

Article

Raising the Soul in Love: St Ignatius of Loyola and the Tradition of Mystical Theology

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Abstract: This paper explores St Ignatius Loyola's relationship to the medieval tradition of theologia mystica, especially in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Although the evidence is scanty, it is clear that the young Iñigo was acquainted with the methods and structures of Abbot García de Cisneros' *Exercitatorio de La Vida Espiritual* during his extended stay at Montserrat and Manresa after his conversion of life. Commentators have disagreed over the extent of the influence of these writings on Ignatius' later spirituality; however, this paper will explore the 'family resemblances' between the type of spirituality developed by Ignatius after his stay in Catalonia and the later medieval spirituality expressed in the Abbot's work. In particular, the paper concentrates on one aspect of that work that has not received much attention: namely, the strand in Cisneros' work that explores the late medieval tradition of theologia mystica, particularly as reworked from the writings of Jean Gerson (1363–1429), sometime Chancellor of the University of Paris. The paper argues that Gerson's form of 'affective Dionysianism' shares much in common with the spirituality later developed by Ignatius, and will conclude with some final remarks as to how this helps us to understand the 'mystical desire' that lies at the heart of Ignatius' project.

Keywords: Ignatius Loyola; mystical theology; Montserrat; Jean Gerson



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1. Introduction

The young St Ignatius of Loyola, fresh from the battlefields of Pamplona, famously asked for novels of romance to divert himself during his prolonged convalescence at the family castle of Loyola. We know what happened next, and how the choice of books given to guests and patients can have profound and long-lasting consequences. His acquaintance with 'a life of Christ' and 'a book of the lives of the saints in Castilian' (A:5)—Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi* and Jacob de Voragine's *Golden Legend* translated into Castilian as the *Flos Sanctorum*—not only changed the young courtier's own life but that of Western Christian spirituality as he embarked on the 'imaginative contemplation' which would become the hallmark of what we now call 'Ignatian' spirituality.¹ Important though these books undoubtedly were for the young man's spiritual formation, I would like in this paper to concentrate on the next period of 'the pilgrim's progress': his journey to Montserrat and encounter there with the nascent Iberian tradition of affective spirituality, especially as described in García Jiménez de Cisneros' *Exercitatorio de vida spiritual*.² In exploring Cisneros' work, I want to draw particular attention to his debt to Jean Gerson (1363–1429), sometime Chancellor of the University of Paris.³ A lot of ink has been spilt over the centuries regarding whether, and to what extent, Cisneros may or may not have influenced Loyola.⁴ However, my purpose here shall be to explore that strand of Cisneros' work that draws upon Gerson and suggest 'family resemblances' between the type of 'affective Dionysianism' expounded by Gerson and Cisneros and the Ignatian spirituality that will later take the world by storm under the guidance of the founder and inspirer of the Jesuit Order.⁵ In so doing, I do not aim to downplay the other influences operating on the young Ignatius, nor his own originality, but rather point to an aspect of the late medieval mystical

tradition that contributed to the emergent spirituality of Ignatius that may have been neglected in the last few decades of discussion.

2. Gerson's Affective Dionysianism

In his *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (McGinn 2005), Professor McGinn continues his long-established distinction between 'affective' and 'intellective' Dionysianism as a way of distinguishing the Rhenish interpretation of the Areopagite originating with St Albert the Great and the interpretation that developed in the schools of Paris in the 12th and 13th centuries and centred around the abbeys of St Denis and St Victor (see also McGinn 1998 and Rorem 1993). This group of writers and commentators took particular interest in the Dionysian corpus, which was in the process of being re-translated by theologians such as Sarracenus and Robert Grosseteste in a manner which replaced the deficiencies of the older translations by Hilduin and Eriugena.⁶

Scholars of this tradition, including writers such as Thomas Gallus (Vercellienis), according to McGinn, 'attempt to see the Dionysian writings as the theoretical or speculative side of the practical theology of mystical joining with God described in the Song of Songs' (McGinn 2005, p. 13), thus reinterpreting the Dionysian 'mystical ascent to union in terms of the superiority of an experience of affective love beyond cognition'. In making such a distinction, McGinn and other commentators such as Rorem do not want to suggest there is no role in the Dionysian ascent for love or eros but rather that the new 12th Century Victorine interpretation will incorporate a more psychological perspective with emphases on aspects of the soul such as Gallus' apex affectionis/scintilla apicis affectualis (McGinn 2005, p. 488; see also Tyler 2011).

As commentators such as Taylor-Coolman (2009, in Coakley and Stang 2009) have pointed out, the bifurcation of the tradition into 'intellective' and 'affective' may sometimes miss the gradations of use to which the Dionysian corpus is interpreted by the Victorines and other late medieval authors (McGinn himself, in fairness, recognises this at the end of *The Harvest* in his subtle account of Cusanus' use of the Dionysian Corpus in his Fifteenth Century interpretation).

The work of Jean Gerson can broadly be placed in this tradition of affective Dionysianism, and recent commentators (see McGuire 2006) have sought to expose Gerson's wide-ranging influence on a variety of late medieval and early modern spiritual writers such as Martin Luther, Desiderius Erasmus and the whole movement of Devotio Moderna, Conciliarism and other proto-Reform movements in the late 15th Century.

In respect to the study of the writings of St Ignatius Loyola in the past century, I think this recent recovery of the tradition of 'affective Dionysianism' is important. The titans of 20th Century Ignatian ressourcement such as Arturo Codina (1926), Victoriano Larrañaga (1947), Ignacio Iparraguirre (1963), Joseph de Guibert (1964), Hugo Rahner (1964) and Cándido de Dalmases (1985) all either downplayed or ignored the Dionysian element of Ignatius' work and the putative influence of Cisneros. This, I would like to suggest here, may be a category mistake. As our understanding of the subtleties of late medieval Dionysianism develop, spurred on by the writings of inter alia Rorem and McGinn, then the old divisions between a pure Eckhartian 'intellective' Dionysianism and something more affective and associated with mystics such as Teresa of Avila begin to blur (see Tyler 2011). de Guibert, writing in 1964, is representative of the group of mid-20th Century Ignatian scholars who struggled to categorise this newly recovered dimension of Ignatius. He writes that:

Whatever else this Ignatian itinerary was in the secret depths of his soul, it was without doubt a way of abnegation growing ever greater, and of a mastery growing constantly more complete over his passions and the entire sensible part of his soul. (de Guibert 1964, p. 59)

However, he continues:

But it was not in any manner a way of gradual disengagement from the sensible, nor a flight ever more complete from the corporeal. In this regard it was completely different from the type of mysticism which can be called ‘Dionysian’.

(de Guibert 1964, p. 59)

This paper directly challenges that assumption by revealing the family resemblance between the school of affective Dionysianism that Ignatius encountered at Montserrat and Manresa and the spirituality that he will later develop in his life and writings, particularly in the *Spiritual Exercises*. I shall do that by suggesting six characteristics of Gerson’s and Cisneros’ school of affective Dionysianism and how they relate to the spirituality of Ignatius. In so doing, I hope to show that one of the roots to our understanding of Ignatius’ mystical desire may arise from the climate of late medieval Dionysianism that he encountered at the Holy Mountain of the Black Madonna.⁷

3. The Language of Mystical Theology Is Simple and Untechnical, Open to All

Gerson insists throughout his long writing career on the importance of simplicity in the approach to the spiritual life and is at pains to stress the importance of the vernacular in his communication of the nature of the spiritual life. At the beginning of *Mountain of Contemplation*⁸, he explains himself why he has chosen to write in French rather than Latin:

Some persons will wonder and ask why, in a matter so lofty as that of the contemplative life, I choose to write in French rather than in Latin, and more to women than to men. They will say that such a subject is not appropriate for ordinary people (simple gens) who have no Latin (sans letter). To this challenge I respond that the matter has been dealt with in Latin... Clerics who know Latin can make use of such texts. But it is different for ordinary people. (MC: 1)

Thus, we have in Gerson a self-conscious decision to make the lofty business of the theologia mystica accessible to all—even women! (See, for example, GMT:1.30:5). Gerson writes in *Mountain* in MC: 77: ‘We have seen and see in many cases that holy hermits and some women have gained more in the love of God through this contemplative life than many great scholars managed to do’. This observation is repeated by Cisneros in GE: 32: ‘We have seen and still learn by experience that some devout hermits and some women (in sanctis hermitis et in aliquibus feminis/santos hermitaños y en algunas mugeres) advance towards contemplation better in the love of God than many very learned churchmen and scholars (clerici et religiosi literati/grandes clérigos y religiosos letrados)’. For Gerson, as for Cisneros, the contemplative life is attained more quickly by simple and devout humility than by great learning. Again, from our perspective, it is striking how Gerson and later Ignatius, will preference the experience of holy women over men. Ignatius, unusually given his background and upbringing, gives special attention in his apostolate to the experiences of devout women, taking seriously their roles as contemplatives within the church (see, in particular Rahner 1960). It is no coincidence that the young Teresa of Avila will find most consolation from her Jesuit confessors, who are able to guide her in a way sympathetic to the ‘spiritual relish’ she is experiencing as a young nun.

It is generally agreed that Cisneros simultaneously presented his *Exercitatorio* in Latin and Castilian, thus making it part of that first wave of vernacular spiritual writing, initiated by his cousin Cardinal Francisco de Cisneros, that would have such an effect on shaping the style and language of the Sixteenth Century Iberian golden age of spiritual writings. Cisneros ends his Latin edition of the *Exercitatorium* by stating that the one who follows its strictures will be ‘borne along on the arms of God’s grace as with seraphic love’ to finally embrace ‘hope in life everlasting’. Much the same words occur in the Castilian edition, but, tellingly, he adds the following, surely again reflecting Gerson’s manifesto in his *Mountain of Contemplation*:

We have compiled this book in the vernacular (en vulgar), for our intention has been to compose it for the simple and devout (los simples devotos) and not for the learned and proud (los letrados soberbios). For the humble, no matter how

much they know, will not appreciate less a good work even if it be presented in a vulgar and simple style (en vulgar y llano estilo). (GE: 69)

How appropriate, then, that one of the chief beneficiaries of the work was the ‘unlettered’ (i.e., unschooled in Latin) young seeker, Iñigo, whose appreciation of this work was no doubt enhanced by the simple, frank style that Cisneros adopted as an homage to the French school of devotio moderna and in particular Chancellor Gerson. Like his spiritual compatriot, St Teresa of Avila, Ignatius retained the love of the simple and unadorned language of the devotio moderna throughout his life. Indeed, many commentators have remarked on the unadorned and simple style of writing such as the *Exercises*.⁹ Brodrick goes further, suggesting that as Iñigo’s first language was Basque, he was never entirely comfortable in the adopted Castilian and he famously found the learning of Latin excruciating (Brodrick [1956] 1998). Yet, as with Gerson, Ignatius’ peculiarly direct language also contains the spirit of the democratic spirituality of the Chancellor and Abbot.¹⁰ He insisted, so we are told in the *Autobiography*, on addressing everyone as vos (‘used between intimates or when speaking to inferiors, but not when speaking to superiors or persons whom it was desired to honour or placate’, Brodrick [1956] 1998, p. 137), and Ignatius tells us in the *Autobiography* that he explicitly used it ‘because it was so that Christ and His Apostles spoke’ (the Greek *συ* in the Gospels, A: 54, 63). He relates in the *Autobiography* tragic-comic tales worthy of Cervantes of how he insisted on this style of address even if it got him into hot water with army officers and prelates. Thus, we see not only in his simple style but in his manner of address an explicit use of spiritually motivated democratic levelling in the same fashion as we find in Gerson and, indeed, the whole devotio moderna in general. To someone of high rank this was constantly frustrating for him, and when, for example, he returns to the castle of Loyola after his studies in Paris, he insists, much to the annoyance of his brother and family, on not staying in the family home but amongst the poor in the hospital for the invalids seeking alms by begging on the streets (A: 87–88). Gerson would have approved.

The most striking manifestation of this in the *Exercises* is perhaps one of Ignatius’ most important spiritual manifestations, what he calls ‘the colloquy’. In Exx 54 he states that such a colloquy is made ‘properly speaking, in the way one friend talks to another or a servant to one in authority—now begging a favour, now accusing oneself of some misdeed, now telling one’s concerns and asking counsel about them.’ One can almost visualise here Ignatius before the governors and prelates of 16th Century Europe addressing them with the ‘vos’ that was his trademark. In similar fashion, we turn the ‘vos’ to the heavenly court of Father, Son, Holy Spirit and the Blessed Mother. Like Teresa of Avila, instructed by the sons of Loyola, we seek in prayer ‘an intimate friendship with God’. This is the true aim of the ‘democratic spirituality’ of the *Exercises*, as he puts it in Exx:104: ‘to ask for an interior knowledge of our Lord, who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely.’ In such simple and untechnical language, Ignatius, like his Gerson and Cisneros, draws the reader into the closeness and intimacy with the Divine that he sought. As he states in Exx 3, that such a colloquy ‘demands greater reverence from us than when we are using the intellect to understand’, and it is to the interface between the intellect and the affect we turn next.

4. Scholastic (Speculative) Theology May Be Unhelpful

Dionysius had distinguished the ‘knowing’ that comes from disputation and the ‘exoteric sciences’ of theology from the ‘knowing’ that comes from the ‘mystical initiation’. He considered both to be essential for good theological practice:

Theological tradition has a dual aspect, the ineffable and mysterious on the one hand (S: hanc quidem secretam et mysticam), the open and more evident on the other (S: illam apparentem et notioem). The one resorts to symbolism and involves initiation (E: eam quidem symbolicam et perfectivam). The other is philosophical and employs the method of demonstration (E: hanc vero philosophicam et approbativam). The one uses persuasion and imposes the truthfulness of

what is asserted. The other acts by means of a mystery which cannot be taught. (Ep: 9.1, Dion: 638)¹¹

Dionysius' rather balanced view in this respect contrasts with that of the Chancellor (or at least the early and middle period Gerson), who goes to great lengths to disparage the 'puffed up' intellectual pride of the university theologians. Scholars, 'especially theologians', he writes, should give themselves over to a great deal of contemplation otherwise 'their knowledge will not help them but puff them up and make them vain, empty and arrogant' (MC: 28), and indeed:

Much advanced scholarship and great learning in God's law may be quite suitable for the person who wishes to come to the height of contemplation, nevertheless sometimes such knowledge blocks their pursuit. Learning in itself is not a problem. Rather it is the arrogance and the self-inflation that the learned person derives from knowledge.

Recent scholarship (see [Fisher 2006](#)) suggests that the later Gerson took a more nuanced view on the value of learning. Yet the early work that would so influence Cisneros, *Mountain of Contemplation*, retains a suspicion of the value of academic theology and the importance of placing it in the context of a life of simple contemplation if one is to say anything meaningful about the Christian life, let alone the mystical way.

Thus, following Gerson, in Chapter 31 of the *Exercitatorium*, Cisneros stresses that 'great wealth of knowledge is not necessary for contemplation, for much knowledge and learning, and knowledge of the divine law and sacred scripture, though they are of great help to the one who aspires to the apex of contemplation (apicem contemplationis ascendere), can also at times be very harmful'. For, again referencing Gerson, although not harmful in themselves, such book knowledge can 'puff up' ('sed ratione inflationis occasionaliter') or 'inflate' the person to a false image of themselves. Hence, as with Gerson, Cisneros stresses the path of humility—especially for the learned and academically gifted.

Ignatius' experiences in Gerson's own university of Paris did not entirely persuade him of the importance of scholastic exercises. Never a natural scholar, he had to work hard on his studies, and one often gets the impression that he would rather not study given the chance. His own mystical journey, as found for example in the *Spiritual Diary*, is often centred on simple affective devotion, especially to the Eucharist, the Trinity and the Mother of God, rather than anything approaching intellectual apprehension (although we shall return to this shortly). Indeed, it is notable that when he studies, the devotions of the heart constantly fight against the desire for study.

Such a desire for experiential knowledge of God rather than academic knowledge of God is expressed in the *Exercises* as 'the desire... for interior knowledge of all the great good I have received in order that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve his Divine Majesty in all things' (Exx: 233). This, following the language of the *theologia mystica*, we can delineate in my next point as the distinction between *sapientia* and *scientia*.

5. Wisdom and Knowledge (*Sapientia* and *Scientia*)

Mirroring his dichotomy between mystical and speculative theology, Gerson makes a distinction between what he terms 'wisdom' and 'knowledge' (*sapientia* and *scientia*). The acquisition of *scientia* ('which seeks through reason based on the true faith the nature of God and his being and all his works', MC: 4) is 'not for ordinary people except through divine inspiration or a unique miracle, as happened to the apostles'. This will be the realm of the academic theologians. Rather, 'ordinary people' have before them the possibility of wisdom as 'taught in the books of mystical theology by Saint Denis of France' (MC: 4). Knowledge will belong to the intellectus (GMT)/l'entendement (MC) and wisdom to the affectus (GMT)/l'affection (MC).

In similar fashion, in Chapter 33 of the *Exercitatorio/Exercitatorium*, Cisneros almost transcribes Gerson's statements verbatim when he states:

A great difference is made by holy doctors between sapientia (sapiençia) and scientia (sciençia), and principally by the Blessed Bernard. For knowledge belongs primarily to the intellect (entendimiento) and is related to it alone, while wisdom belongs to the affect (affecto). Thus according to its name wisdom is called a ‘tasty knowledge’ (sapida scientia/sabrosa sciençia), whose savour comes from affect, desire, appetite and will (affectionem, desiderium, appetitum et voluntatem/affection, desseo, apeto y voluntad) wherein wisdom consists. (GE: 33)

And ‘following Gerson’, Cisneros further suggests that great knowledge does not necessarily lead to wisdom, for wisdom requires ‘relish and affection’ (saporm vel affectionem/sabor o affection). This, as I suggested in the previous point, is then the ultimate aim of Ignatius’ *Exercises*—to foster the experiential knowledge of (or even better desire for) God that is expressed through the movements of the heart described in *The Guidelines for the Discernment of Spirits* (Exx: 313–336), where Ignatius refines the Gersonian/Cisnerosian sapientia into a sophisticated tool for discerning God’s action in the exercitant’s life. Such sapientia derives from what he calls the experience of ‘consolation’, where ‘the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord’ (Exx: 316), often experienced when ‘the soul sheds tears which move it to love for its Lord’, which leads to ‘every increase in hope, faith and charity, and every interior joy which calls and attracts one toward heavenly things and to the salvation of one’s soul by bringing it tranquillity and peace’. However, we can see Ignatius’ sapientia as having a more urgent twist than perhaps we find in Cisneros and Gerson, where he continually suggests in the *Exercises* that we shall develop a closer relationship with Christ in order to be impelled to action in the world rather simply forming a union with the Divine. Cisneros states that the purposes of his own *Exercises* is ‘to bring the soul into union with God’/ayuntar el anima con Dios (Prol, pp. 18–20) by means of the Dionysian three-fold path. In contrast, Ignatius, in the Annotations to the *Exercises* (p. 10), mentions that week one corresponds to the ‘purgative life’ and week two to the ‘illuminative life’ of the classic three-fold Dionysian path. No mention is given of the ‘unitive life’, which has led commentators to suggest that the ‘union’ of the *Exercises* is the ‘union in action’ initiated after the undertaking of the Ignatian *Exercises*. As he would later write in a letter to Antonio Brandao in 1551 regarding the role of studies for the young scholastics of the nascent Society of Jesus:

The aim of their studies prevents the scholastics from making long meditations. Over and above the exercises for growth in virtue, they can practice seeking the presence of Our Lord in all things, for example, in conversing with someone, in walking, looking, tasting, hearing, understanding, and in everything that we do, for it is true that His Divine Majesty is in all these things in his power and essence. (Ignatius of Loyola 1991, p. 353)

We shall return to this ‘contemplation in action’ as a manifestation of Ignatius’ sapientia in our final point below.

6. Mystical Theology as a ‘Savoury Knowledge’

Cisneros, in his *Exercises*, stresses, with Gerson, that all knowledge has to be tasted and savoured for it to become wisdom. Knowledge without this acquired taste is useless. At this point in the *Exercitatorio* (GE: 33), Cisneros cites the homely example given by Gerson in Section 5 of *Mountain of Contemplation*. Here, Gerson boldly calls the mystical theology a savoureuse science—literally a ‘tasty knowledge’—from which Cisneros derives the term above. Gerson goes on to state, as we see in Cisneros, that this taste (savour) ‘concerns the emotions, the desire, the appetite and the will of the person’. As usual, the Chancellor gives a homely and direct analogy:

One can know about the nature of honey by hearing about it or studying books without having ever savoured the sweet taste of honey (savour en goust de la douceur du miel). (MC: 5)

In this respect, Gerson departs most radically from the pure intellectual Dionysianism of, for example, Meister Eckhart. The Chancellor's Dionysianism is one with a distinctly Gallic twang of 'savour', 'gout' and delight:

One receives a sense of delight or spiritual enjoyment (en la delectation ou plaisance espirituelle) felt in the soul when God visits it secretly, after one has humbled oneself before His Majesty. And if this happens, then an ordinary person, when they receive some of the benefits mentioned here, will know God better than any scholar or philosopher. (MC: 8)

Warming to his theme, Gerson quotes the Song of Songs (1:3–4) and describes how God will visit us with 'une douceur, une odeur, une saveur, une joie sobre, une claret, une pais; un erlargissement depensée, un goustement, un son sans son/a sweetness, an odour, a taste, a sober joy, a brilliance, a peace, an opening of their mind, a sense of bliss, a soundless sound' (MC: 13).

Likewise, Cisneros, in Chapter 29 of the *Exercitatorio/Exercitatorium*, references Psalm 23: 'taste and see that the Lord is good' for 'by these words (the psalmist) shows that the true exercitant and devout seeker tastes (gustat/gusta) of God in the first place through love, and only afterwards understands through the intellect that which she had experienced through tasting in the heart (gustado el corazón)' (GE: 29).

Such 'tasty knowledge' is also to be found in Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*. At the beginning of his work, he instructs the giver of the *Exercises* to foster greater 'spiritual relish and spiritual fruit' (más gusto y fruto espiritual) in the exercitant rather than 'lengthy explanation and meaning', for 'it is not in knowing much but deep down feeling and relishing things interiorly that contents and satisfies the soul/porque no el mucho saber harta y satisface al anima, mas el sentir y gustar de las cosas internamente' (Exx: 2). In the *Autobiography*, the first time he refers to the *Spiritual Exercises* (dar ejercicios espirituales, A: 57) at Alcalá in 1526 he explicitly relates that 'many people grew in understanding of spiritual things and in greater relish for them'. This savour or relish rather than intellectual knowledge would become for Ignatius the touchstone by which the success or otherwise of the *Exercises* was held. As he says in Exx: 124, we should 'taste the infinite sweetness and charm of the divinity of the soul/gustar y con el gusto la infinita suavidad y dulzura de la divinidad del anima'.

This is explicitly described in the 'Methods of Praying' (Exx: 238–60), where Ignatius urges the exercitant to dwell on each phrase, word and syllable of a prayer, such as the 'Hail Mary' or 'Our Father', so as 'to consider the word as long as meanings, comparisons, relish and consolations connected with it are found' (Exx: 252, 254). Such relish—and here Ignatius perhaps goes further than Gerson and Cisneros—should even be connected with bodily awareness (Exx: 247, 248) and breath-awareness (258). In Exx: 76 he concentrates on prayer-posture, telling us that we are to enter into contemplation: 'now kneeling, now prostrate on the floor, or lying face upward, or seated or standing—but always intent on seeking what I desire'. Although Cisneros in *Exercitatorio*, Chapter 69 also describes different postures for prayer; unlike Ignatius, who suggests we adopt the position that helps us most, Cisneros directs us to the 'more perfect position'.

7. Eros and Apophasis

The tradition of Affective Dionysianism to which Gerson was heir took seriously (possibly uniquely in the late medieval and early modern Christian traditions) Dionysius' exposition of the importance of eros in the spiritual journey. As Professor McGinn puts it:

The Dionysian program is a cosmic one in which the divine Eros refracts itself into the multiple theophanies of the universe, which in turn erotically strive to pass beyond their multiplicity back into simple unity. (McGinn 1991, p. 161)

All movement in the hierarchy of creation, for Dionysius, comes from above and is 'fundamentally erotic'. Not only do all things strive erotically for the Beautiful and the Good (DN: 4), but the Deity itself is Eros: 'Divine Eros is the Good of the Good for the

sake of the Good' (DN: 4.10). Or, to put it in the terms used by Gerson, it is a knowing which involves the libidinal or affectus as much as the intellectus. This erotic union, being engendered by eros through the affectus and the libido, leads to an ex-stasis, the ecstasy: 'through ecstasy we pass beyond the human condition and become divinised' (McGinn 1991, p. 179).

Cisneros refers to this tradition in Chapter 28 of the *Exercitatorio/Exercitatorium*, where he presents Dionysian contemplation heavily filtered through the Victorine tradition as received by him from Eiximenis' *Tractat de contemplació* (who is receiving the tradition from Gerson) and de Balma's *Viae Lugent Sion*. He quotes Dionysius as saying that 'this wisdom is known by means of our ignorance; for no reasoning or understanding (ratio, intellectus/rázon ni entendimiento) or human knowledge can raise the exercitant to a union after this manner.' For, 'the affection of love (afeción de amor/amoris affection) alone reigns within it'. And in such manner, reflecting Dionysius' account of the erotic ecstasy in Book Four of the Divine Names, the seeker 'is touched by this Divine wisdom, made to rejoice by the touch of God and lifted up on high, so that it faints away, in such a manner that language will fail to express what is now felt in love' (tactu divine sapientie exhilarator et sursum elevatur et hic deficit, nam non sufficit lingue exprimere officio, quod de suo hic sentit dilecto).

Dispensing with Gerson's measured anxiety about the relationship between intellectus and affectus, Cisneros' affectus can launch straight away to God without any prevenient intellectus: 'with true contemplatives and tried exercitants, the highest part of the soul soars upwards immediately, through fervour of love, without any labour of understanding or speculative or practical knowledge of aught beside the love of God, and even without any speculative thought of God whatsoever' (GE: 29) as 'the soul is set on fire with the love of God' (anima igne divini amoris inflammetur/sea ardiente en Díos por el fuego de amor).¹² The 'fuego de amor', set on fire by Dionysius' divine eros, reminds us of the final 'flame of love' that Ignatius feels for all creation in his final 'contemplation to attain love' with which he ends his *Exercises*:

I recall the gifts I have received, my creation, redemption and other gifts particular to myself, I will ponder with deep affection (con mucho afecto) how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much he has given me...

I will speak as one making an offering with deep affection (afectándose mucho): 'Take, Lord, and receive, all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and all my will—all that I have and possess... Give me only your love and your grace (amor y gracia) that is sufficient for me. (Exx: 234–35)

For a writer who is routinely accused of being slightly pedantic and mechanical in his approach to the spiritual life, in passages such as this, as I suggested earlier, the mask slips and we have a glimpse of the passionate, might we dare say erotic Ignatius, whose fire is banked up throughout the *Exercises*. If we look carefully, the embers are flickering throughout, and if we read the *Exercises* alongside the witness of the *Autobiography* and the fragment from the *Spiritual Diary* latterly published, the argument that Ignatius is heir to the late medieval tradition of erotic/apophatic Dionysianism becomes more convincing.

In the 'Guidelines for the Discernment of Spirits' Ignatius describes 'a consolation without a previous cause' which by its nature 'will have no deception in it since it is coming only from God our Lord' (Exx: 336). Such 'direct perceptions' of God pepper the *Autobiography* and the *Diary*. In A: 28–30, for example, he speaks of these experiences using the apophatic/erotic binary so familiar to the tradition to which he was heir. God appears as 'three musical keys that brought on so many tears and so much sobbing that he could not control himself' (A: 28). Or, later, 'he seemed to see something white, from which some rays were coming, and God made light from this, but he did not know how to explain these things' (A: 29). Or, finally, and most dramatically, whilst he is gazing into the waters of the Cardoner river near Manresa:

The eyes of his understanding began to be opened; not that he saw any vision, but he understood and learnt many things, both spiritual matters and matters of faith and scholarship and this with so great an enlightenment that everything seemed new to him... the details that he understood then, though there were many, cannot be stated, but only that he experienced a great clarity in his understanding. This was such that in the whole course of his life, after completing sixty two years, even if he gathered up all the various helps he may have had from God and all the various things he has known, even adding them all together, he does not think he had got as much as at that one time. (A: 30)¹³

In a famous letter to Teresa Rejadell written in 1536, he stresses how such rapture cannot be put into words:

It often happens that our Lord moves and compels our soul to a particular course of action. He opens up our soul; that is, he speaks inside the soul without the din of words, raising it up wholly to his divine love, so that we are incapable—even if we wanted to—of resisting his intention. (Ignatius of Loyola 1991, p. 337)

Commentators such as Ganss have helpfully pointed out the noetic element in these experiences.¹⁴ However, thirty years after the experience, as Ignatius struggles to articulate it to his secretary Camara, he explicitly states that ‘the details cannot be stated’. Whereas Ganss (and many others) relates the incipient form of the *Exercises* at this stage to his readings of Ludolph and De Voragine, I think it is equally important to stress how much of the Ignatian experience at this point can be placed in the Dionysian theophany whereby the Divine eros unites with us as part of creation and leads us back to the source through an affective unknowing. For, as expressed in the final ‘Contemplation to Attain Love’, the unity of the soul with creation glimpsed at this moment is the apophatic-erotic unity of the Dionysian vision. Such a vision of ‘God in all things’ will inevitably lead to Ignatius’ final call to action, again, following the tradition created by Gerson and Cisneros.

8. Mystical Theology Outside the Cloister

Gerson constantly emphasises how important it is for the contemplation of mystical theology to move outside the cloister to engage with the affairs of the world. A famously active and practical figure, the Chancellor engaged in the most important ecclesiastical (and often political) events of his times, participating very actively at the Council of Constance, making passionate and well-constructed interventions for the conciliarism he hoped would repair the damaged fabric of Western Christendom.

In *Mountain of Contemplation*, he feels that the personality of some seekers will suit them more to the contemplative life, and others to the active life. Some ‘are of such a disposition that they have difficulty in overcoming or taming themselves’ and should avoid the contemplative life, whilst others, on the other hand, ‘have already reached the stage when active life becomes a great burden and an overwhelming impediment to contemplation’ (MC: 18). In passages such as this, Gerson seems to anticipate Carl Jung’s division of ‘personality type’ into ‘extravert’ and ‘introvert’ by 500 years. In common with Jung, he emphasises the need for the naturally introverted person (by temperament or divine grace) to develop the active side of their personality and the naturally extroverted to develop their contemplative side: ‘thus in one person it is always necessary that Martha be with Mary, and Mary with Martha’ (MC: 18).

Cisneros takes up this distinction in Chapter 32 of the *Exercitatorio*, giving the reference to Saint Gregory the Great (also acknowledged by Gerson) and quoting *Mountain of Contemplation* directly. However, Benedictine as he was, he places the emphasis more on the importance of contemplation being open to all (‘even though a person is simple’—‘personae simplices’/‘personas simples’). In the later Chapter 35, he adopts Gerson’s integration of Martha and Mary in the same person: ‘in the same person Martha must ever be present with Mary, and Mary with Martha’. Thus, we see in Cisneros, reflecting Gerson, the no-

tion of ‘contemplation in action’ that will become so fruitful when embraced by Ignatius, reinvigorating it into the ideal of Christian life in his new Society of Jesus.

The desire to help people find ‘relish’ in the things of God was the driving force of Ignatius’ new crusade in the world. Throughout the *Autobiography*, we hear that once Ignatius found himself in a new town, whether Barcelona, Salamanca or Venice, his first instinct was to find the simplest and poorest people to work with. As Brodrick puts it, ‘at Manresa, Barcelona, Alcalá and Salamanca Inigo appears to have met only simple unlettered people, mostly women, and to those awkward novices on the slopes of Mount Carmel he gave with utter love and devotion all that at the time they were capable of taking’ (Brodrick [1956] 1998, p. 168). In so doing, Ignatius was taking the example of the Gersonian *Devotio Moderna* and bringing contemplation out of the cloister to the marketplace. This has been the special gift of his Order—the Jesuits—from those first evangelical missions in Catalonia and Castille up to the present day. The *Exercises* stress that love ‘ought to manifest itself more by deeds than words’ (Exx: 230). That is, we can have the mystical visions by the Cardoner and at the Eucharist, but, counsels Ignatius, such mystical love must spill out into apostolic action outside the cloister as described in the appendices to the *Exercises* such as ‘The Guidelines for the Ministry of Distributing Alms’ (Exx: 337–44).¹⁵ In the letter regarding the way of his life for his scholastics that we quoted earlier, having given the list of practical activities wherein they can find God, he concludes: ‘this kind of meditation—finding God our Lord in everything—is easier than lifting ourselves up and laboriously making ourselves present to abstract divine realities. Moreover, by making us properly disposed, this excellent exercise will bring great visitations of our Lord even in short prayers’ (Ignatius of Loyola 1991, p. 353). As this passage reveals, action and contemplation are for Ignatius two sides of the same coin and one cannot develop mystical pieties without at the same time developing a life of Christian action in the world. Overemphasis on the latter has sometimes led to downplaying the former. By re-situating Ignatius within the tradition of mystical theology to which he is heir we can recalibrate this balance once again, restoring the mystical heart that lies at the heart of Ignatius’ call to ‘contemplation in action’.

9. Conclusions

Reviews of Cisneros’ work and its putative influence upon Ignatius have been mixed. Ganss, in his edition of Ignatius’ works, suggests that Cisneros’ *Exercitatorio* may have ‘suggested to (Ignatius) later the title of his own book, and also some of the methods he proposed’ (Ignatius of Loyola 1991, p. 26). Apart from this, and some other minor influences on the final version of the *Exercises*, Ganss does not give much emphasis to Cisneros and his influence (preferring to emphasise the importance of Ludolph of Saxony’s *Vita Christi* and Voragine’s *Flos Sanctorum* on the young pilgrim). Melloni, in contrast, asks why the young man should break his pilgrimage to the Holy Land for a year in order to live in the cave of Manresa under the shadow of Montserrat (see Melloni 2000, p. 3). His conclusive (and in my view convincing) answer is that Ignatius recognised the importance and lasting influence of Cisneros’ pioneering school of Catalan spirituality centred on Montserrat and (perhaps instinctively) realised that he had to stay for this instruction of the soul before he could move on to his other objectives. Other 20th Century commentators such as Arturo Codina (1926), Allison Peers (1930), Ignacio Iparraguirre (1963), Joseph de Guibert (1964), Hugo Rahner (1964), Cándido de Dalmases (1985), Terence O’Reilly (1973) and Baraut all take positions between these two extremes, emphasising more or less the structure of Cisneros’ exercises, his meditations on the life of Christ (which would have reinforced what Ignatius had gleaned from Ludolph of Saxony) and his deft summary of the Dionysian ‘three-fold path’ as possible ways in which Cisneros had influenced Ignatius—admittedly with the Jesuit commentators generally (and quite understandably!) emphasising the originality of Ignatius.¹⁶

The emphasis of the present study has been on the wider late 15th Century climate of Iberian affective Dionysianism which, I have suggested, may have been an influence in

shaping Ignatius' later outlook. Although previous commentators, as noted, have tended to emphasise the originality and novelty of the Ignatian approach, I hope to have demonstrated here that, at least in the six points discussed, there is a 'family resemblance' between Ignatius' orientation and that of the later affective Dionysianism he would have encountered at Montserrat. Original Cisneros may not have been; however, by creating a primer of later medieval mystical theology, he provided an invaluable education to the young Ignatius (in much the same way that Francisco de Osuna's 'Third Spiritual Alphabet' had performed this role for the young Teresa of Avila). The masters of the devotio moderna which Cisneros used to shape his *Exercitatorio* all, in one way or another, drew on the affective Dionysianism of Jean Gerson to create the necessary climate of affective prayer which will flower in the hands of the mature Ignatius in Rome.

During the process that prepared the way for Ignatius' beatification and canonisation in 1595 and 1605, the monks of Montserrat confirmed that Ignatius had sought spiritual guidance with Dom Jean Chanon, who accompanied him through Cisneros' own *Exercitatorio* (see Melloni 2000, p. 4; de Guibert 1964, p. 157; Allison Peers 1930, p. 33). If this is the case, then Cisneros' school of affective spirituality, derived from Gerson, will have shaped Ignatius to a much greater degree than we may have thought possible. Melloni, in his instructive study, concludes that from Cisneros the young Ignatius received the 'Benedictine tradition with its liturgical ordering of time; the Carthusian tradition, source of the ascending sequence of lectio, meditation, oratio and contemplation, the Franciscan tradition with its devotion to the humanity of Christ and the Devotio Moderna with its methods for interiorizing prayer' (Melloni 2000, p. 11). Although he mentions Ignatius' derivation of the Dionysian 'three-fold path' from this source too, we can conclude by adding that, via Gerson and Cisneros, he is also heir to the late medieval tradition of affective (or we might even call it 'Gersonian') Dionysianism which, for this author at least, seems to lie very close to the heart of the Ignatian project.

Therefore, in conclusion, I do not want to downplay the originality of Ignatius and his unique contribution to the future development of Western spirituality. However, the essential activism that lies at the heart of Jesuit life and Ignatian spirituality today has tended to mask the mystical and contemplative heart that lies at the centre of Ignatius' writing, not least that which derives from the late 15th Century climate of Dionysianism to which he is heir.

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Notes

- ¹ Throughout I have used the Spanish edition of Ignatius' writings in (Ignatius of Loyola 2014). English translations are taken from: (Ignatius of Loyola 1991, 1996). I have used the two following abbreviations for the two main texts referenced: A = *The Autobiography*, Exx = *The Spiritual Exercises*.
- ² García Jiménez de Cisneros, 1455–1510, cousin of the Spanish Patriarch, Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros and Abbot of Montserrat (by command of the Catholic Monarchs) from 1493–1510. His *Exercitatorio de la vida espiritual* was first published by the presses of Montserrat in 1500 along with his *Directorio de las Horas Canónicas*. I shall use the edition in the *Obras Completas* edited by Dom Cipriano Baraut (Cisneros 1965). Although I shall mainly make my own translations of the work, Castilian and Latin versions, I have consulted Allison Peers' 1929 translation of the Castilian text and that of the 'Monk of St Augustine's Monastery' (Cisneros 1876) of the Latin text.
- ³ For a good summary of Gerson's 'omnipresent' influence on the 15th Century see Mazour-Matusevich (2006). Ignatius referred to Gerson later in life, but this was the mistaken attribution of the time of Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* to the Chancellor, hence its popular Spanish name, the 'Gersonzita'.
- ⁴ I shall return to this in the final section.
- ⁵ Cisneros was, of course, wonderfully eclectic in his range of sources and not entirely dependent upon Gerson (although he refers to him by name over fifty times). Of the 69 chapters of the *Exercitatorio* O'Reilly (1973), following Baraut (1967), identifies 15 taken from Zutphen (seven from *De reformation virium animae* and eight from *De spiritualibus ascensionibus*), one from Thomas a Kempis' *Hortus rosarum* and 11 from Mombaer's *Rosetum* (whom Cisneros met in Paris in 1496) as well as material from Bonaventure (*De Triplici Via*, *Soliloquium de quatuor mentalibus exercitiis*) and other Franciscan sources such as Francesc Eiximenis' *Tractat de*

contemplació and Carthusian sources such as Hugh of Balma's *Viae Lugent Sion*. Along with passages from Ludolph's *Vita Christi*, which Ignatius had already read directly, and the work of Nicholas Kempf (*Alphabetum divini amoris*—usually attributed at this time to Gerson), Cisneros' work was therefore a primer of late medieval affective spirituality. Mombaer, Zutphen and a Kempis all rely heavily on Gerson's distinction between intellectual and affective spirituality that I develop here and this will be the main emphasis of this study. For more on the wider influences on Cisneros see O'Reilly (1973); Baraut (1967) and Melloni (2000).

6 Sarracenus produced his version of the *corpus* in 1166–7, the first full translation since Eriugena, some three hundred years earlier. I shall reference the Sarracenus version with S and the Eriugena with E—both would have been available to the Victorines and scholars such as Gerson, for more on this see Tyler 2011.

7 I shall draw primarily upon the influence of Gerson's *The Mountain of Contemplation* (hereafter MC) and his *Mystical Theology: The Speculative Treatise* (hereafter GMT) as used in Cisneros' *Exercitatorio de La Vida Spiritual* (hereafter GE). Barault gives 39 references in total in the *Exercitatorio* to Gerson and 5 references in Cisneros' other works (E. Allison Peers gives 50 in his 1929 translation, Cisneros 1929, p. 16). The *Mountain of Contemplation* is the most referenced (17 times) followed by the *Mystical Theology (Practical and Speculative Treatises)*. Gerson is mentioned by name 15 times. I shall use the edition of (Gerson 1966, vol. 7.1: pp. 16–55) and Gerson's (1958) using translations from (Gerson 1998), when available, otherwise my own.

8 *La Montaigne de Contemplation*, in Glorieux vol. 7.1, pp. 16–55. Probably written in 1400 at Bruges. I shall draw upon the translations in McGuire 1998, where necessary introducing my own translation. Hereafter MC.

9 Roland Barthes goes further to describe Ignatius, along with Sade and Fourier as a 'logothete' who creates a new architecture of language. See Barthes (1971) and Munitiz/Endean (Ignatius of Loyola 1996), p. ix.

10 Whereas Gerson clearly intended his *Mountain of Contemplation* for a wider lay audience, Cisneros' work, although fitting into the late 15th Century/early 16th century explosion of spiritual reading initiated by Cardinal Cisneros, was 'intended primarily for the monks' (Allison Peers 1930, p. 10). That being said, the fact that it was written probably first in Castilian and then translated into Latin (see Allison Peers 1930) suggests, as I have argued here, that the Abbot was working very much within the spirit envisaged by the Chancellor.

11 Latin versions of Dionysius are taken from: *Dionysius the Areopagite* (Dionysius the Areopagite 1937–1950) and English from: *Dionysius the Areopagite* (1987). I have used the following abbreviations for the main works referred to: DN = *The Divine Names*, EH = *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and Ep = *Epistles*.

12 In same fashion Cisneros in GE: 45 references Gerson's example in MC, Ch. 31 where the soul in ecstasy is cast away from all earthly cares, such as Archimedes, oblivious to the rioting soldiery as he contemplated his mathematics: 'the meditation or love is so powerful in its virtue that it makes the soul forget or cease from all other workings and phantasies as though it were in perfect repose or sleep' (GE: 45). In his greater emphasis on the *affectus*, Cisneros here mirrors Francisco de Osuna who takes the same path in his *Third Spiritual Alphabet* which will have such a profound impact on the young Teresa of Avila (see Tyler 2011).

13 In Gonçalves de Câmara's *Memoriale* Ignatius seems to refer again to this incident. When Ignatius was asked about why certain points were later adopted in the ordering of the Society of Jesus he replied that they were because of 'some experience (*negocio*) that I underwent in Manresa... a great illumination of the understanding in which our Lord at Manresa showed to our Father these and many other things later established in the Society' (Ignatius of Loyola 2004, p. 84, No. 137).

14 Ibid., pp. 31–34.

15 As he stated in the *Memoriale* of Gonçalves de Câmara: 'He did not want anyone in the Society who came simply for his own salvation, but he said that everyone should be prepared in addition to help the salvation of others' (Ignatius of Loyola 2004, p. 97, No. 158).

16 The debate is not new. In 1595 Dom Arnaldo Wion of Douai suggested that all the 'perfection and meditation' of the Jesuits was derived from Cisneros' *Exercises*. Constantino Cajetan, the Benedictine Papal Librarian, weighed in during 1641 suggesting that Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* were 'in large measure borrowed from the *Exercitatorium* of the Venerable Garcia de Cisneros'. This was followed later by a repudiation from the Milanese Jesuit Giovanni Rho in 1644 (see Brodrick *Saint Ignatius Loyola: The Pilgrim Years*, pp. 225–26 and de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, p. 152). Both Orders later distanced themselves from the views of these partisans (MHSJ, *Exercitia Spiritualia Sancti Ignatii de Loyola*, Madrid, 1919, p. 122). At the beginning of the 20th Century Besse and Watrigant clashed with Codina over the issue in a manner, which to Allison Peers at least, was 'inconclusive' (Allison Peers, *Book of Exercises*, pp. 32–33). In more recent scholarship Mazour-Matusevich ('Gerson's Legacy', 380) tends to play down the influence of Gerson and Cisneros on Ignatius, stressing the 'active but also militant' aspect of Ignatian spirituality over the 'docile' quality of writers such as Mombaer. Rather, she would like to emphasise that in Loyola the link with Gerson 'is visible in spirit rather than in the letter' ('Gerson's Legacy', p. 380). She concludes: 'nothing is more foreign to Mombaer, Cisneros or Gerson than the psychology and strategy of the soldier, even if it be the soldier of Christ' ('Gerson's Legacy', p. 381). It is hoped that the present paper will challenge such binary judgements.

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