusion and sorrow to a response of deep gratitude and love.”⁴¹ Ignatius wants to evoke a felt knowledge of sin as well as God’s merciful love which continues to embrace us in the midst of our sinfulness.⁴²

Standing before the cross while reflecting on sin and then entering into a colloquy with Christ who is demonstrating his love through this ultimate sacrifice, enlivens the reality of his forgiveness. Becoming aware of how God is maintaining his gaze of love toward the one who is metaphorically standing ‘naked’ before him, the reality of his forgiveness, offered even in the presence of the worst sin recalled, evokes a great sense of spiritual freedom.⁴³ Reluctance to uncover the sin one would rather hide is natural, however the freedom that results from admitting its presence and then receiving the forgiveness of Christ overwhelms any fear as perfect love casts it out (1 Jn 4:18).⁴⁴ So important is this process to spiritual transformation, that spiritual growth is inhibited by the denial of the ways in which one turns from the love of God and so keeps sin hidden. “Spiritual transformation does not result from fixing our problems. It results from turning

⁴¹ Dyckmann et al, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, chap 6, sec 2.

⁴² Wilkie Au, “An Ignatian Path to Gratitude”, *The Way Supplement* 49, no 3 (July 2010): 72; Manney, *God Finds Us*, 57.

⁴³ Barry, *Finding God in All Things*, 52-53.

⁴⁴ James Wakefield, *Sacred Listening: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 28, Kindle

to God in the midst of them and meeting God just as we are. Turning to God is the core of prayer. Turning to God in our sin and shame is the heart of spiritual transformation.”⁴⁵

The process of uncovering the way one turns from God’s love and the admission of the sin that is present, promotes the process of spiritual transformation as the revelation grows that the love of God remains firmly directed toward each of us despite our imperfections. We are all sinners, yes, but deeply loved sinners. Once we are able to declare this reality with confidence, it means “The grace of the First Week has taken firm root,” and so “we can acknowledge our failings with unshakable confidence in the constancy of God. Deep within, we know that we are loved sinners.”⁴⁶

The Contemplation to Attain Divine Love

The final movement of the *Exercises* known as the Contemplation to Attain Divine Love moves through four stages that reflect the Four Weeks. While this contemplation was not included in the Immersion Experience, it is useful to consider as it demonstrates how important the love of God is for Ignatius and his approach to spirituality. In this contemplation, the retreatant recalls the specifics of each Week which are the love of God in the principle and foundation; the loved sinner and the forgiveness of God in the First Week; the way in which God dwelt with humanity through the incarnation in the Second; how God labours for all of creation and is present with us through suffering and pain the Third; and the joy of the resurrection and how that

⁴⁵ Benner, *The Gift of Becoming Yourself*, 61.

⁴⁶ Au and Au, *The Grateful Heart*, chap 2, sec 4.

provided the way for intimate communion with God in the Fourth. The purpose is to be reminded again and to experience in ever deepening reality, the love of God.⁴⁷

Each stage builds on the next so that the love of God is revealed as incorporating and extending beyond the love He demonstrated through creation. That love is beautiful and overwhelming enough, but his love goes further to be incarnated in the life of Jesus where “God personally enters into solidarity with humanity. And the incarnate love of God goes further. Not only to incarnation, but to the giving of one’s life.”⁴⁸ Jesus himself says in John 15:13 that there is no greater love than laying your life down for another, which He then goes ahead and does as an expression of his love for humanity. The final Week of the *Exercises* demonstrates the love of God as being powerfully restorative and declared through the resurrection that even death cannot overwhelm it. This contemplation then, is not a practice to “attain” something elusive and out of reach; love is already present; God has already given it - in its fullness, therefore it is about receiving his love in greater measure. The response is one of gratitude which is at the heart of this meditation.⁴⁹ Gratitude is evoked for gifts received, but also in response to the “deepest manifestation of the love of God in Jesus Christ who is Creator and Redeemer.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Au, “An Ignatian Path to Gratitude,” 68.

⁴⁸ Peter Schineller, “St Ignatius and Creation-Centred Spirituality”, *The Way Supplement* 29, no 1, (January 1989): 50.

⁴⁹ Au, “An Ignatian Path to Gratitude,” 70.

⁵⁰ Schineller, “St Ignatius and Creation-Centred Spirituality,” 51.

Contemplative Spirituality – Finding God in All Things

The Principle and Foundation establishes the love of God as the central theme of the *Spiritual Exercises* from the outset. The other Ignatian theme found in the Foundation is “the ongoing effort to find and serve God in all things and above all things,”⁵¹ surmised by the phrase “finding God in all things.” This theme is evident in the second line of the Foundation which states: “All the things in this world are also created because of God’s love and they become a context of gifts, presented to us that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily.”⁵² Creation is viewed very seriously by Ignatius who considers its purpose as provoking a sense of wonder in the retreatant to “elicit a deeper affectivity, a great desire for this God who so desires each person.”⁵³ In fact, creation is the primary landscape through which God comes to each one of us and through which we, in turn, direct our lives toward him.⁵⁴

The apostle Paul writes that “God’s invisible qualities are clearly displayed through what has been created” (Rom 1:20) and Ignatius teaches that consideration of these created gifts mediates deeper knowledge and experiences of God. Thompson states, “The intricacies and complexities of everything from earthquakes to sea urchins to quarks to planetary orbits all point to God’s power and God’s nature. Such is creation. Paul suggests that when we pay attention to it, we discover things about God’s power and his

⁵¹ Ibid., 46.

⁵² Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, 27.

⁵³ Dyckmann et al, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, chap 4, sec 4.

⁵⁴ Schineller, “St Ignatius and Creation-Centred Spirituality,” 46.

nature. Creation points to God.”⁵⁵ God is ever-present and communicating through his creation, which is given as a gift to draw human beings into deeper communion with him. This view immediately broadens the frontier of the spiritual life to beyond the walls of the church, thus removing the sacred-secular divide that limits the activity of God to traditional religious images, biblical stories and rituals.⁵⁶ Finding God in all things literally means God is to be found in the things of this world and can be seen, heard and communed with through his created gifts. Creation is therefore a sacrament, or an effective sign of the presence of God. This is a theological concept not necessarily unique to Ignatius as creation has been considered a sacrament by Christian theologians throughout Christian history, however Ignatius embraced this ancient sacramental view of creation to inform his contemplative outlook.⁵⁷

The contemplative paradigm affirms the view that God is never absent from any of us; he comes to us disguised as our lives.⁵⁸ Manney writes, “This is the beating heart of Ignatian Spirituality – Ignatius says “Jesuits should practice the seeking of God’s presence in all things – in their conversations, their walks, in all that they see, taste, hear, understand, in all their actions, since his Divine Majesty is truly in all things.”⁵⁹ He is

⁵⁵ Majorie Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 4, Kindle.

⁵⁶ Gerard Hughes, *God of Surprises*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2008), chap 5, Kindle.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ David Benner, *Spirituality and the Awakening Self: The Sacred Journey of Transformation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), 64, Kindle.

⁵⁹ Manney, *God Finds Us*, 158.

present in the people we meet, through what we see and hear and perhaps in particular, through the interior movements of the soul.⁶⁰ This approach to spirituality invigorates faith by infusing every movement of heart and every activity of life with the ever present and available presence of God. Merton describes contemplation as follows:

Contemplation is the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness and for being. It is a vivid realisation of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source.⁶¹

This definition provides a summative overview of what the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* invite the retreatant to experience; the wonder of creation, gratitude for life and the gifts the Creator has given; and the deepening felt awareness of the Source of that life who is intimately present.

The contemplative life is an intentional approach to spirituality where one listens for the voice who is always speaking and can be found in "all things." Eugene Peterson offers the following translation of Isaiah 65:1-2 in his Bible paraphrase *The Message*,⁶² which expresses God's desire to be found in all things and his disappointment when humanity refuses to attune themselves to him:

⁶⁰ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* 43.

⁶¹ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, (New York: New Directions Publishing Company, 1961), 1.

⁶² Eugene Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 1002.

I've made myself available
to those who haven't bothered to ask.
I'm here, ready to be found
by those who haven't bothered to look.
I kept saying 'I'm here, I'm right here'
to a nation that ignored me.
I reached out day after day
to a people who turned their backs on me

His voice is always speaking and he longs for it to be heard, yet he tends to speak in ways too quiet to be identifiable in the midst of a frantic pace which numbs the senses and inhibits intimate communication.⁶³ The key is to notice; to notice God in the midst of all things and to notice God moving in our inward depths as he directs our outward gaze.⁶⁴ Richard Peace discusses the practice of noticing God as the discipline which brings “a sense of the supernatural in the midst of the natural. This gives a wholeness to our living.”⁶⁵

To hear his voice, requires a slowing down long enough to notice the “real” in the midst of ordinary life. This is a contemplative approach to spirituality that Burghardt defines as “a long, loving look at the real.”⁶⁶ Contemplation is slowed down spirituality; it is taking time to notice the real; it is the practice of exhaling in the act of surrender to a God of love who is beyond comprehension or control, yet closer than the next breath we take; and it is the realisation that if the world is a sacrament, then “any reality in the

⁶³ Dyckman et al, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, loc 1367, Kindle.

⁶⁴ Richard Peace, *Noticing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), chap 2, Kindle.

⁶⁵ Peace, *Noticing God*, introduction, sec 3.

⁶⁶ Walter Burghardt, “Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real,” in *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, ed. George Traub, (Chicago: Loyola Press: 2008), 89.

world, person, event or object can become an image of God and a focus of contemplation.”⁶⁷ This approach requires an inner stillness, a choice to respond to the invitation given in Psalm 46:10 to “Be still to know that I am God.” It is a turning from the endless distractions of the world, in order to find God in the midst of that world. The contemplative long, loving, look at the real means “God will be seen in ordinary experience when ordinary experience is fully open to him.”⁶⁸

The beauty of the Ignatian approach to the contemplative life, or to finding God in all things is that it necessitates full engagement with all of life. Full engagement with life includes the complications, concerns and all of the realities - the realities of joy and the realities of pain. If God is truly to be found in all things, the people, circumstances, creative gifts and the personal details of life, then he is to be found through living it all, the pleasant and the unpleasant, as the book of Acts reminds us, “in him, we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Therefore, he can be found and experienced through every moment of life which is, in fact, his desire.

For Ignatius, contemplation is incomplete unless it expresses itself in action, hence the term ascribed to the Jesuits, “contemplatives in action.” In the *Constitutions* which govern the Jesuits, it is clear that they were to be trained in prayer practices, but also in “the liberal arts, logic, languages, theology, mathematics, natural sciences and classics.”⁶⁹ They were to be trained to live and practice their spirituality in the real

⁶⁷ Lonsdale, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear*, 114.

⁶⁸ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005), 40.

⁶⁹ Schineller, “St Ignatius and Creation-Centred Spirituality,” 53.

world, through a myriad of professional fields. This meant Jesuits became active in fields that were previously alien to religious orders, and in doing so, testified to the central vision of Ignatius to find and serve God in all things, and “of employing all created means for the greater glory of God.”⁷⁰

The contemplative in action participates in the real world, yet has an inner attitude, or orientation that is cultivated in silence and solitude. Lonsdale uses the metaphor of deep river to describe the contemplative in action, with the surface current relating to the activity, but the deep, slow undercurrent below providing the foundation, quite separate from, yet connected to the surface activity.⁷¹ The deep flowing river is cultivated through sustained time in the secret place, nourishing intimacy with God which is identifiable through the approach taken to the activities of life and particularly the way one is open to hearing, noticing and responding to God through everyday events.

The contemplative in action is informed by a pneumatology that views the Holy Spirit as an intimate friend, guiding and directing their life as they make choices and look for the divine fingerprints present in the world.⁷² Growing sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit of God will influence the way in which one engages with life to “give praise and service to God.”⁷³ For Ignatius, it was the Spirit who helped him take what he experienced in prayer and translate that into practical choices through his daily decision-

⁷⁰ Ibid., p54.

⁷¹ Lonsdale, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear*, 117.

⁷² Ibid., 118.

⁷³ Ibid., 118.

making process.⁷⁴ It is to those particular Ignatian prayer practices and the *Spiritual Exercises* which all lend themselves to being reframed to appeal to the Pentecostal passion for the prophetic life that we now turn.

Ignatian Prayer Practices, The Spiritual Exercises and Prophetic Training

The Examen - Training in Prophetic Listening

The Examination of Conscience, or as Aschenbrenner calls it, the Examination of Consciousness⁷⁵ is a daily prayer practice, ideally practiced twice per day and was considered so crucial for the Jesuits that Ignatius insisted they incorporate it in their day even if they had to forego other prayer practices. It is commonly known by the abbreviated version *The Examen*. This practice generally has five steps designed to develop a greater sensitivity to the reality of living, moving and being in the presence of God every day (Acts 17:28).⁷⁶ The process is summed up slightly differently by various authors, however it always begins with the preparatory practice of becoming aware of the presence of God around and within and by consciously inviting God to direct the practice

⁷⁴ Lonsdale, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear*, 81.

⁷⁵ Aschenbrenner renamed the practice to the Examination of Consciousness due to the moralistic overtones of the word conscience that directs people's attention to their sinfulness rather than the broader focus of finding God through the examination of the day and the movement of their heart in the midst. Martin, p87. Dyckman, Garvin and Liebert in *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed* note that "The contemporary shift from using 'conscience' to using 'consciousness' acknowledges a watershed in understanding the role of examination in the spiritual life. It signifies a shift in emphasis from individual acts to the fundamental orientation of one's whole life." chap 5, sec 2.

⁷⁶ Larry Warner, *Journey with Jesus: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 29.

by his Spirit. The contemporary translation of the steps as offered originally by Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises are as follows:

1. Gratitude: Giving thanks to God our Lord for all the favors received;
2. Light: asking the help of the Spirit to enlighten me so that I may see with the light of God's grace;
3. Review: going back over the events of the day or of the time since my last confessions to see where God has been present in my life and where I have kept God out – the sinful acts, whether in thoughts, words or deeds, whether it be things I have done or I have failed to do, and the tendencies or roots of such sinful behaviour;
4. Sorrow: expressing my sorrow and asking God's forgiving love to heal and strengthen me;
5. Grace: praying for the grace to be more totally available to God who loves me so totally.⁷⁷

This is a practical way of looking for God in all things through retrospectively reflecting on the activities of the day; through being aware of the deeper movements in the soul that have occurred during those activities; and exercising a level of self-awareness that is willing to admit sin and discover the roots of that behaviour; receiving the forgiveness and experiencing the love present in the midst of that discovery; and then praying for the grace to be more present to the God who is already present in the new day ahead.

The origins of this practice can be traced back to Psalm 139:23-24 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my thoughts; And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." Further passages which support this practice are Psalm 95:7-8 and Hebrews 3:15 "Today if you hear his voice, do

⁷⁷ Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, 33.

not harden your hearts, as when they provoked me.” This passage presupposes that God’s voice can be heard and that life should be lived in dialogue with him.⁷⁸

The practice of *Examen* positions one to hear his voice and through ongoing reflection, beginning to notice patterns emerging in the ways in which God is inviting that person to develop a language of communion with him. Hamm notes, “Ignatius taught that deep learning could occur when going over experiences and the thoughts and feelings connected to them. He understood that God is always at work in one’s life and there is much to be gained by *noticing* that activity.”⁷⁹ This is a valuable practice for the process of transformation as it encourages both self-awareness and awareness of the Divine in our lives. God is present in the world around us, and present to us whether we are conscious of him or not. The practice of *Examen* assists in becoming increasingly conscious of the activity and presence of God simply by searching for glimpses of his presence through reflecting on the day. Then by becoming aware of the deeper interior movements of the soul that are stirred while reflecting upon the ordinary as well as spectacular moments of the day which come to mind through this discipline, patterns of communication begin to emerge. “The *Examen* carves out a few moments of solitude in the midst of a busy day to allow us to reflect on what is going on and where our actions and choices are taking us. It is a form of discernment.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Dennis Hamm, “Rummaging for God: Praying Backwards through Your Day,” in *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, ed. George Traub, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 105.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Au and Au, *The Grateful Heart*, chap 7, sec 2.

For the Pentecostal, living a prophetic life is primarily about hearing the voice of God and through “reason of use” attuning the ear to that voice with ever greater clarity. The *Examen* is an unfamiliar practice for the Pentecostal, yet it extends the way in which one is trained to listen for his voice and to look for signs of his presence beyond the corporate meeting and the inspirational encounter moments typical in the Pentecostal service. Therefore, this practice could readily be reframed as “training in prophetic listening” which would be of great interest for the Pentecostal. The *Examen* supports the pursuit of the gift of prophecy which Paul says we should all eagerly desire (1 Cor 14:1) but in a way that invites the believer into a prophetic relationship with the Spirit who gives the gift. Therefore, relationship becomes central rather than reception of the gift.

The practice of *Examen* is a personal practice undertaken in solitude, away from the typical corporate setting in which the prophetic operates. This encourages the individual to notice how their own unique language with the Holy Spirit is developing through rummaging backward through their day. As their ear becomes more attuned to the voice of God and known through intimacy with him, the possibility of hearing God for others becomes an increasing likelihood, hence the attraction to the practice for the Pentecostal who desires to operate in prophetic ministry.

Lectio Divina & Imaginative Contemplation

Developing a prophetic relationship with Scripture - Lectio Divina

The practice of lectio divina or sacred reading engages Scripture for the purpose of developing a dynamic relationship with the living Word - through the written word. This practice is not undertaken for the purpose of increasing knowledge or for cognitive

engagement with Scripture, rather it is a contemplative practice that draws the reader into a deeper experience with the loving presence of God. The presupposition of this approach is that the reader desires dialogue and relationship with God that is “dynamic rather than formulaic”⁸¹ although, there is a defined method for lectio that while may appear formulaic, is more akin to the steps of a dance.⁸² The steps provided in this practice are not intended to be static or linear, rather they are there to guide the reader to flow backward and forward throughout the practice while engaging with the words as if they had been spoken by God afresh in that moment. It is fair to say that when first attempting this practice particular attention is paid to the specific steps, lest the dancer trip or stumble. As familiarity with the steps grow, they fade into the background and there is an ease of movement that becomes familiar and alluring.

At the centre of this practice is listening for God at ever deepening levels of awareness.⁸³ The natural outcome or response to these deepening encounters for the reader is spontaneous prayer, and then in turn, the gift of contemplation given to the reader is the response offered by God.⁸⁴ This experience is the realization of the biblical testimony that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). The text is sacred and alive through the

⁸¹ Geoff New, *Imaginative Preaching*, (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2015), 30.

⁸² David Benner, *Opening to God: Lectio Divina and Life as Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 46, Kindle.

⁸³ Christine Sine, *Return to Our Senses: Re-imagining How We Pray* (Seattle: Mustard Seed Associates, 2012), chap 5, sec 3, Kindle; Benner, *Opening to God*, 48.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, chap 5, sec 3.

animating force of the Spirit who inspires revelatory wisdom and a desire for God within the reader as they engage for the purpose of deepening relationship.⁸⁵ The four movements traditionally include *Lectio*, *Meditatio*, *Oratio* and *Contemplatio*, however Christine Valters-Paintner provides a more contemporary definition as follows:

1. Settling and Shimmering (*Lectio*): listen for the word or phrase that beckons you, addresses you, unnerves you, disturbs you, stirs you, or seems especially ripe with meaning – it shimmers.
2. Savoring and Stirring (*Meditatio*): reflecting on or thinking about the word or phrase. The invitation in this movement is to read the whole text again, and then take time to savor the word or phrase that shimmers by allowing it to unfold in your imagination. Listen for the interior movements of your soul and heart, embracing whatever arises.
3. Summoning and Serving (*Oratio*): verbal prayer. Prayer arises spontaneously when you allow your heart to be touched by this entering of God into your experience and you are drawn to respond in prayer.
4. Slowing and Stilling (*Contemplatio*): slowing yourself down and resting into the still presence of God. This idea is to simply ‘be’, rather than trying to ‘do’ anything.⁸⁶

These four steps or movements result in a holistic encounter with the living Word through the text which opens the heart, mind, and imagination and eventually leads to contemplative stillness.⁸⁷ It is transformative through its holistic approach to engaging with Scripture, but particularly so through the growing awareness of how the text is stirring the inner parts of the soul. As Casey writes “I become aware of the truth about myself at this moment; and as I move around within that awareness, my being related to

⁸⁵ Christine Valters Paintner, *Lectio Divina: Transforming Words and Images into Heart-Centered Prayer* (Woodstock: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013), chap 1, Kindle.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Benner, *Opening to God*, 55.

God, and drawn toward God, becomes less intangible. The soul is being nourished inwardly.”⁸⁸ Transformation can only occur as knowledge or experience of God is accompanied by knowledge of self, and particularly knowledge of how we are turning from or toward the truth that the Word declares.

The practice of *lectio divina* is somewhat foreign for the Pentecostal who is generally more familiar with the traditional evangelical relationship with Scripture which is focused on knowledge accumulation. Further, common devotional practice in the Pentecostal context is reading the Bible as text, rather than an invitation to encounter the truth the text is inviting the reader to experience. This approach may evoke some suspicion that it is encouraging moving beyond the text to find and apply a subjective, and therefore dangerous interpretation. However, framing *lectio divina* as a way to develop a prophetic relationship with Scripture would have more appeal for the Pentecostal. This would not challenge the integrity or intent of the practice, nor would it step beyond the way Scripture has been engaged with for centuries within the greater Christian tradition. Pentecostals may be surprised, and even comforted to know that *lectio divina* can be related back to the third century when Origen used the phrase *thea anagnosis* (divine reading) to describe “a way of approaching Scriptures for the purpose of finding a personal message from God.”⁸⁹ Discovering its deep roots in the Christian tradition for the purpose of finding a personal, or prophetic message from God would

⁸⁸ Michael Casey, *Toward God: The Ancient Wisdom of Western Prayer* (Ligouri MO: Triumph Books, 1996), loc 975, Kindle.

⁸⁹ Benner, *Opening to God*, 47.

open the heart of the Pentecostal to engage with the practice as it has been demonstrated to be orthodox.

Currently in Pentecostal contexts, training in prophetic ministry encourages the one aspiring to move in the gift of prophecy to listen for the voice of God within their heart, and then seek to find a Scripture reference that supports the message, thus demonstrating its orthodoxy. *Lectio divina* provides a further way of developing the skill of using Scripture in a prophetic context, albeit in the opposite direction. This approach would train the Pentecostal to approach Scripture first, with the anticipation that God will speak through the Word in a personal and dynamic way. This anticipatory stance is different from the usual informational approach and would provide training in listening for the Spirit who has and is speaking through the written word first. This provides a firm foundation for the prophetic message to then develop and become even more personal and potentially transformational for the recipient.

Imaginative Contemplation

The practice of imaginative contemplation is an important element of Ignatian spirituality and particularly so for the *Spiritual Exercises*. It is not surprising that imagination plays such an important role for Ignatius given it was central to his personal conversion and further, as he led others through the *Exercises* over many years, he became increasingly convinced of its power for the spiritual life in general.⁹⁰ Imagination in Ignatian spirituality is a tool to encounter and experience the love of God in a way that

⁹⁰ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality*, 55.

is profoundly personal as it engages the internal domain of the retreatant, touching both conscious and subconscious thought, beliefs and emotions. The imagination is a bridge between the seen and unseen realms; the conscious and unconscious; the body and soul, and allows the retreatant to access “the deepest realities because it approaches life in its wholeness.”⁹¹ This is far from an abstract, predominantly Western cognitive approach to reality that champions logic and left-brain dominance which has the fingerprints of the Enlightenment all over it. Rather, the imagination holds spirit and matter together in a way that embraces emotion, challenges perceptions and promotes transformation. It allows one to “dwell in two dimensions at once – ordinary events and God’s presence in the ordinary.”⁹² Imaginative contemplation then, supports a non-dual approach to life and spirituality that facilitates finding God in all things.

The primary Ignatian prayer method that was used in the Immersion Experience was that of imaginative participation in the Scriptures that were considered each week. This practice had the participants imaginatively placing themselves within the story of Scripture through embodying a role within that story. It may have been one of onlooker or observer, or it may be the role of a character within the story, in either case the primary goal was to encounter Jesus and interact with him in a holistic manner. Through engaging with this practice, “we immerse ourselves into a gospel mystery so totally that we are given an intimate, felt-knowledge of Jesus that goes far beyond the abstract and impersonal.”⁹³ This is not about thinking or receiving more information about Jesus,

⁹¹ Kathleen Fischer, “The Imagination in Spirituality,” *The Way*, (Autumn, 1989): 96.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 98.

⁹³ Au and Au, *God’s Unconditional Love*, introduction, sec 1.

rather it is about “filling our senses” with him, meeting him and truly getting to know him in a way mere information could never provide.⁹⁴ This approach allows “the person of Christ to penetrate places that the intellect does not touch. It brings Jesus into our hearts. It engages our feelings. It enflames us with ideals of generous service.”⁹⁵

The imagination provides the means for holistic and truly experiential encounters in a way that cognitive consideration of theological concepts or suppositions could not possibly provide. To experience something through the imagination is to immerse yourself in its reality with all the accompanying emotional and visceral responses. It is a means of transformation through the exploration of those responses and by paying attention to the “whom” and the “what” that stirs the soul through the practice. “The imagination in full force facilitates, if not demands, the presence of the whole person and not simply an emotional or cognitive presence. It draws on all the human faculties and calls forth action in response to that which is discerned and experienced through the imagination.”⁹⁶

This is a practice that brings the ancient text into the present moment as the Spirit of God who is present today just as he was then, animates the contemplative experience and enlivens the text. The work of the Spirit is in focus here as Ignatius never prescribes what should happen once a person has entered the scene through the imagination. As Gallagher notes, “Once we have entered reflectively or imaginatively, our hearts are

⁹⁴ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality*, 56.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 58.

⁹⁶ New, *Imaginative Preaching*, 12.

utterly free to follow the drawings of grace.”⁹⁷ This movement of the Spirit and the faith required to engage with the Lord in this way holds strong appeal and possibilities for the Pentecostal context in which this project occurred.

The strong pneumatology at the centre of this practice would appeal to the Pentecostal who might otherwise hold the same suspicions in regard to subjective interpretation as they would toward *lectio divina*. To understand the imagination as a gift given by God and to be reminded that every human faculty, including the imagination, can be used by the Spirit provides comforting truth.⁹⁸ Jesus himself made use of parables to teach about the kingdom. In fact, as a Jewish rabbi, this was his primary way of drawing his followers into the reality of the kingdom, encouraging them to consider how they might live according to that truth, rather than just cognitively understanding it. This technique requires imaginative engagement with the truth to which the parable points. Fryling notes, “reading the Bible imaginatively helps us be more attuned to God’s love and grace in the parables of our lives and our world.”⁹⁹ This is a perspective that could readily be reframed for prophetic ministry training, thus appealing to the Pentecostal Christian.

Prophetic ministry begins in the imagination in one form or another. To train for prophetic ministry in a Pentecostal context, the student is often encouraged to begin

⁹⁷ Timothy M. Gallagher, *Meditation and Contemplation: An Ignatian Guide to Praying with Scripture* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008) chap 3, Kindle.

⁹⁸ Alice Fryling, *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 70, Kindle.

⁹⁹ Fryling, *Seeking God Together*, 70.

searching for a picture, a word or feeling for the person they are ministering to. This takes imaginative engagement. Further, in order to grasp the heart of God to ensure the prophetic word is aligned with the biblical witness, the learner is encouraged to imagine how God might look upon both the prophetic minister and the one receiving ministry. Therefore, the practice of imaginative contemplation is a very useful tool not only to engage in a deeper way with the reality of Scripture, but to develop a relationship between God and the human spirit that is vital for effective prophetic ministry. This practice then, would not only be useful, but vital for prophetic training.

Spiritual Discernment - Learning to Live a Prophetic Life

Spiritual discernment in Ignatian spirituality is considered as both a “posture and a process.”¹⁰⁰ The posture is contemplative as discernment assists in the cultivation of finding God in all things, including the ordinary experiences of everyday life.¹⁰¹ The process seeks to make practical decisions in a way that discerns how God is present to the decision maker and has therefore, influenced the decision being made.¹⁰² Both the posture and the process are developed through cultivating a growing awareness of the inner movements of the soul or spiritual centre of the individual. These movements are present in both the spectacular and mundane moments of life and the discernment process involves becoming increasingly aware of whether they are leading closer to, or away

¹⁰⁰ Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au, *The Discerning Heart: Exploring the Christian Path*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 19, Kindle.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰² Ibid.

from God. Awareness is facilitated through partnering with the Spirit of God who is intimately present and whose guidance is sought with greater clarity through “refining the acoustics of our heart.”¹⁰³ Being aware of these movements is central to moving through the *Spiritual Exercises*, as Dyckman et al state “The *Spiritual Exercises* provide a training ground par excellence for learning discernment and growing into its habitual use.”¹⁰⁴

Discernment then, is “a life stance of being sensitively attuned to the promptings of Emmanuel.”¹⁰⁵ Intimacy with Christ, our Emmanuel, is the goal and end of the Christian life, therefore discernment is the art of recognising whether the posture adopted and decisions made are leading toward or away from that end. It would be fair to say that Christians strive to make the same decisions Christ would if he were living our lives, as Fleming notes, “Discernment guides us toward decisions that join us ever more closely with Christ and with our working with Christ in the world.”¹⁰⁶

Ignatius identifies two primary movements related to spiritual discernment, those of consolation and desolation. Fleming provides a contemporary translation of consolation as follows,

Spiritual Consolation: This term describes our interior life:

- (a) When we find ourselves so on fire with the love of God that we can freely give ourselves over to God and there is no competition with any human person or any created thing. Rather, we begin to see everything and everyone in the context of God, the Creator and Giver of all good gifts.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Dyckman et al, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, chap 10, sec 2.

¹⁰⁵ Au and Au, *The Discerning Heart*, 21.

¹⁰⁶ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality*, 93.

- (b) When we are saddened, even to the point of tears, for our infidelity to God but at the same time thankful to know God as Savior. Such consolation often comes in a deep realization of ourselves as sinner before a loving and compassionate God, or in the face of Jesus's Passion when we see that Jesus loves and entrusts himself to God his Father and to us without limit, or for any other reason which leads to praise and thank and serve God all the better.
- (c) When we find our life of faith, hope, and love so strengthened and emboldened that the joy of serving God is foremost in our life. More simply said, consolation can be identified with any increase of our faith, our hope, and our love. A deep-down peace comes in just our living life as "being in our Father's house".¹⁰⁷

Consolation then, is a spiritual movement that is deeper than surface emotion. Emotion may in fact look quite different to what is occurring in the innermost parts of the heart. For example, in point (b) one may have participated in an activity that 'feels' good and evoked a sense of joy or contentment, but the activity has ultimately led away from God. The immediate feeling of gratification experienced while participating in such an activity subsides to reveal a deeper sorrow as it becomes apparent that the action has led away from God. When repentance occurs, consolation has taken the lead, and has led back to God who is waiting with overwhelming forgiveness. Consolation is further defined by point (a) and (c) as a movement that results in contentment, joy and peace - as you would expect through its leading toward God.

Desolation on the other hand, is an opposite movement. Again, Fleming's contemporary definition is as follows,

Spiritual Desolation: This term describes our interior life:

- (a) When we find ourselves enmeshed in a certain turmoil of spirit or feel ourselves weighed down by a heavy darkness or weight;

¹⁰⁷ Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, 249-251.

- (b) When we experience a lack of faith or hope or love in the distaste for prayer or for any spiritual activity and we know a certain restlessness or tepidity in our carrying on in the service of God;
- (c) When we experience just the opposite effect of what has been described as spiritual consolation. For we will notice that the thoughts of rebelliousness, despair, or selfishness which arise at the time of desolation are in absolute contrast with the thoughts of prayer and service of God which flow during the time of consolation.¹⁰⁸

Desolation is also an inner movement of the heart and characterised by thoughts and emotions which are heavy, dark, faithless and result in a general apathy toward any spiritual practice. This leads away from God and Ignatius spends a significant time in his “Rules for the Discernment of Spirits” at the end of the *Spiritual Exercises*, to provide instruction on how to navigate an experience of desolation. Clearly this movement has serious consequences for the spiritual life and must be discerned correctly through the refined acoustics of the heart in order to allow the Spirit of God to lead throughout this time and to ultimately into renewed consolation. Both consolation and desolation are deep, affective movements that require a holistic approach to spirituality in order to discern them correctly. They are intuitively realised rather than being rational emotional states and require the integration of “thought, affectivity, imagination and sensation.”¹⁰⁹ This integration supports the posture of spiritual discernment and results in a contemplative approach to life that is consistent with what a Pentecostal might call “living a prophetic life.”

¹⁰⁸ Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, 251.

¹⁰⁹ Au and Au, *The Discerning Heart*, 50.

Living a prophetic life requires a posture of being radically open to the voice of God who speaks through thoughts, impressions and the imagination for the purpose of deepening personal relationship. The translation of training in spiritual discernment to training for a prophetic life is immediately identifiable however, the approach would be less about the knowledge of how to live a prophetic life and more about training in the experience of discerning the inner movements of the soul which lead to a prophetic relationship with the Spirit of God. Training in spiritual discernment extends the way a Pentecostal would usually seek to hear the voice of God to include inner affective movements of the soul, as well as through the word of God and visions or impressions which are more common foci for prophetic training. This approach extends the purview of prophetic ministry to include a lifestyle of hearing God for the individual, rather than just hearing God for others in order to deliver a prophetic message. To live a prophetic life then, is to live a spiritually vibrant life where one is increasingly attuned to the communication of God who can be found in all things, at all times.

The Spiritual Exercises - An Invitation to a Prophetic Adventure

The *Spiritual Exercises* appeal to the Pentecostal when presented as having both an expected and unexpected element to them. They are set out in a manner that has not changed for some 400 years, so there are certain elements that are to be expected, yet the experience of them is as varied as the thousands, even millions, of individuals who have journeyed through them. This spontaneous and unexpected edge to the *Exercises* holds great appeal for a Pentecostal who readily pursues relationship with the Holy Spirit and

embraces the unbridled and unpredictable nature of the Spirit who is likened to the wind that “blows where it wishes....So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:8).

In chapter one the various opportunities that Ignatian spirituality and in particular the *Exercises* could offer in a Pentecostal context was discussed. It was noted that Pentecostalism is “Christianity standing on tiptoe, expecting something to happen,”¹¹⁰ and it is this anticipatory stance that provides the schema for adventure rhetoric to be applied to the *Exercises* in a Pentecostal context. The unpredictability of the encounter awaiting the retreatant easily lends itself to being framed as a “prophetic adventure.” This language positions the retreatant to be open to hearing the voice of God, which trains them for prophetic living as well as preparing them to explore wherever the Spirit blows, hence the adventure. This remains true to the purpose of the *Exercises* while offering the Pentecostal a more familiar and appealing experiential possibility through emphasising the prophetic edge.

There is great expectation and value placed on individual encounters with the Spirit in Pentecostalism. However, this encounter is most often mediated through prayer ministry which occurs at the end of a worship service. The worship service has been considered the primary place for formation in Pentecostal churches for several decades.¹¹¹ This project offered the opportunity to expand that experience of the Spirit beyond the worship service through encouraging the participants to develop their own personal language with God through the *Exercises*. The *Exercises* utilise orthodox scriptural

¹¹⁰ Christensen, “Pentecostalism’s Forgotten Forerunner,” 27.

¹¹¹ Boone, “Community and Worship,” 1996.

meditation and imaginative contemplation in daily devotional practices which encourage the expectation of transformative encounters to become part of a personal, daily relationship with the Spirit. The anticipation for encounter then extends beyond the corporate meeting and becomes the stance one adopts every day.

This may be perceived as a type of subversive formation, where the focus is on adventure with the Holy Spirit, although that adventure leads to the discovery of self; the growing awareness of the way in which one turns from the love of God; and the development of a contemplative approach to spirituality, all of which, when fully embraced, naturally lead to transformative experiences of the Spirit of God. The discovery of self, the awareness of sin in light of the love of God and the contemplative paradigm of finding God in all things are not only central to Ignatian spirituality but surmise general spiritual formation concepts as well. Framing each of these elements through the lens of the prophetic attracts the Pentecostal in a way that the word ‘discipleship’ cannot. Therefore, the Immersion Experience incorporated Ignatian spirituality and spiritual formation concepts while appealing to the Pentecostal’s anticipation of encounter through framing the entire project with prophetic language.

PART THREE
MINISTRY STRATEGY

CHAPTER FIVE

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Chapter four described how the Immersion Experience was developed in light of the theological foundations informing Ignatian spirituality, particularly how the love of God is central to spiritual transformation, and the way in which the contemplative paradigm of finding God in all things supports holistic spiritual formation. Ignatian prayer practices that contribute to holistic formation including the *Examen*, lectio divina and imaginative contemplation were crucial to the Immersion Experience along with the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* around which the project revolved. It was further noted in chapter four that Ignatian prayer practices and the *Spiritual Exercises* readily lend themselves to being reframed through a prophetic lens which Pentecostals would find attractive and could therefore symbiotically bring the Pentecostal and the Contemplative stream together.

In chapter one, it was asserted that Pentecostalism is “in the main theologically evangelical”¹ which explains the Bible centred, doctrinal formation foci of many discipleship programs typical in a Pentecostal context. As a result, Pentecostals remain

¹ Cettolin, *Spirit Freedom and Power*, 25.

true to the evangelical view of Scripture as being authoritative and directive for holy living, however that pursuit of holiness can easily swing into legalistic duty, particularly when premillennial urgency to evangelise is emphasised. While this approach trains people doctrinally, it lacks the broader ontological engagement that holistic contemplative spirituality offers. Along with this evangelical foundation, the central theological motif of Pentecostalism is baptism in the Spirit, making the most identifiable characteristic of Pentecostalism a charismatic one. As a result, an approach to formation that centres on biblical engagement with a strong expectation of encounter with the Spirit of God, both of which are crucial for the journey through the *Spiritual Exercises*, would hold great appeal for a Pentecostal context.

Emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit being operational in corporate Pentecostal meetings as well as in individual lives cannot be overstated, hence, the high value placed on prophecy, words of knowledge and healing in Pentecostalism.² The caution in the pursuit of spiritual gifts and correct doctrinal formation is in that pursuit becoming one of knowledge for knowledge sake and for spiritual gifts per se, rather than pursuit of the Giver of the gifts and relationship with him. The high value placed on knowledge and the operation of spiritual gifts for Pentecostals breeds the perception, albeit implicitly, that a highly educated and particularly gifted individual must really know God. In truth, they may only have a lot of knowledge about God and have been trained in the use of their spiritual gifts yet remain unacquainted with their own soul. It is not uncommon to hear of a gifted minister being

² Huggett, "Why Ignatian Spirituality Hooks Protestants," 24.

unable to sustain themselves in ministry through lack of character formation, which is crucial for longevity in ministry and for spiritual transformation. Offering a contemplative path to knowing God and self that is founded on the love of God and a deeper relationship with him, will cultivate the inner life of the believer rather than just develop their giftedness. It was anticipated that this project, through the emphasis on charismatic encounter along with the pursuit of a contemplative paradigm of spirituality would draw together two seemingly separate streams of Christianity, that of the Pentecostal and contemplative, in a unique and transformative way. This converging of streams was potentially the most exciting and unique outcome of the Immersion Experience.

Huggett provides the definition of a contemplative as one who “find themselves drawn to an experience of God’s love for themselves; those whose life so revolves around Christ that they feel his compassion for this world and find themselves compelled to take action.”³ The language of the contemplative is often characterised by longing, hunger and a desire for a divine love affair or union with God as the only thing which can satisfy the soul. While the Pentecostal may not use language like “union” or “divine love affair,” hunger and thirst are very familiar and often accompanied, in a corporate meeting, with the exhortation for those who thirst to “come to Jesus and drink” (Jn 7:37). However, coming to Jesus and drinking are two different movements. Hunger and thirst lead to Jesus, but drinking is a learnt behaviour. The Contemplative tradition provides practices that quench thirst in a way that is often unfamiliar to Pentecostalism but feels like a

³ Ibid., 24.

homecoming for the spirit as it encounters the depths of Christ. Ignatian spirituality and the *Spiritual Exercises* invite the Pentecostal into a Contemplative approach to formation that may feel unfamiliar, yet they traverse through familiar territory with Christ, with the gospels providing the map.

Scripture engagement is foundational to the *Exercises*, thus satisfying the Evangelical influence that dominates formation and discipleship in a Pentecostal context. However, the end goal is not accumulation of knowledge, rather it is the journey of that knowledge from head to heart as the *Exercises* “show us the head knowledge we have stored in the filing cabinets of our minds can make an impact on our innermost beings.”⁴ The integrative practice of bringing knowledge, imagination and emotion together as the *Exercises* facilitate, results in holistic engagement with Scripture along with a strong reliance on guidance from the Holy Spirit. This satisfies both the Evangelical and Charismatic influence operational in the Pentecostal context yet provides broader and potentially transformative encounters with Christ as the written word becomes a mirror to the soul, facilitating a level of self-awareness required for transformation and a doorway to an encounter with the One who transforms.

Basing the Immersion Experience on the theological foundation of the love of God and Ignatian spirituality with the *Exercises* as central, satisfied the Pentecostal appetite for encounter, while remaining true to orthodox biblical engagement with a strong Christological emphasis. This was done while simultaneously introducing and relying upon the development of the contemplative paradigm of finding God in all things.

⁴ Ibid., 25.

This approach encourages the Pentecostal to re-evaluate the role of emotion and in particular the deep affective movements of the soul and how they are useful for discernment when framed through a prophetic lens. While the Evangelical influence on Pentecostalism results in a general distrust of emotion, “to discover a spirituality which encourages us not only in our feelings but to listen to them and allow the Word of God to speak into them is liberating.”⁵ Such an approach embraces our humanity in its entirety and reminds us that emotions are not only acceptable, but vital to the journey of spiritual transformation. This is an integrative approach of body, mind and spirit that “energizes, excites and inspires.”⁶

Self-awareness that occurs through the examination of personal sin when viewed in light of the love of God, encourages transformation as sin is not viewed as a failure of responsibility, but as a turning from the love of God, or even, a lack of gratitude for his love. Therefore, the Immersion Experience’s approach to formation began with experiencing the love of God afresh through the preparatory exercises, rather than beginning with a theological exploration of the fall of humanity and the need for a saviour which typically begins discipleship training. While that may be true, such knowledge does little to inspire spiritual transformation in and of itself. Considering sin in light of the love of God and the reality that sin does not turn God’s face away, results in a desire to run toward this merciful God and for a deep relationship with him. This is a

⁵ Ibid., 29.

⁶ Ibid.

tried method of not knowing more about God but encountering him in the core of one's being which surpasses the head and touches the heart – the place of true transformation.

The final element of the project that provided a different approach to formation for the Pentecostal was that of spiritual companioning offered through the contemplative listening groups. Spiritual direction or companioning is not a familiar practice in the Pentecostal context and is, in fact, generally unfamiliar throughout Protestant denominations. However, this practice is heavily reliant on the Spirit of God as the “true” director so satisfying the pneumatological emphasis of Pentecostalism, while introducing a new way of journeying with one another. While the nearest model akin to this approach would be that of disciplining or mentoring, those approaches are “highly directive, [and] can be life-stifling rather than growth inducing and can pave the way for dependence on the person giving the disciplining rather than the Holy Spirit.”⁷ The intended result of the contemplative listening groups, was another encounter with the love of God, mediated through the listening ear of another who has given their time and space to listen with, and for, the person who is sharing about their personal journey with God.

In an attempt to draw the Contemplative and Pentecostal streams together, the contemplative listening groups added an additional element at the end of each person's sharing time. Specifically, once someone had finished sharing and there had been space for reflecting and asking questions,⁸ there was an opportunity for the person who had shared to receive prophetic ministry from the other members of the group. This not only

⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁸ Susan Phillips, *The Cultivated Life: From Ceaseless Striving to Receiving Joy*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 221-222.

encouraged the person who had just shared their story, but also trained those present in different ways of listening. Contemplative listening uses a different ear to prophetic listening, yet both are listening for the same voice. Therefore, being trained to listen both contemplatively and prophetically, results in greater clarity in hearing the One speaking at all times.

Ministry Plan: The Immersion Experience

Goals

The overall goal of this ministry initiative was to introduce a contemplative approach to spiritual transformation in a Pentecostal context through introducing Ignatian spirituality and an experience of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*. Such an approach to formation attempted to draw the Pentecostal and Contemplative streams together in a complementary and transformative way. Further outcomes of this project included firstly, an increased imaginative engagement with Scripture to deepen relationship with Christ. To engage with Jesus through gospel meditation and contemplation enhances relationship through holistic encounter with the person of Jesus. He is brought to life through this practice in a way that lifts the words off the page and animates them through imaginative space. Such an encounter is transformative precisely because knowledge of Jesus is not the goal but rather a “felt knowledge which affects our whole being that affects the way we see ourselves, other people and the world around us....This felt knowledge of God changes the patterns of our thinking and therefore of acting.”⁹ This practice provides

⁹ Hughes, *God of Surprises*, chap 3.

further transformative experiences as it not only utilises conscious elements such as memory, feeling and thoughts, but also mines the depths of the subconscious which influences our lives despite its hiddenness.¹⁰ Therefore, it was anticipated that imaginative engagement with Scripture would not only increase relationship with Christ, but also, through reflecting upon affective or emotional responses to those encounters, result in greater self-awareness.

The second outcome of the project was an increased awareness of the role and importance of self-awareness in the process of spiritual transformation. Spiritual transformation is a journey of transformation of self and so, requires both a knowledge of God and self to be effective. In particular, the knowledge of self that is required is an unfolding awareness of the so-called “false self” which has been constructed primarily to “avoid feelings of vulnerability and have become parts of our social self.”¹¹ The false self is like a mask worn to cover the originality and beauty of the true self, the person Christ desired into being and discovered in him. The goal of spiritual transformation then, is to discover the true self – the one known by Christ and to then strip away the false ways of being that have contaminated perspective of self, God and the world. Spiritual transformation is the ongoing discovery of one’s true identity; specifically, our identity as free and deeply loved human beings. “Identity is never simply a creation. It is always a discovery. True identity is always a gift of God. We do not ‘create’ our self in God – we discover it.”¹²

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Benner, *The Gift of Becoming Yourself*, 16.

¹² Ibid., 17.

Along with the discovery of God and self, is the growing awareness of what Ignatius terms “disordered attachments.” These are either conscious, or more commonly, unconscious loves which inform choices, perceptions and even the direction of our life. When they are disordered, they have taken the place of God and inhibit full surrender to his love. Anthony de Mello defines a disordered attachment as “a state of clinging that comes from the false belief that something or someone is necessary for your happiness.”¹³ When such an attachment is present, even subconsciously, there is often an associated intensity of emotion when there is an attempt to remove its influence.¹⁴ Overcoming disordered attachments was such an important concept for Ignatius that it is the stated purpose of the *Spiritual Exercises*, “Which have as their purpose the conquest of self and the regulation of one’s life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of an inordinate (disordered) attachment.”¹⁵ Dyckman et al describe disordered affections as being in “conflict with one’s deepest humanity, unfolding spirituality and growth in spiritual freedom.”¹⁶ Therefore, the identification of disordered attachments or affections are crucial for the journey toward spiritual freedom, and so are a central theme of the *Exercises*.

The third outcome of the project was to develop an understanding and experience of Ignatian discernment. As discussed in chapter four, discernment is both a posture and a

¹³ Anthony de Mello, *The Way of the Heart*, (New York: Double Day, 1995), 28.

¹⁴ Larry Warner, *Discernment, God’s Will and Living Jesus*, (Oceanside, CA: Barefooted Publishing, 2016), 76, Kindle.

¹⁵ Louis J. Puhl, S. J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1951), 11.

¹⁶ Dyckman et al, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, chap 3, sec 3.

process and is foundational for Ignatian spirituality. It was hoped that the participant's knowledge and experience of discernment would be developed through the various practices employed in this project while encouraging exploration of the deeper affective movements of their soul. Awareness of affective movement supports the development of a contemplative paradigm which is a posture of finding God in all things. In the Immersion Experience, participants also explored the process of discernment specifically for decision making as two weeks of the project were dedicated to that practice. This was expected to be a new experience, but one that enhanced overall perception of the role of discernment in the spiritual life thus supporting this particular outcome.

The fourth outcome was the development of a contemplative paradigm of finding God in all things. This was a central theological concept for the Immersion Experience and undergirded the entire project. It was broadly based on the contemplative posture of embracing a "long, loving look at the real." However, the contemplative paradigm was specifically developed through an Ignatian lens as each participant engaged with specific exercises related to various Ignatian themes, as well as the first movement of the *Spiritual Exercises*. This outcome was supported by teaching, practical engagement and reflecting on how a contemplative paradigm complements, adjusts or challenges the participant's existing perspective on spirituality.

The final outcome was to understand and respond to the love of God as essential for spiritual transformation. Again, this was a foundational theological concept for the Immersion Experience and was explored through teaching, practical exercises and reflecting on the participant's felt experience of the love of God. It was anticipated that those who undertook this project knew God loved them however, there is a difference

between knowing something conceptually, as is our dominant Western view of knowledge, and experiencing the reality of that love. It is an experience of the reality of the love of God that was the desired outcome of this project and what Ignatius desires for us all.

Format

The Immersion Experience was conducted over a twelve-week period with an additional orientation day prior to commencement. The original *Exercises* were designed to be undertaken over a thirty-day retreat, however Ignatius allowed adaptations to ensure as many people as possible could engage with them. This project made use of the nineteenth annotation that allows for the *Exercises* to be undertaken in daily life. However, given the limitations of a twelve-week period, this project only included the First Week of the *Exercises* as well as a further two weeks that explored discernment for decision making, three weeks of preparatory exercises including the Principle and Foundation and a final week that explored the Call of the King meditation. The group met together once per week, on a Monday evening throughout the twelve-week period. Each participant engaged with individual spiritual practices every day throughout the length of the program.

The Immersion Experience consisted of a four-fold approach to learning that was developed with a holistic and experiential method in mind. The four-fold approach included teaching, transforming, reflecting and exploring. Informing included teaching various Ignatian concepts pertinent to the project and those that related specifically to the individual spiritual practices being incorporated into daily life each week. Transforming

included individual spiritual practices that utilised imaginative contemplation, the *Examen* and meditative practices which were all based on the *Spiritual Exercises* or the foundational theological concepts informing the project. Specific practices were provided every week with detailed instructions for the participants. Reflecting occurred through journaling and the use of the Enneagram as a tool to consider the false self and unconscious motivators which may be operational in one's life. Exploring occurred every week through contemplative listening groups which were based on Dougherty's group spiritual direction practice.¹⁷ Those specific elements and how they supported the goals and outcomes of the project are discussed further below.

The format for each week included commencing with contemplative listening groups where the participants explored the weeks' exercises and particularly the affective movements that accompanied those exercises. Following a short break after the listening groups, teaching that supported the following week's individual practices was provided.

Content

Orientation Day

Orientation took place on a Saturday, a week prior to commencement of the program and introduced key concepts pertinent to the project. They included: an overview of Ignatian spirituality and prayer practices; clarification of the expectations and format for the project; an introduction to contemplative spirituality and how it complements Pentecostal experience; education on the importance of self-awareness and

¹⁷ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 1995.

how knowledge of both God and self is crucial for spiritual transformation; review of the Enneagram and how it will be used for reflecting on self, particularly in the First Week of the *Exercises* when participants considered themselves as loved sinners; an introduction to Ignatius of Loyola and the themes of Ignatian spirituality including finding God in all things, becoming contemplatives in action, looking at the world in an incarnational way, and freedom and detachment; casting a vision for an Ignatian formation in a Pentecostal context; educating participants on Ignatian prayer practices including meditation and imaginative contemplation, the *Examen*, colloquy and lectio divina; and finally, to participate in an imaginative contemplation exercise.

At the commencement of orientation day, a candle was lit at the front of the room to symbolise and remind participants of the presence of the unseen Spirit of God who was present to lead and guide the entire process. This is not a common practice in Pentecostal contexts and so provided an immediate sensory cue that the framework for the entire project was contemplative and deeply focused on the presence of the Spirit. Lighting a candle is common practice in spiritual direction, serving as a reminder that the Spirit is in fact the true director of the exchange that follows. It is in this same vein that a candle was lit each time the group participated in contemplative listening as the project progressed.

At the conclusion of orientation day, each participant was given two exercises to complete prior to meeting again. The first was a “graced history” exercise that was based on Williams Barry’s practice of exploring the way in which God has been present throughout the participant’s life with a particular focus on positive affective

experiences.¹⁸ This was undertaken to ground what was to come in an awareness of the love of God and to provide a kind of “affective principle and foundation” from which to launch into the weeks ahead.¹⁹ Specifically, the graced history exercise took the form of a *Life Examen*, where one partners with the Spirit to rummage back through their life, looking over five-year periods while noting significant people, events or circumstances that arise. Alongside those memories, each person was asked to consider how God had been present to them and what gifts they had received from him during that period of time. This became a living document, in that each participant was encouraged to continue editing the document as further memories or experiences with God arose throughout the project.

The other exercise provided at the conclusion of the orientation day was prophetic in nature. Each participant was randomly assigned the name of another participant and asked to write them a prophetic letter specifically around “How God looks at them.” This was designed to do two things: the first was to activate each participant in the prophetic through seeking God for prophetic encouragement for another person; and the second was to provide something for each participant to reflect on in the second week’s daily exercises when they considered how God looked upon them. Receiving a prophetic letter written by someone who has sought the heart of God provided a personal and uplifting experience that went a long way in demonstrating the love of God for each person.

¹⁸ Barry, *Finding God in all Things*, 49.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Individual Spiritual Practices and Weekly Teaching

The Immersion Experience asked participants to engage with the *Examen* every day over the twelve-week period. In addition to the *Examen*, various exercises were provided each week that included preparatory exercises; discernment for decision making; the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*; and finally, the Call of the King. There was no time limit assigned for the daily exercises, however participants were asked to engage with them at least six days per week. Each week's theme and related exercises were as follows.

Week 1: Immersed in the Unconditional, Creating, Inviting Love of God

This week centred on exploring the participant's felt experience of the love of God. The Monday evening began by teaching on the love of God and then having participants reflect on their graced history exercise and the prophetic letter they had received. Further teaching was also provided to introduce the concepts of consolation and desolation. Encouraging the participant's growing awareness of their interior movements continued as the project progressed as they are foundational for self-awareness, discernment practices and exploring one's response to the love of God. Following the teaching, participants were provided with the protocol for contemplative listening²⁰ and then broken into pairs to practice being both the listener and presenter in a contemplative listening exercise. This exercise asked participants to take an event from their graced history exercise and discuss it with the other person. This was a practical exercise to

²⁰ Susan Phillips, *The Cultivated Life*, 221-222.

prepare the participants for the contemplative listening groups that commenced in week two of the program.

The Scriptures, questions, prayers and quotes provided for the week ahead focused on the theme of God's unconditional love and promoted deep reflection upon the felt reality of that love.²¹ They included Mark 1:40-41 - the story of the healing of the leper. In addition to this passage, a series of questions that facilitated deeper interaction with the story were provided to guide the participant to consider what it is like to be seen, touched and healed by the deeply compassionate Jesus.²² 1 John 4:16 that speaks of believing in the love of God and relying on that love, was assigned with a view to exploring how real that statement felt for each person. Exploring resistance to, and evidence of, the reality of this statement for each person was encouraged. Ephesians 3:17-19 describing the love of God as surpassing knowledge was also provided for meditative reflection. The prayer and quote provided for this week included the Merton prayer "God loves us" and a quote by David Benner on the love of God which both asked the participants to explore the ways they resisted and leant into the reality of the love of God as described by those pieces.

²¹ The weekly exercises include Scripture passages, poems, quotes, prayers and questions that relate to each week's theme. They are drawn from a variety of sources including the traditional and contemporary translation of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Larry Warner's *Journey with Jesus*, Kevin O'Brien's *An Ignatian Adventure*, James Wakefield's *Sacred Listening*, as well as passages, poems or prayers I have found personally useful.

²² Warner, *Journey with Jesus*, 70.

Week 2: Immersed in Creation-Centred Spirituality

Week two through week twelve followed the same format with each weekly Monday evening commencing with contemplative listening groups. In these groups, participants were offered the opportunity to use the space to explore an exercise that was of significance for them. It was anticipated that the exercise chosen would be one that evoked the greatest emotional response, or one they felt greatest resistance to. The larger group was broken into two separate groups in order to allow for up to three people in each group to share and to then receive prophetic ministry. Following the group listening time and after a short break, teaching was offered on the contemplative paradigm of finding God in all things; the importance of recognising and exploring any resistance that emerged through the weekly exercises; and a deeper exploration of contemplation through considering the phrase “a long, loving, look at the real.” During the teaching, participants were encouraged to ask questions and/or note any concept that challenged their pre-existing theological conceptions of self and God.

The exercises for week two continued with the theme of God’s love, however the focus was on how the creation of the individual, as well as the gifts of creation given to each person lead to a deeper experience of his love. The Scripture passages for this week included imaginative contemplation on Genesis 1:26-2:9 with a focus on the declaration of God that creation is “very good.”²³ Meditation on Psalm 139: 1-18 in conjunction with individual consideration of how God looks upon each participant. The prophetic encouragement received in week one supported this exercise through making it more

²³ O’Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure*, 46.

personal. Psalm 19:1-4 was offered for meditation and it was suggested that it be considered while walking in creation in order to enhance the sensory experience of God speaking through creation.²⁴ Meditation and lectio divina on Psalm 104 and the message version of Isaiah 65:1 which both speak of the presence of God being experienced through creation and his desire to be found were also assigned for this week. Two poems, one by Mary Oliver entitled “Messenger” and one by Meister Eckhart called “Apprehend God” were offered as additional meditations.²⁵

Week 3: Immersed in Spiritual Freedom

The teaching for this week was on the place of imagination in spirituality given imaginative contemplation was to become more prominent in the coming weeks. Following that, introductory thoughts around indifference and spiritual freedom were offered in anticipation of further exploration in week four. These concepts are so foundational to Ignatian spirituality that they were continually developed throughout the program. The weekly exercises for week three included reflection on the purpose and presupposition of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Scripture passages assigned for this week included Luke 1:26-28 where participants were encouraged to imaginatively place themselves at the annunciation and then reflect on that experience; Mark 10:17-27 where participants considered what attracted them to following Jesus and what emotions were evoked as they considered the exchange recorded in this passage between Jesus and the

²⁴ Warner, *Journey with Jesus*, 83.

²⁵ “Messenger” by Mary Oliver is provided by O’Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure*, 48 and Meister Eckhart’s “Apprehend God” is found in Richard Peace, *Noticing God*, chap 6.

rich young man; and John 3:22-30 where participants were encouraged to reflect on John the Baptist's freedom.²⁶ Finally, a quote on prayer by Ruth Burrows was offered for consideration.²⁷

Week 4: Immersed in the Principle and Foundation

Week four's teaching built on the previous week through focusing on indifference and disordered attachments. Gratitude as an Ignatian theme was also introduced. The assigned weekly exercises included a reflection and meditation on the principle and foundation of the *Spiritual Exercises* with both a traditional and contemporary translation provided to each participant. Scripture passages included Philippians 4:11-13 and Psalm 23:1 with accompanying questions related to Paul's contentment in Philippians and the provision of the shepherd in Psalm 23.²⁸ Matthew 6:19-25 exploring where our treasure lay had the participant consider any anxiety that might be present through sitting with Jesus in imaginative contemplation with this passage.²⁹ The final exercise for week four was an imaginative contemplation on John 21:15-17. Two prayers were also suggested, the Jesuit prayer for spiritual freedom that is used by Jesuits and a prayer by St Anselm of Canterbury.³⁰

²⁶ This week's Scripture passages and accompanying questions are all drawn from O'Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure*, 58-59.

²⁷ Ibid., 48.

²⁸ Warner, *Journey with Jesus*, 95.

²⁹ Ibid., 96.

³⁰ O'Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure*, 59 & 62.

Week 5: Immersed in Discernment: The Posture & The Process

Weeks five and six week were focused on the posture and process of discernment. The teaching this week explored consolation and desolation in more detail as foundational movements for the posture of discernment and introduced Ignatius's rules for discernment in brief. The process of discernment for decision making was also taught with a focus on the three modes of decision making based on Ignatius's instructions. The weekly exercises were more practical in nature, asking participants to reflect on any disordered attachments that might be present and therefore influencing their decisions or decision-making process. Further reflection was encouraged on which core desire lay behind that attachment, and then asking the participant to reflect on what God might be inviting the participant into.³¹ Imaginative contemplation on Matthew 19:16 was also assigned as a way to explore those core desires and what Jesus might be asking of each person. The final exercise was about using memory, reflection and meditation to consider how the participant had made decisions in the past with a view to understanding how an Ignatian discernment process might provide a different process for decision making in the future.³²

Week 6: Immersed in Discernment: The Posture & The Process

Week six teaching explored imagination and discernment and revisited the three modes of decision making. Weekly exercises for this week were drawn from *The*

³¹ Warner, *Discernment, God's Will and Living Jesus*, 79, Kindle.

³² Au and Au, *The Discerning Heart*, 97.

*Discerning Heart*³³ and included writing a personal obituary as a way to clarify values and core desires; discerning desires as being wishful, instinctual, tentative or definitive; and imaginative contemplation on Mark 10: 17-22, the parable of the rich young ruler. The other exercise that participants were asked to complete this week were a review of the love of God and how the participant's personal understanding and experience of that love had shifted or changed since the commencement of the course. This was used as a form of evaluation to consider whether participants are prepared to enter into the First Week of the *Exercises* where the loved sinner is central.

Week 7: Immersed in the Reality of Sin

Week seven of the Immersion Experience focused on Week One of the *Spiritual Exercises* where the reality of sin is the focus. Sin is present objectively and subjectively, and Ignatius has the retreatant consider both realities. Teaching focused on the devastation of sin and its effect on the soul and revisited the theme of sin as a lack of gratitude. The exercises for this week were drawn directly from Week One of the *Spiritual Exercises*, specifically *SE50* – the sin of angels, *SE51* – the sin of Adam and Eve, *SE52* – the sin of one person and *SE53* – colloquy with Jesus. Traditional and contemporary translations of these exercises were provided for participants.

³³ Ibid., 159-162.

Week 8: Immersed in the Reality of being a loved sinner

Week eight continued with Week One of the *Spiritual Exercises* and focused on the subjective reality of sin and how it had been and continues to be, present in each participant's life. The Enneagram was also utilised this week as a tool to uncover any unconscious motivators of sin which might otherwise remain hidden and therefore unable to be transformed. Teaching for this week included a review of consolation and desolation and particularly how sorrow and confusion for sin is an experience of consolation. The exercises for this week were also be drawn directly from Week One of the *Spiritual Exercises*, specifically *SE56 – SE58* which are reflections on personal sin and the effect of sin; *SE59* – which is a reflection on the attributes of God and comparative opposites in self; *SE60* – the cry of wonder which considers how the angels, saints and creation have supported the existence of humanity and finally *SE61* – a colloquy with God.

Week 9: Immersed in the Consequences of Sin

Week Nine considered the consequences of sin on both a global and individual level. Further consideration of the development of the false self and how it inhibits freedom was also reviewed with a particular emphasis on the attachments of the false self being a consequence of sin. Exercises for this week included meditation on Romans 6:23 in conjunction with a practical exercise of reviewing the news of the day and how sin leads to destructive behaviour;³⁴ meditation on Genesis 3:17-19 as a demonstration of the

³⁴ Warner, *Journey with Jesus*, 120.

consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve;³⁵ lectio divina on Psalm 51 which is a psalm of contrition;³⁶ imaginative contemplation on Mark 2:13-17 where the participant imagines being called by Jesus as Levi was called;³⁷ and finally, the meditation on hell as provided in the *Spiritual Exercises - SE 66*, concluding with a colloquy.

Week 10: Immersed in the Mercy of God

Week ten focused on the mercy of God. It was hoped that after considering the reality of sin, both cosmically and personally, as well as the consequences of sin, the mercy of God would become a more present reality for the participants. In keeping with the spirit of the project, each participant was encouraged to feel the mercy of God rather than give their cognitive assent to it as a concept. Teaching this week included Willard's "6 aspects of a human life"³⁸ as a useful way to understand how the mercy of God allows for holistic transformation across these six areas. Further teaching on repentance and necessity of true repentance in order to appropriate the mercy of God was also offered. Exercises for the week included a meditation and questions offered for deeper reflection on Romans 8:1;³⁹ a meditation and practical exercise focused on John 10:14-15;⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid., 123.

³⁶ O'Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure*, 103.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 30.

³⁹ Warner, *Journey with Jesus*, 73.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 74.

meditation and imaginative contemplation on the spiritual reality described in Ephesians 2:4-5;⁴¹ and imaginative contemplation with guiding questions on John 8:2-11.⁴²

Week 11: Immersed in the Call of the King

This week returned to the *Spiritual Exercises* and specifically Ignatius's mediation, the "Call of the King." Teaching was offered around the Ignatian concept of being contemplatives in action and the invitation to join in the mission of seeing God's dream for the world become reality. The exercises for this week was a consideration of the Call of the King meditation, specifically *Spiritual Exercises SE91-98*. Again, a traditional and contemporary translation was offered to participants. In addition to this imaginative contemplation on Luke 5:1-11, guiding questions was offered as well as a prayer by John Henry Cardinal Newman for the participants' consideration.⁴³

Week 12: Evaluation evening

Week twelve commenced with contemplative listening groups to explore the Call of the King exercise and what arose for the participants. Following the listening groups, participants were given an opportunity to complete the post-project survey which formed part of the evaluation. Further opportunity to verbally provide feedback was also offered and subsequently recorded for evaluative reflection.

⁴¹ Warner, *Journey with Jesus*, 66.

⁴² O'Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure*, 113.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 73.

Additional Practices

Along with the *Examen* that participants were encouraged to engage with each day of the Immersion Experience, the other practice that formed part of the reflecting component of the project was that of journaling. Ignatius himself encouraged the use of personal review for prayer periods as he writes, “After a formal prayer period is finished I should review what happened during the past hour – not so much what ideas did I have, but more the movements of consolation, desolation, fear, anxiety, boredom and so on...I thank God for the favors received and ask pardon for my own negligences of the prayer time.”⁴⁴

This demonstrates the importance Ignatius places on the exploration of personal interior movements and feelings that are evoked during prayer. This practice is crucial for developing greater self-awareness as well as an increased awareness of how the Spirit of God is leading the process of spiritual transformation. Journaling around these insights and the interior movements experienced was an important component of the project and was discussed during orientation in order to have it in place from the outset. Each participant was gifted with a journal for their personal use after the orientation day. Along with the journal, Kevin O’Brien’s questions were offered as a useful guide for those who would not otherwise journal their spiritual experiences. These questions included:

What were the significant interior movements (that is, feelings, reactions, intuitions, desires, emotions, thoughts, or insights)? What was the prevailing mood of my prayer: peace, agitation, excitement, boredom, confusion, calm? Was

⁴⁴ Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, 69.

my prayer more about the head or the heart, or about both? What word, phrase, image, or memory meant most to me during prayer? Is there some unfinished business that I think God is calling me to return to during another time of prayer? Is there something happening in my life that is becoming part of my prayer? Do I feel moved to do something concrete in my life? Am I making the necessary preparations for my prayer? Is there anything I am doing or not doing that is getting in the way of my listening to God?⁴⁵

These questions were intended to be a guide only and not formulaic. The content of the journal remained for personal reflection only but could have been used for the contemplative listening groups should the participant choose to share the content.

Contemplative Listening Groups

Contemplative listening groups comprised the exploring component of the program where the individual spiritual practices during the week were developed in a deeper way in a communal setting. Contemplative listening groups provided a space for each participant to serve one another through “holding space” for each person as they discussed particular experiences, emotions, thoughts, struggles or joys that were evoked through the weekly exercises. This was a reciprocal practice as each person held space for another, as well as having space held for them so their own experience could be explored more deeply.

It was anticipated that through this communal practice, community would be nurtured and developed as “people are present together in the Mystery of Love explicitly to assist one another in discernment.”⁴⁶ The development of discernment in this format

⁴⁵ O’Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure*, 27-28.

⁴⁶ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, chap 3, sec 5.

was twofold as the speaker had the benefit of the listeners' ears, and the listeners grew in discernment as they recognised the presence of the Spirit in their own lives through becoming aware of how he has been present to another. This practice supported one of the goals of the project being the development of a contemplative paradigm of finding God in all things which was facilitated as each person realised through the hearing of another's story that God communicates in ways both similar and foreign for them and is in fact present in ways or even in 'things' that might not otherwise be noticed.

Community is cultivated through communal contemplation as "the spiritual practices become public theology through acts of shared liturgical discernment."⁴⁷ This made the weekly experiences richer as they moved beyond a personal, subjective reality to shared experiences which became "communal vessels of grace."⁴⁸

As stories become communal vessels there is greater investment into one another's journey through a shared understanding of, and experience with the Holy in the midst of the community. This practice is a reflection of the bond the disciples of Jesus shared which is replicable through communal, contemplative practice that "cultivates accountability and altruism, both of which are crucial for living as Christ's disciples."⁴⁹

In order to ensure the group was a safe place to explore the very personal and sacred experiences being offered by each participant, all agreed to hold this

⁴⁷ Barbara Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, 2nd Ed, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), preface, Kindle.

⁴⁸ Susan Phillips, "Together in Prayer: The Art and Gift of Group Spiritual Direction," *Crux* 49, no 4 (Winter 2013): 17.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

contemplative space without “teaching, judging, interpreting, interrogating or advising.”⁵⁰ This is a position of surrender to the Holy Spirit as the true director and the One whom both listener and speaker desire to hear through the shared experiences. This required humility as each participant agreed that true listening requires letting go of “preconceived opinions, the need to be right, our own insecurities and the need to appear to be wise, good or spiritual.”⁵¹ In short, individual ego has no place in holding space for another as the other’s story is given value through preferring them and their experience over our own. This ensured that the group was a place where each participant felt “comfortable or at least willing to move beyond the discussion of ideas about God and spiritual matters to the sharing of what actually goes on between themselves and God.”⁵² Wakefield provides an overview of the role of listening that the *Exercises* requires:

The ministry of listening encouraged by these Exercises is very specific. We are not asked to teach anything or be responsible for anyone else. We are asked to walk on a spiritual path with other disciples, to offer them encouragement, to hold them accountable to continue praying, and if asked, to provide a reflection or second opinion that will help them appreciate their experience of the love of God.⁵³

This explanation demonstrates how we are all companions on the same journey. There are no experts, we are all learners and it is a privilege to hold each other’s sacred space and catch the glimpse of the Holy present in all of our lives.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁵¹ Fryling, *Seeking God Together*, 41.

⁵² Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, chap 5, sec 3.

⁵³ Wakefield, *Sacred Listening*, 45.

Practically, those groups were guided by Dougherty's conditions for group spiritual direction which was used as a guide for the necessary agreements and commitment that each participant agreed to adhere to. Specifically, the agreements included a) being honest with one another; b) wholehearted participation in the exercise; and c) opening our spiritual journey to one another.⁵⁴ Further, the protocol⁵⁵ for listener and sharer provided practical guidelines for the contemplative listening groups. Each week, the larger group was broken into two separate groups who then participated in communal listening groups led by either myself or my husband as the spiritual leaders of the church and as people who have completed the full experience of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The groups began with a time of silence and then gave opportunity for participants to share their stories. It was anticipated that each week there would be enough time to hold space for up to six people across the two groups and priority was given in subsequent weeks to those who had not had opportunity to share in the previous week. It was important to ensure all participants had equal opportunity to speak and explore their experiences.

Target Population

The target population for the Immersion Experience were leaders of Urban Church and specifically those leaders who oversee various departments and/or hold an executive level role within the church. All such leaders were invited to participate,

⁵⁴ Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, chap 4, sec 1.

⁵⁵ Susan Phillips, *The Cultivated Life*, 221-222.

however the first twelve that responded to the invitation were accepted into the program. Given there was an established relationship among the leaders, and I had personal relationship with each of them, I anticipated being able to discern whether this program would be of benefit to them and whether they were ready to participate. Moving beyond this year, it is hoped that this program will be extended to include others within the Urban Church community as well as the broader church community of Perth who express interest in contemplative spirituality. At that time, an interview process to ascertain suitability will be required.

CHAPTER SIX
IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Implementation

In November 2019, department leaders and executive team members of Urban Church received an email invitation to be part of the Immersion Experience in 2020. The invitation asked for a response by the end of January 2020 which offered each person three months to discern whether they wanted to participate. The email provided some details regarding the commitment required and a brief overview of the program. The number of participants was capped at twelve to allow ample space for each person to share during the contemplative listening groups. The group was filled by end of January 2020 with all participants committing to be part of the project and to providing feedback and evaluative advice following the project to be used for future programs.

The following timeline was implemented for the Immersion Experience. On March 21, 2020, all participants attended orientation which was held at Urban Church. At that time, there were some restrictions in place regarding meeting size due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. In Western Australia we were still allowed to gather in groups of 20 with physical distancing guidelines. Daily practices were scheduled to run from the

week beginning April 6 and concluding week beginning June 29. That allowed for twelve weeks of practice and one week break in the middle of the project. Immediately following orientation, Western Australia went into the next level of meeting restrictions due to COVID-19 which meant groups were no longer able to physically meet. Therefore, the first six weeks of the program was conducted online via the Zoom platform which took place on Monday evenings. Contemplative sharing happened through Zoom breakout rooms and teaching was offered through screen sharing and other online tools offered through the online platform. On May 18, 2020, Western Australia lifted some COVID-19 restrictions which meant the twelve participants in the Immersion Experience was able to meet face to face for the second half of the project. While this disruption had not been anticipated, it allowed for additional reflection on the different experiences between meeting online and then face to face, as well as how the communal aspect of the project was enhanced through being physically present with one another.

Assessment Process

The Immersion Experience was primarily evaluated through anonymous self-assessment surveys. There were two surveys completed by participants, one was completed at orientation and the other upon completion of the project. Both surveys are attached as Appendices.¹ The pre-project survey consisted of two parts. The first part asked general questions regarding the participant's openness to, knowledge of and personal use of contemplative practices as well as a general description of their spiritual

¹ See Appendices page 184 – 190.

and prayer life. The second part of the pre-project survey asked questions specific to the Immersion Experience, including the participant's knowledge of and personal experience with imaginative contemplation; the concept of the true and false self and its applicability to spiritual transformation; their experience of discernment; and their felt experience of the love of God. The post-project survey covered the same questions as the pre-project survey in order to ascertain whether those specific aspects of the participant's spiritual lives had changed as a result of the project. In addition, the post-project evaluation posed additional questions regarding the implementation and effectiveness of various aspects of the project. Specifically, the additional questions related to evaluation of the various components of the project and how effective or useful they were for the participants. Those components included orientation day, daily practices, contemplative listening groups and the weekly teaching. This effectively evaluated the four-fold approach to the project being teaching, transforming, reflecting and exploring. The post-project survey also made room for the participants to write comments and reflections on the various components of the project, as well as the opportunity to suggest any changes that might enhance the experience for future participants.

Along with the self-assessment surveys, I personally evaluated the project through observing the way the project progressed and how the participants were engaging with the exercises and reflecting on their experiences. The contemplative listening groups provided ongoing insight into how each participant was engaging with the daily prayer practices and whether they were experiencing the desired outcomes of the project including a felt knowledge of the love of God; awareness of their true and false self; and an unfolding understanding of discernment. All information collected through the surveys

and personal reflections was kept confidential. Participants were invited to keep their responses to the pre and post survey anonymous if they preferred to do so.

Summary Results

The overall goal of this project was to introduce a contemplative approach to spiritual transformation in a Pentecostal context through introducing Ignatian spirituality and an experience of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*. This overall goal was further broken down into five desired outcomes. Those outcomes and the results of each are described below.

Increased Imaginative Engagement with Scripture

Every participant in the Immersion Experience reported an increase in both their knowledge of and experience with imaginative engagement with Scripture. This component of the program was an overwhelmingly positive experience for the participants with ten out of the twelve² reporting a significant increase in their knowledge. Additionally, every participant indicated an increase in their personal use of the practice as part of their ongoing spiritual lives with four indicating their use of imaginative contemplation had increased significantly. This practice was specifically introduced as an Ignatian prayer practice and so reflected the broader approach of the project centred around Ignatian spirituality.

² All twelve participants completed the pre and post project survey.

The weekly exercises regularly included passages that encouraged Ignatius's approach to imaginative contemplation with a view to providing a more holistic encounter with Scripture. This resulted in new revelatory experiences for most of the participants and has now become an important part of their personal spiritual journey. One participant wrote, "I really enjoyed putting myself into Scriptures. I loved the REAL emotions I felt. This will be something I continue to do and will teach others to do as well." This was clearly an experience that participants valued with one person stating, "Given that [imaginative contemplation] wasn't part of my reality and now it forms an integral part of my walk, it introduced a massive change. This will be a backbone activity for me in future." Another stated, "As a result of a greater level of awareness of the exercises, some of these have become more common in my everyday walk with the Lord." In addition to the practices, the teaching around a contemplative approach to engaging with Scripture added to the experience with participants noting that the teaching "normalised it [imaginative contemplation] for me." The teaching appeared to remove any suspicion that may have lingered around approaching Scripture for encounter and not only knowledge accumulation.

Embracing the senses and welcoming the accompanying emotion through imaginative contemplation provided an opportunity for participants to step into a holistic encounter with Jesus rather than the traditional evangelical approach to reading the Bible for knowledge accumulation. Another participant noted, "I am now trying to connect with my feelings more and less intellect," which reflects the approach to engaging with Scripture as encouraged through the Immersion Experience. Imaginative engagement with Scripture facilitated the journey of knowledge from head to heart as the participants

encountered familiar passages in new and holistic ways. In addition to the passages offered for imaginative engagement, the colloquies that participants engaged with as part of the *Spiritual Exercises* enhanced personal relationship with Jesus as one participant noted, “The colloquy was my favourite way of engaging imaginatively. I feel as though I know Jesus in a way I have not experienced before.”

The personal impact of the practice of imaginative contemplation was further enhanced through the contemplative listening groups each week where participants had the opportunity to bring an encounter they had during the week, into the group setting to explore in a deeper way. It was through those groups that the revelation and encounters participants had received during the week lent themselves to further development through adding greater layers of understanding and experience in the context of the community holding space for one another. Even those exercises that hadn’t appeared to hold great insight, grew as they were explored in the group setting. One participant stated, “It was amazing and eye opening to feel God’s eagerness to move in the smallest opportunity.” This was facilitated through what one participant described as being “gently shepherded through the revelation.”

Through the weekly exercises that included imaginative contemplation and exploration through the contemplative listening groups, participants were encouraged to continue exploring their feelings and the deeper movements of consolation and desolation. One example of how this was beneficial for the participants can be seen in the different experience one participant had with the exercise in week three, an imaginative contemplation on the annunciation in Luke 1 and the Call of the King exercise in week eleven. In week three, the participant was deeply challenged by the way Mary

immediately responded to the call of the Lord in Luke 1. When we explored their feelings around this in the listening group, they realised it was because they felt “disqualified” from being called by God as they “didn’t feel worthy of his attention.” Through welcoming that emotion and subsequently exploring the narrative attached to the emotion, they identified the deeper movement of desolation. This became an invitation to reimagine how Jesus looked upon them and so when they came to participate in the Call of the King meditation in week eleven, they were able to embrace his personal call and experience freedom from the false narrative they were not even conscious of before participating in this project.

Overall, Imaginative engagement with Scripture formed the foundation for the Immersion Experience and proved to be a profoundly positive experience for participants and one that will continue to shape their personal spiritual journeys into the future.

Increased Awareness of the Role and Importance of Self Awareness in the Process of Spiritual Transformation

The second outcome for this project was an increased awareness of the role and importance of self-awareness to spiritual transformation. This requires a knowledge of both God and self to be effective. Eight participants stated that their self-awareness had improved as a result of the project. Specifically, their awareness had improved around aspects of their false self as revealed through their use of the Enneagram as a reflective tool. One participant noted, “Self-awareness is always important, but the nature of my awareness has changed.” It should be noted the participant’s level of self-awareness was generally high from the outset of the program which reflects the fact that all Urban

leaders have received teaching on self-awareness and participated in Enneagram workshops prior to participating in the Immersion Experience. What the project focused on was applying that knowledge to their spiritual journey and demonstrating how helpful it is to the process of reflection and transformation.

To that end, what is of interest is that all twelve participants noted an increase in how helpful their knowledge of self is to their spiritual journey. In fact, one participant did not rate self-awareness as being helpful at all for their spiritual transformation prior to the project and following, indicated it was four out of five on the scale of importance for them. One participant said, “This [how helpful the knowledge is] has changed a lot. Knowing who I am or having a growing knowledge of who I am has changed my spiritual life.” This demonstrates that having knowledge of self is but one part of the process of spiritual transformation, what is required is an application of that knowledge, using it to partner with the Holy Spirit who is the One who transforms. For example, identifying the way in which one’s own created image contrasts with the true self is crucial to knowing what needs transforming, as one participant notes, “This experience has highlighted the issues of the image I have of myself against God’s created image.”

When you can see the gap between the image held of yourself and the one God is calling you to, you can respond appropriately. Another participant summarised this in the following way, “I feel it is hugely important. If you’re not aware of certain things in yourself (true self/ego self), strengths, weaknesses and different tendencies, how can you grow or choose to change? Without it, how can you ‘deny’ yourself when the need to arises so that you can evolve, live as God intends – as your true self.” Another participant appreciated the increased knowledge of self as they noted, “Having an understanding of

my behaviour that I am able to identify with is amazing.” It would appear that the Immersion Experience not only offered tools to assist in increased self-awareness, particularly through utilising the Enneagram in conjunction with the relevant weekly exercises, but also provided opportunity to apply that knowledge to their everyday spiritual journey that made a difference to their lives.

Development of Understanding and Experience of Ignatian Discernment

This aspect of the project explored discernment as both a posture and a process. The posture was explored through teaching and exploring the interior movements of consolation and desolation, and the process focused on discussing Ignatius’s three modes of decision making. The posture of discernment was central throughout the project with participants being coached to identify the movement of consolation and desolation throughout the weekly exercises, contemplative listening groups and teaching. It is no surprise then, that eleven out of twelve participants reported an increase in their confidence to discern the interior movements of their souls. One participant stated that as a result of the Immersion Experience, “Anytime I feel movement, or my emotional temperature change I try to stop, listen and pay attention to what’s going on within. I now find myself exploring inward often.” The way in which that participant noted their willingness to embrace their emotions demonstrates the shift that other participants experienced away from the general distrust of emotion that has pervaded Pentecostalism.³

³ Huggett, “Why Ignatian Spirituality Hooks Protestants,” 29.

Another participant stated, “I am no longer afraid to explore and confront my feelings and fears.”

As participants were encouraged to re-evaluate the role of emotion and the deeper affective movements of their soul as per an Ignatian approach to spirituality, it resulted in the discovery of what Huggett refers to as noted earlier, “a [liberating] spirituality which encourages us not only in our feelings but to listen to them and allow the Word of God to speak into them.”⁴ This exploration of discernment through integrating emotion, imagination and reason influenced one participant’s spiritual journey as they realised, “There is a real relevance [to discernment] as I step past the script that I write and seek the script that the Father has given me. Discerning whose voice, I hear is the lesson.” Therefore, the posture of discernment led to greater intimacy and spiritual transformation which was the hoped outcome of this project.

There were only two weeks of the project, specifically weeks five and six dedicated to discernment for decision-making which, upon reflection, was insufficient and would need far more focus in future projects. However, as part of those decision-making weeks, exercises that specifically sought to uncover disordered attachments which might be influencing participant’s decision-making processes were explored. Identifying disordered attachments also supports the development of the posture of discernment and so were considered throughout other weeks, however the exercises offered in weeks five and six specifically focused on attachments and provided opportunity for participants to consider them with more intentionality. As a result, one

⁴ Ibid.

participant stated, “Disordered attachments in week five was a big week for me. It brought up a lot and it was quite an emotional week or two. One disordered attachment that was particularly prevalent, I was able to work through with Jesus at a time that was perfectly ordained. It was quite uncomfortable, but beneficial to work through.” For those who found these two weeks particularly confrontational, also noted that the discomfort was ultimately beneficial as they were reminded that any identification of disorder was an invitation to freedom. This was highlighted by another participant who wrote, “Week five really broke me apart. I went back to my childhood. However, I was able to reframe so much of my childhood that some of my memories are different now. The freedom that resulted was extraordinary. The hardest and yet most beneficial exercise. I wrote a new story.”

Development of a Contemplative Paradigm of Finding God in All Things

Participants were asked the same question in the pre and post project survey regarding how aware they are of God in their everyday life. The post survey results indicated that every participant had experienced an increased awareness of God in their life as a result of the Immersion Experience, with four stating it had “significantly increased.” Further, when it came to their individual prayer life, participants were asked how present God seemed to them during prayer. Half of the participants stated that God was “somewhat absent” or only “somewhat present” prior to the project, and following the project, all noted that he now felt “very present” in their prayer life.

Contemplative spirituality was the primary theme that extended throughout the weekly teaching and exercises for the twelve weeks of the project. The pre and post

project survey attempted to capture the participants general openness to and experience of contemplative spirituality and practice. Ten of the twelve participants indicated they were very open to contemplative spirituality and practices prior to the project, leaving only two who were not very open to contemplative spirituality. Following the project eleven participants indicated they were “very open” to contemplative spirituality practices and one participant significantly increased their openness from two prior, to four on a scale of five, after the project. Eight of the twelve participants indicated that their knowledge of contemplative spirituality had increased and eleven indicated they had personally increased their engagement with contemplative spirituality practices as part of their daily spiritual journey.

The Ignatian phrase “finding God in all things” was introduced at orientation and provided continuity of language for the development of a contemplative paradigm throughout the program. Week two’s exercises encouraged participants to consider how God was present to them through creation which was designed to encourage the development of the contemplative paradigm of finding God in all things. One participant stated, “I’ve been more drawn to awareness of him in nature,” and another said, “Finding God in all things, particularly in nature has evolved for me throughout the course.”

As a result of encouraging participants to find God through creation in week two, the foundation was laid for how they might “notice” his presence in other aspects of their everyday life. The encouragement to “notice” and to take a “long, loving look at the real” enhanced the participants awareness and ability to find God in all things through the weekly exercises that followed. One participant stated, “Doing the daily activities has made me more aware each day of God being in all things and speaking to me through all

things.” Another noted, “Prior to the course, I had a deep awareness of him being present, but the course has caused a focus for me on creating a space where he is always welcomed whilst present.” Even those participants who already had some knowledge and experience with contemplative spirituality said that the Immersion Experience had provided further knowledge and experience as follows, “I’ve been on this journey for some time yet feel that I now have more tools to use to help with my awareness.”

In addition to the weekly exercises, participants were encouraged to complete the Examen every day which had a dual purpose. The first was to assist in the development and experience of discernment through noticing the movements of consolation and desolation, and the second was to provide a tool to notice how God had been present to them throughout the day, and particularly in ways they had not noticed at the time. This was reflected in one participant’s feedback as follows, “It now feels like it’s quicker and easier to picture or feel/sense Jesus. Also, daily meditating on the ways that he reveals how present he is through the Examen over the past twelve weeks has helped with my awareness/revelation of this.”

Every week at the commencement of the contemplative groups, the practical act of lighting a candle continued to provide a sensory cue to shift awareness to the Spirit of God as being present and the ultimate director of what was to follow. This was a new practice for every participant at the commencement of the project, however many noted that it become a useful cue for them each week and some even carried the practice of lighting a candle into their own spiritual practices.

Understanding and Responding to the Love of God as Foundational to Spiritual Transformation

Participants were asked prior to the project how aware they were of the love of God in their lives. Every participant indicated a high level of awareness; however, it became evident early in the project, particularly through the contemplative listening groups that many of the participants “knew” they were loved by God but found it difficult to “believe” when they engaged holistically with the exercises. Prior to commencement of the program, on the orientation day, each participant was asked to write a prophetic letter to another participant that specifically focused on how God looked upon that person. In week one, the participants received their letter from God and were then encouraged to reflect on the level of resistance they felt when reading about how much God loved them as he looked upon them. Nearly every participant struggled to fully accept the love expressed to them through the prophetic letter and so discovered an invitation to rewrite some narratives they had about themselves, and God.

The journey from head to heart, from knowledge of the love of God, to belief in that love, is one that participants realised was profoundly important for their spiritual growth as they desired a felt experience of the love of God. The weekly exercises, journaling and listening groups provided various ways to uncover what was inhibiting their reception of the love of God as well as identifying the ways in which each person turns away from his love. This was particularly in view during weeks eight and nine which included the exploration of personal sin. Exploring sin in light of the love of God became a liberating experience for the participants with many noting that the colloquies with Jesus were particularly moving and transformative. One participant stated, “the

colloquy with Jesus gave me permission to be flawed and loved at the same time. This was a moving experience and one that I struggled to accept at first. But as I continued to hold his gaze, I realised that there was nothing I could do to make him love me any more than he already does.”

Standing before Jesus through imaginative contemplation was particularly transformative for the participants and reflects what Willard states, “The effect of standing before God by welcoming him before us will, by contrast, be the transformation of our entire life.”⁵ As participants stood before Jesus in the broad space of their imagination, they discovered his love in a way that pushed past their resistances and touched their inner depths. The transformative experience of such an encounter cannot be overstated. One participant stated, “God always shows up and reveals himself and his loving kindness, which constantly reaffirms his love for me.” Another noted, “I feel I have gained ‘new ground’ in this area through the exercises, specifically practising seeing myself through God’s eyes.”

Understanding how the love of God is more than a concept, but an experiential reality which transforms was a foundational theme for the Immersion Experience and encouragingly every participant reported an increased awareness and experience of the love of God in their lives in the post project survey. Not only that, but the realisation that God actually likes and enjoys their company was a revelation for one participant who stated, “I really feel like I have entered into a season of understanding that the Lord likes me and enjoys my company.” Therefore, while the revelation of the love of God is one

⁵ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 108.

that is beyond comprehension (Eph 3:19) in its fullness, there is an invitation to taste it afresh every day with even the smallest encounter with his love igniting the desire for more.

Program Evaluation

The various components of the program were also evaluated through the pre and post project survey. Participants rated the orientation day, daily exercises, journaling, graced history exercise, contemplative listening groups and weekly teaching. The rating was on a scale of one to five with one being least helpful and five most helpful.

Orientation day was rated highly with many participants appreciating the foundation it offered for what lay ahead. Although, one participant indicated that the day felt a “little rushed” for them and found there was too much information provided. Another suggested that some pre-reading would have been helpful to ensure the information on orientation was not “all new.” However, the majority found the day was a crucial introduction and provided welcomed “inspiration” as they anticipated the experiences to come. All participants indicated they enjoyed the imaginative contemplation exercise that concluded the orientation with one participant stating that their experience of that exercise, “literally held me through the twelve weeks.” For future projects, it would be beneficial to provide more time for orientation which would mean a longer day, but more time to reflect and ask questions. Providing more practical exercises on the day which could then be discussed as a group as way of introducing the format for each weekly gathering would also be useful for the participants.

The weekly exercises were also rated highly. The overwhelmingly popular exercises were imaginative contemplation and Scripture meditation. Participants noted that the meditative and contemplative exercises were easy to engage with and appealed to the Pentecostal appetite for encounter. Two participants stated that they would like “more teaching on this” including “hints on how to move from head to heart.”

The Examen had mixed reviews with some loving the practice, “What a gem is revealed here! Thanks for giving me this,” and another “I will do this forever.” While others found it difficult to incorporate it into their daily rhythm, particularly as a “scheduled” activity, preferring to spontaneously reflect as the Holy Spirit led them.

Journaling also produced a mixed review with only one participant rating this a five in terms of its importance for their spiritual journey. Many participants noted that journaling was not a common practice for them yet appreciated its place for reflection and deeper exploration of the weekly exercises. It would be beneficial to re-visit journaling in later weeks of the project to remind participants of its importance in the spiritual journey as it was only discussed at orientation. Continuing to hold it up as an essential practice throughout the weeks would enhance reflection and provide participants opportunity to ask questions and adapt their journaling habits to be of greater benefit for their own journey.

The graced history exercise was well received in week one and many found it useful to identify how God had been present to them throughout their lives. The aim of this exercises was to provide what Barry refers to as an “affective Principle and

Foundation,”⁶ which he uses to ensure the retreatant’s experiences of the love of God are at the forefront of their mind before commencing the *Exercises*. One Immersion Experience participant stated, “this was eye-opening from a guidance/love of God perspective. It was useful in noting patterns, but more time would have been better to develop it and then reflect on it.” Following week one when it was specifically used for the introductory exercise of contemplative listening, it was not referred to again which may account for its low rating in terms of its usefulness. This is another exercise that could be utilised further in later weeks to improve its rating and would be particularly comforting in the weeks that explore personal sin.

Contemplative listening was at the heart of the weekly Monday evening meetings with every participant experiencing the transformative value of these groups. That said, some did not “enjoy” them as they were at times difficult and confrontational yet necessary for significant change. One participant stated, “Sharing was difficult, but always led to something good. It gave me language for what was going on.” Another participant summarised their experience in a particularly insightful way as follows:

I believe in them and saw the Lord really use them to bless people in a MAJOR way. It was so beautiful to see people hold space for one another and to really listen. For myself I found it really hard not to save or give advice. It also felt awkward when no one wanted to share, and people started getting called upon. I would usually speak up not necessarily because I wanted to share but just to help fill the space. I am sure though that it is something in me that doesn’t like the long silence.

Several others noted that it was through the groups that they experienced the “most transformation” with one noting “I found this was the best part for me, just to have to sit

⁶ Barry, *Finding God in all Things*, 49.

and give one hundred percent attention to the person I found awesome and it helped me a lot.” While the temptation some experienced to “rescue” the person sharing was strong, particularly when sharing something painful and emotive, many noted that their trust in God to meet that person had increased as they surrendered control to the process. The listening groups always ended with a time of prophetic encouragement for the person who had shared in an effort to draw the Pentecostal and Contemplative together. This was a very well received component of the experience as one participant said, “I really enjoyed both listening and sharing and especially loved the prophetic space given at the end.”

Weekly teaching on the Monday evenings was rated very well with all participants reporting that it provided sound foundation for the entire experience. One participant noted that the teaching was, “Very insightful and great preparation in lead up to the weekly exercises,” and another said, “I needed the teaching to feel safe and comfortable to ask questions.” Each week the teaching would focus on a particular Ignatian theme that supported the weekly exercises to come. Teaching was often reframed through a prophetic lens as described in chapter four to ensure the language was more familiar for the Pentecostal context. However, like orientation, the weekly teaching was often rushed, particularly if the listening groups had gone over time during the evening. For future projects, consideration will be given to having some weeks that forgo the listening groups to focus particularly on teaching and then having participants experience alternative group exercises that provide opportunity to apply the teaching in practical ways.

General feedback was gathered on the final Monday evening of the project that considered the difference between meeting online and face-to-face, as well as any other element that participants wanted to discuss. Interestingly, many of the participants felt that the online experience was just as enjoyable and some even felt “less intimidated” to share in the listening groups with the perceived protective barrier of the screen. Although, there were more who preferred face-to-face as they “drifted away” when on Zoom and found it hard to concentrate when “interacting with a screen.” The positive of meeting online was accessibility as no one needed to travel to participate and was convenient for those who were also managing family responsibilities. For some, who travelled a great distance to attend face-to-face, the practicality of meeting online was a significant positive for them.

Further suggestions offered by participants included implementing an accountability measure to encourage completion of the weekly exercises. It was thought that an end of week email “check-in” sent by each participant to the coordinator, that noted which exercises they were completing would ensure greater participation each week. Whilst this has merit, it would remain an optional step and no feedback from the coordinator would be provided so not to feel as though the participants were being marked on their level of participation.

Conclusion

The Immersion Experience was designed to introduce participants to a contemplative approach to formation in a Pentecostal context. This was achieved through a four-fold approach which included teaching, transforming, reflecting and exploring.

The project was based on Ignatian spirituality and in particular the *Spiritual Exercise*. It was designed to be experiential and holistic in nature as an alternative approach to the traditional Pentecostal or Evangelical discipleship model which focuses on correct doctrinal knowledge and gift identification for service in the church. Given the Pentecostal context in which this project took place, a strong prophetic element was incorporated in an attempt to draw the Contemplative and Pentecostal streams together. The result was a twelve-week experience founded on the theology of the love of God as foundational to spiritual transformation, the importance of self-awareness in that transformative process, as well as a contemplative approach to spirituality supported by Ignatian prayer practices.

It is testament to the universality of the contemplative approach that Ignatius cultivated and culminated in his *Spiritual Exercises*, that the writing of a Catholic mystic who lived some four hundred years ago could have such an impact on contemporary spirituality. While some particularly Catholic concepts⁷ and at times, antiquated language that Ignatius used did not translate into a contemporary Pentecostal context easily, the essence of his thought and practice developed in response to his desire for intimacy with Jesus and resultant spiritual freedom, draws the heart of every lover of God as it surpasses the boundaries of time and denomination. I am grateful for the generosity of Ignatius who allowed the broad dissemination of his *Exercises*, and by extension, his approach to spirituality throughout his lifetime, and would hope that he would be delighted to see how it has shaped the leaders at Urban Church.

⁷ For Pentecostals, Ignatian colloquies to Mary, the mother of Jesus is particularly problematic.

The evaluation of the project demonstrated that every goal and outcome of this project was fulfilled, but what is of greater significance is the way in which the Immersion Experience has changed the individuals who participated as they were introduced to contemplative ways of encountering God and developing their relationship with his Spirit. Perhaps the longer-term impact of this project will be even greater as the leaders who have been changed through this experience begin to influence and teach others that they lead through their respective ministries.

Looking forward, the result of this project has been profoundly encouraging and interest in how it might be expanded to provide further opportunities to explore contemplative spirituality is high among the community at Urban Church and beyond. Many leaders in the ACC denomination as well as those who have personally contacted me from other parts of the church in Australia have expressed interest in participating in future Immersion Experiences. The feedback provided by this group, as the pilot project, has been invaluable in shaping future endeavours. In conclusion, I quote a participant whose feedback on her experience of the project encourages me to continue pressing forward in expanding the Immersion Experience and introducing Pentecostals to the Contemplative stream. She turned to me as we were concluding the evening and said, “This has been the deepest experience of community I’ve ever experienced.” What this suggests is that she felt known in a way she had never before and now knew that she was “enough” despite being a Christian for several years and yet doubting her self-worth. That for me - is more than enough.

APPENDIX 1

PRE-PROJECT SURVEY

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

- On a scale of one to five, one being not open at all and five being very open, how *open* are you to contemplative spirituality practices in your own life? *Please circle*

1 2 3 4 5

- What is your level of knowledge regarding contemplative spirituality practices? *Please circle*

No knowledge Some knowledge Growing knowledge Advanced knowledge

- On a scale of one to five, one being no engagement and five being high engagement, what is your level of engagement with contemplative practices currently? *Please circle*

1 2 3 4 5

- How would you describe your spiritual life currently? *Please circle*

Stalled - Somewhat stalled – Somewhat growing – Growing – Thriving

- My prayer life is currently. *Please circle*

Barely there Somewhat there Growing Dynamic & thriving

- On a scale of one to five, one being very closed and five being very open, how open or trusting do you feel regarding God's leading in your life? *Please circle*

1 2 3 4 5

- How present does God seem to you during prayer? *Please circle*

Absent Somewhat absent Somewhat present Very present

QUESTIONS SPECIFIC TO THE IMMERSION EXPERIENCE

This project will explore how Ignatian contemplative prayer practices promotes spiritual transformation specifically through: implementing imaginative contemplation exercises, daily prayer practices, weekly teaching, contemplative listening groups and promoting self-awareness. Please answer the current questions based on your current knowledge and experience.

- How much do you currently *know* about imaginative contemplation? *Please circle*

No knowledge Some knowledge Growing knowledge Advanced knowledge

- How often do you *engage with* imaginative contemplation practices? *Please circle*

N/A Never Sometimes Often Always

- On a scale of one to five, with one being not important at all and five being very important, how important is self-awareness in relation to your spiritual life? *Please circle.*

1 2 3 4 5

- Are you aware of the concept of the ‘false self’ and ‘true self’? Yes / No

If Yes, do you know what the characteristics of your ‘false self’ are? Yes / No

If Yes, on a scale of one to five, with one being not helpful and five being very helpful, how helpful is this knowledge in your spiritual practices for transformation? *Please circle*

1 2 3 4 5

- When making decisions that require discernment practices, how confident are you to engage with a ‘discernment’ process? *Please circle*

Not confident Somewhat confident Very confident

- On a scale of one to five, with one being not at all aware and five being very aware, how aware are you of God being present in your everyday life? *Please circle*

1 2 3 4 5

- On a scale of one to five, with one being not at all aware and five being very aware, how aware are you of being loved by God radically and unconditionally? *Please circle*

1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX 2

POST-PROJECT SURVEY

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

- On a scale of one to five, one being not open at all and five being very open, how *open* are you to contemplative spirituality practices in your own life? *Please circle*

1 2 3 4 5

- What is your level of knowledge regarding contemplative spirituality practices? *Please circle*

No knowledge Some knowledge Growing knowledge Advanced knowledge

- On a scale of one to five, one being no engagement and five being high engagement, what is your level of engagement with contemplative practices currently? *Please circle*

1 2 3 4 5

- How would you describe your spiritual life currently? *Please circle*

Stalled - Somewhat stalled – Somewhat growing – Growing – Thriving

- My prayer life is currently. *Please circle*

Barely there Somewhat there Growing Dynamic & thriving

- On a scale of one to five, one being very closed and five being very open, how open or trusting do you feel regarding God's leading in your life? *Please circle*

1 2 3 4 5

- How present does God seem to you during prayer? *Please circle*

Absent Somewhat absent Somewhat present Very present

QUESTIONS SPECIFIC TO THE IMMERSION EXPERIENCE

This project has explored how Ignatian contemplative prayer practices promotes spiritual transformation. Please answer the questions based on whether the following has *changed* for you as a result of the program.

- How much has your *knowledge/experience* of imaginative contemplation changed as a result of the program? *Please circle*

No change

Some change

Significant change

Comments: _____

- How much more do you *engage with* imaginative contemplation practices as a result of the program? *Please circle*

No increase

Somewhat increased

Significantly increased

Comments: _____

- On a scale of one to five, with one being not important at all and five being very important, how important is self-awareness in relation to your spiritual life? *Please circle.*

1

2

3

4

5

Has this changed? Comments: _____

- Has your understanding of the concept of the ‘false self’ and ‘true self’ improved? Yes / No

Comments: _____

Are you more aware of the characteristics of your ‘false self’ are? Yes / No

Comments: _____

If Yes, how helpful is this knowledge in your spiritual practices for transformation? *Please circle*

1 2 3 4 5

- Has your confidence to engage with a 'discernment' process increased as a result of the knowledge received? *Please circle*

No increase Somewhat increased Significantly increased

Comments: _____

- How much has your awareness of God being present with you in your everyday life increased? *Please circle*

No increase Somewhat increased Significantly increased

Comments: _____

- How much has your awareness and experience of being loved by God increased? *Please circle*

No increase Somewhat increased Significantly increased

Comments: _____

EVALUATION OF THE COMPONENTS OF THE PROGRAM

Please evaluate the effectiveness' of the various components of the program with 1 being unhelpful and 5 being very helpful.

Orientation Day

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Comments: _____

Daily Practices

Imaginative Contemplation

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Comments: _____

Examen

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Comments: _____

Scripture Meditation

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Comments: _____

Journaling

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Comments: _____

Graced History

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Comments: _____

Contemplative Listening Groups

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Comments: _____

Weekly Teaching

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Comments: _____

Do you have any suggestions for ways the Immersion Experience could be improved?

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