

*The Way* is an international journal of contemporary Christian spirituality, published by the British Jesuits. Through writing informed by critical and creative scholarship, it aims to provide a forum in which thoughtful Christians, from different walks of life and different traditions, reflect on God's continuing action in human experience.



**Berry Bishop**

***Spiritual Direction as a Source of Healing in the Wake of Trauma***

*The time-honoured art of spiritual direction can help or hinder people as they heal from traumatic experiences. This critical appraisal encourages practitioners work with sensitivity to discover the positive approaches that foster resilience.*

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**Woo-Jung Kim**

***Vulnerability and Virtue in the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises***

*The dynamic of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises leads from vulnerability to growing virtue as we become aware of the forgiveness of God. The freedom to love is rooted in our recognition that God shares our vulnerable nature through the cross.*

**Robert Green**

***Was Jesus Abandoned***

*This theological analysis rejects the notion that God abandoned Jesus on the cross. It releases us from a bundle of unsettling theologies and demonstrates how, in not abandoning Jesus, God reveals that he will never abandon anyone with important repercussions for our understanding of pastoral practice.*

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**Robert W. McChesney**

***Noticing Hibakusha***

*The survivors of the first nuclear bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki are reminders of the necessity of recognising human fragility both within and without. It is only by acknowledging that God shares that fragility that we can hear the good news proclaimed to all those who suffer.*

**Gerard Garrigan**

***Spirituality and the Arts: The healing nature of poetry and jazz***

*The endless play of art in life, exemplified by jazz, is a reflection of the indefatigable human spirit.*

**Mary Cohen**

***New Narratives: Dementia, Arrupe, and Living the Suscipe Prayer***

*Pedro Arrupe's surrender to God in the face of a suffering is the inspiration for this meditation on how to accompany those who suffer from dementia. God can make use even of the involuntary surrender of memory, understanding and will in order to bring patients and carers closer to Godself.*

**William M. Watson**

***The Perennial Vitality of the Ignatian Examen***

The connection between the Examen and the autobiography of St Ignatius creates a deeper understanding of the inner workings of this prayer. Watson shows how God made use of the trauma that Ignatius received to fashion him anew, and shows how we can receive the same healing in our own lives.

**Annemarie Paulin-Campbell**

***Has the Pandemic Changed the World of Spiritual Accompaniment Forever***

*A hallmark of Ignatian spirituality is its capacity to adapt to circumstances of person, place and time. The new context of the pandemic was the cause for a reevaluation of the use of technology in spiritual ministry. Perhaps*

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*surprisingly this has opened up new frontiers in practice and formation for spiritual directors.*

**Gavin Murphy**

***Bursting out in Praise: Faith and Mental Health***

*A former Jesuit novice describes his journey through mental ill health to arrive at the discovery of the affirmative work of the Holy Spirit at work within each of us.*

***From the Foreword***

Foreword Last summer's film *Oppenheimer* tells the story of the designer of the first nuclear weapon. It reminded us of the fragility of human life before the means we still have at our disposal to destroy ourselves. Yet even in the darkest moments of human history, hope has sprung anew, strength has been received and we have been able to walk forward in confidence. The human spirit was made indefatigable, nourished by the hidden well-spring of God's life. Each of the articles in this issue touches upon the theme of resilience, a growing strength in the face of adversity. With God at our side we stand forever at the threshold of hope. In the wake of the first nuclear attack in Hiroshima, Pedro Arrupe searched through the wreckage of the city and tended to the surviving victims. Based on his work with survivors of trauma, Robert McChesney invites us to notice and respond to these hibakusha who lived with the continuing impact of what they had experienced. He shows how, through the incarnation, God reveals the desire

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to walk with all those affected by violence. Later Pedro Arrupe's own suffering after his stroke gave him the opportunity to discover for himself that he was, more than ever, in the hands of God. Mary Cohen draws out spiritual inspiration from his self-surrender for sufferers of dementia and their carers today. Bill Watson's empirical approach to the Examen Prayer is the fruit of many years of helping people to implement it in their lives. His work has been based on a profound insight into the connection between the prayer and Ignatius' own traumatic past. The prayer encouraged Ignatius to heal from the spiritual trauma of a ruptured relationship with God. A critical appraisal of the role of spiritual direction in recovery from trauma enables Berry Bishop and her co-authors to show what helps and hinders in spiritual ministry. They argue that the role of the director is to build a spiritual home where life can be received once more. In an article reprinted from our online sister journal *Thinking Faith*, Gavin Murphy found that the Jesuit novitiate was not, in the end, the home where he would flourish, but in his surprising journey to mental well-being he finally arrived in the same place. The First Week of the Spiritual Exercises is one place where we can acknowledge our human fragility before the love of God. In an exposition of the role of vulnerability in virtue ethics, Woo-jung Kim argues that as we look upon the cross we recognise that God shares our vulnerable nature: The culmination of this revelation of God's vulnerability is Jesus dying for us on the cross. When we understand this

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vulnerability, we can recognise our own vulnerability, as our nature reflects God's attributes and participates in God's nature. Although some theologies have claimed that God abandoned Jesus on the cross, Robert Green argues that God neither abandoned Jesus nor does he forget any one of us, with important implications for pastoral ministry. Two of the articles here tackle the positive and negative impact of the global pandemic. Annemarie Paulin-Campbell's experience of the online ministry of spiritual direction helped deepen her understanding of how Ignatian spirituality can be adapted to time, place and person. The pandemic brought to light a human fragility that could easily make us feel uncertain about the future of humanity. However all the articles in this issue give us cause for hope. We walk with growing strength, reassured by God's continuing presence even in the midst of adversity. Gerard Garrigan makes the following invitation: Let each one of us live our own improvised lives in this extraordinary time with the delightful originality with which our loving God created us in his glory with joy, with verve, with zest, with hope and, most of all, with swing.

Philip Harrison SJ Editor

***Philip Harrison SJ***

# THE PERENNIAL VITALITY OF THE IGNATIAN EXAMEN

## The Work of the Sacred Story Institute

*William M. Watson*

OUR FAMILY VACATION on the Oregon coast in the summer of 1973 ended on 21 August, the feast of the Blessed Mother's Assumption. On the way home, we stopped at the Jesuit novitiate near the town of Sheridan, Oregon. My family left and I stayed to begin my new life as a Jesuit. In the evening of that same day, while walking the hilltop trails of the novitiate property and watching the sun set, I made my first Ignatian Examination of Conscience. My recollection of that Examen was a sense of gratitude because I felt I had come home.

Moving ahead two decades, I made the final stage of my Jesuit formation in Northern Ireland, in the town of Larne in County Antrim. Years before this spiritual sabbatical, I had let the habit of the Examen slip, till it was hardly present. Now I discovered in the illuminating, mystical fires of the Spiritual Exercises the price I had paid for abandoning this most elemental of all daily Ignatian practices.<sup>1</sup> So, for the next ten years, I reincorporated the twice-daily Ignatian Examen back into my spiritual regimen.

The Examen's reintroduction into my life had salutary benefits in body and spirit. God's discrete presences were more transparent. Understanding that the movements of consolation and desolation were constant even outside a retreat—24/7—was a revelation. Also, my general health improved, both benefits I attribute to a more carefully

<sup>1</sup> The teaching of Christian doctrine for the early Jesuits was coupled with instructions for examination of conscience and the confession of sins. The instruction was less about theory and more about practical formation in 'how life was to be led as a Christian'. Jesuit pastoral practice with the laity did not shy away from the Examen's focus on sins. However, the early Jesuits sought generally to highlight the more positive aspects of spiritual growth and God's mercy. This positive focus matched Ignatius' own graced experience of God's love and mercy as he awakened to his sinfulness. See John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard U, 1993), 53–54.

examined and modulated life. It was early on during this period that I decided to develop an institute devoted to making the Ignatian Examen an accessible spiritual tool for people of all ages.

I wanted to resurrect teaching the dual benefit of a daily Examen practice with regular confession. Also, over many years in Ignatian retreat development, I knew that, practically, making a thirty-day retreat was an unachievable goal for nearly all the lay women and men I knew. It was an imperative to create a self-guided method that anyone could do. So, for this, and after thirty years of active ministry, I began a doctorate in ministry to form the basis for the Sacred Story Institute, founded in 2012.

### ***The Origins of the Ignatian Examen***

My doctoral programme provided the intellectual space to research the origins and structure of St Ignatius' unique Examen discipline. My first goal was to understand how Ignatius developed his method so that I update it faithfully for the third millennium.

I intuited I would find the building blocks of the Examen in the *Autobiography*, as I discovered no extant record or writings on its creation other than that his method was unique to himself.<sup>2</sup> For this, I did a close reading of the *Autobiography*—reading and rereading it. A Jesuit usually reads it once in the novitiate and that is it. But believing that the most unique spiritualities in Catholic history emerge from the way God works with human instruments during their ongoing conversion, I concluded that the *Autobiography* might hold the key. Understanding the how and why of its structure would provide the foundation for the remaining research.

A third of Ignatius' *Autobiography* is dedicated to the first two years of his conversion. A close scrutiny of these early years of Ignatius' faith journey reveals important insights. In this early part of his conversion narrative one can discern four paradigmatic events that appear significant not only for Ignatius' life, but for the spirituality that marks his

<sup>2</sup> George Ganss states that Ignatius formulated two methods of examination that 'were original' to him. George E. Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary* (Chicago: Loyola U, 1992), 153 note 23. On the particular examination of conscience, 'St Ignatius is generally considered as the author or at least as the first who reduced it to a system and promoted its practice among the faithful': Maurice Meschler, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Explained* (Woodstock, Ma: privately printed, 1899), 32.

legacy, including the Examen. These are Ignatius' injury at the siege of Pamplona and initial conversion experience (*Autobiography* nn.1–10); his temptation at Manresa by his former sinful life (n.20); his crisis with scruples (nn.21–27); and a sequence of near-death experiences (nn.32–34). They give rise to what I have called the Ignatian, Truth, Powerlessness and Patience paradigms.

In May 1521, Ignatius was wounded at Pamplona, when a cannon ball shattered his leg. While recuperating from surgery, 'he requested books of knightly exploits and chivalrous romances popular with men of his social class'.<sup>3</sup> But the only reading matter available to him was Ludolph of Saxony's *The Life of Jesus Christ* along and the *Flos Sanctorum*, brief tales of the most popular saints' lives. Reading the books, his vain fantasies were interspersed with holy thoughts of making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. But Ignatius started to see something in his daydreaming ruminations:

... one time ... his eyes were opened a little, and he began to marvel at this difference in kind and to reflect on it, picking it up from experience that from some thoughts he would be left sad and from others happy, and little by little coming to know the difference in kind of spirits that were stirring: the one from the devil, and the other from God (*Autobiography*, n.8).

This led to 'an archetypal structure of conversion and vocation' which corresponds to the 'spiritual arc' of both the Examen and the Spiritual Exercises themselves.<sup>4</sup>



Saint Ignatius Wounded in the Battle of Pamplona, by Miguel Cabrera, 1756

<sup>3</sup> Willam M. Watson, *Sacred Story: An Ignatian Examen for the Third Millennium* (Seattle: Sacred Story, 2012), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Watson, *Sacred Story*, 10.



<i>Autobiography</i>	Examen
A graced experience of God's love opening Ignatius' heart to →	GIVE THANKS FOR FAVORS RECEIVED
↓	↓
his dissatisfaction with vain fantasies and surrendering to holy daydreams characterized by consolation which in turn: →	GRACE TO SEE CLEARLY
↓	↓
cause him to review his life and actions leading to: →	DETAILED ACCOUNT OF CONSCIENCE: GENERAL AND PARTICULAR
↓	↓
his grief and the yearning for penance and the repentance for his past sins, culminating in: →	ASKING PARDON FOR FAULTS
↓	↓
Ignatius' passion to amend his life and a desire to love God wholeheartedly.	RESOLVE AND AMEND

### ***Ignatius Is Schooled in Discernment***

As one reads the *Autobiography*, it is clear that Ignatius' conversion process was guided by two foundational discernment insights at critical junctures or crises. The first of these came after he left the Loyola manor on pilgrimage to Montserrat. He was overcome with anxiety and fear that he would have to live the remainder of his life—seventy years—without the pleasures of his first thirty. He was graced with the insight that this was a temptation and named it as such—‘you wretch! Can you even promise me one hour of life?’ (*Autobiography*, n.20) In consciously confronting the fear of a lifelong commitment to battling his habitual sins, plus the constant self-examination it entails, Ignatius is ‘rewarded with both peace and profound insights into the discernment of spirits that fill him with “awe”’.<sup>5</sup> This provides the basis for the Truth paradigm.

<sup>5</sup> Watson, *Sacred Story*, 14.

The second crisis, which gives rise to the Powerlessness Paradigm, is linked to his ferocious scrupulosity over confessing past sins, which drove him to contemplate taking his own life. And yet, just at the point of seeming failure, he was graced with what might be the most important insight of his life, at arguably the most vital juncture in his conversion process. What no effort of his own could achieve came to him from the Lord, 'as if awakening him from sleep' or from a dream.<sup>6</sup>

### **Testing the Modern Examen**

Understanding the origins of Ignatius' unique Examen structure and realising that discernment is essential to navigate ongoing conversion, I had the necessary elements to construct an updated reading authentic to Ignatius' intent. But I would also need to produce a self-guided set of discernment strategies comprehensible to the average reader as the inevitable crises of conversion arose. I created a format for describing discernment principles that incorporates both narrative and descriptive elements. Also, I distilled the wisdom of the Rules for Discernment into short 'affirmative' statements that recur throughout the journey at the beginning of each new week.<sup>7</sup>

My doctoral research gave me the opportunity to assess the effectiveness of an updated method of making the Examen on human subjects. The basis for the analysis was provided by commentators who, for various reasons, had determined that Ignatius' method was deficient in helping individuals achieve integral and holistic spiritual and human growth. From the multiple commentators reviewed, five major themes surfaced: narcissism and individualism; narrow moralism; the interplay between sin and psychological compulsions; the social dimensions of sin; and modern secularizing trends and their impact on God-mindedness or God-consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

I had the help of two scholars to shape a survey for the research. One was a specialist with an Oxford doctorate in psychometrics, and the other a specialist in market testing with a doctorate in business. The survey tool I call the Whole Life Survey. It asks individuals for

<sup>6</sup> Watson, *Sacred Story*, 21.

<sup>7</sup> See William M. Watson, *Forty Weeks: An Ignatian Path to Christ with Sacred Story Prayer* (Seattle: Sacred Story, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Eight *Examen* commentators were used in my research: George Aschenbrenner, David Townsend, Joseph Tetlow, John English, Joan L. Roccasalvo, Peter G. van Breemen, Mary Hugh Campbell and Brendan Kneale.

information on multiple aspects of their ‘story’, including family history, education, medical history, and religious beliefs and practices. It was designed to help assess reactions to the new Examen method being tested so I could correlate response to the method and a subject’s background—his or her *story*.

The hundred participants in the survey were divided equally between Roman Catholics and Protestants. The Protestant subjects came from seven different denominations. It has been my intent, from the start, to create a version of the materials for Protestants, who, for reasons that appear linked to the pragmatic style of Ignatius’ methods focused on Jesus and the gospel, gravitate in large numbers to his spirituality.<sup>9</sup>

### *Results*

At the end of ten weeks, where participants did the daily exercises that would become refined in the book *Forty Weeks*, I had 2,000 pages of data. Participants had also completed the survey twice, once at commencement and once at the conclusion. The two surveys were essential to gauge the participants’ growth or lack thereof over the course of the study, in the five areas where commentators had criticized the Examen.

The subjects who completed *most* of the required exercises made statistically significant progress in minimising narcissism, individualism and scrupulosity or narrow moralism. Diligent subjects also achieved statistically significant growth in understanding the connection between their sins and psychological compulsions. It has been suggested that the Examen can be a privatised, ‘me and Jesus’ spiritual discipline, but they also showed increased awareness of the social manifestations of sin. And finally, the goal of the Examen to become more conscious and aware of God in a secularised world was amply realised.

There were also two other important results of the research. First, those who experienced the least spiritual growth tended to be much more self-satisfied than those who grew the most, who had a humbler opinion of themselves. This humility was probably due to the Examen’s ascesis helping individuals achieve genuine self-awareness before God. And second, of those who left the study early, the surveys indicated that all, *to a person*, had sustained some form of early-life trauma.

<sup>9</sup> In 2021, and with the editing help of multiple Protestant pastors, we published *Discovery: A Disciple’s Journey*. All Sacred Story publications are available from our website: [sacredstory.net](http://sacredstory.net).

### ***Humility and Pride***

In the course of many years of Ignatian programme development, I have been committed to ensuring the First Week of the Exercises is dutifully represented. Beginning in gratitude for the gifts that God showers on us, the First Week continues with a stark set of exercises that follow, forming the majority of the Week, that draw an exercitant into a full awareness of personal sinfulness. This is not just an awareness, but a conviction that one cannot save oneself from the magnitude of the damage sin has wrought in one's life. Of the multitude of purported modern versions of the Ignatian Examen I have researched, very few spend any time on these meditations on sin. Gratitude is aptly covered, but not sin.<sup>10</sup> But the Ignatian paradigm I detail above must be present for an Examen to be called 'Ignatian'. Unless and until someone realises his or her sin, and lack of capacity for self-salvation, Jesus, as Saviour, will not be necessary.

So, my research revealed that those participants who engaged in more exercises, including the daily fifteen-minute discipline, simple daily recording of consolations and desolations, and preparing and making the Whole Life Confession, had a more sober view of themselves.<sup>11</sup> They had come closest to what Ignatius intended in the First Week, realising more fully the scope of their sinfulness and discovering not themselves, but Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Conversely, those who did fewest fifteen-minute Examen, did not keep their journals diligently, and did not take part in sacramental reconciliation or a Protestant form thereof, had a more self-satisfied sense of their spiritual maturity. This aspect of the research would prove to be absolutely essential to the *sense and depth of community* that formed in the subsequent testing of the Forty Weeks method.

### ***Trauma and the Examen***

In three important articles written between 1972 and 1988 George Aschenbrenner observed the neglect of the Examen among religious men and women. He wrote: 'Examen is usually the first practice to disappear from the daily life of the religious ... all the reasons amount

<sup>10</sup> One wonders if this focus on positive elements such as gratitude alone has been influenced by their authors' own difficulty in understanding Ignatius' true intent with his unique method of Examen and in opening to its full ascesis *and* its graces.

<sup>11</sup> I created for the research participants a method for making a confession of one's life, modelled on Ignatius' confession at Montserrat, that now comprises the first third of the Forty Weeks method.

to the admission (rarely explicit) that it is not of immediate practical value in a busy day'.<sup>12</sup> He later added, 'they start to practice it because it seems important, but it just does not last'.<sup>13</sup> Most commentators on the Examen are aware of the difficulties that secular culture presents to persons seeking to cultivate self-awareness. Aschenbrenner hints that undefined pressures make it difficult for them to achieve the day-long attentiveness the Examen invites. He writes:

The examen invites its practitioner into the 'sorrow place' of the heart. Not an easy fun place, it is like a haunted house in the neighborhood of all our hearts. Guilt, failure, shame, sorrow, and inadequacy bordering on helplessness inhabit this place and easily frighten us into avoidance tactics for detouring around this haunted, fearful section of our hearts.<sup>14</sup>

In my own experience I have found that some people feel actual fear, even terror, of being silent on retreat lest those undefined pressures (ghosts, sorrows, self-doubts, shame) are brought to light. They instinctively know that there is a lot beneath the surface and they simply do not want to look too deeply at their lives.

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<sup>12</sup> George Aschenbrenner, 'Consciousness Examen', *Review for Religious*, 31/1 (January 1972), 14–21, here 14.

<sup>13</sup> George Aschenbrenner, foreword, in Timothy M. Gallagher, *The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today* (New York: Crossroad, 2006), 10.

<sup>14</sup> Aschenbrenner, foreword, in Gallagher, *Examen Prayer*, 12.

Equal numbers of Catholic and Protestant, male and female participants (about a third of the total) left the research project before it concluded. Reasons varied: *took too much time, too complicated, not what I thought* and so on. The fact that all of them had self-reported some form of early-life trauma in the Whole Life Survey was significant. And yet, not a single individual alluded to any discomfort from remembered trauma as a reason for leaving the study early. I judged that the process of engaging the Examination of Consciousness in its General and Particular forms was bringing to the surface life events that had been forgotten, suppressed or repressed.

The very thing Ignatius sought to achieve in the particular Examen—bringing to light the core area of sin and dysfunction in one’s life—was making the Examen difficult for individuals to access and, consciously or unconsciously, causing enough fear and anxiety for them to stop practising it. Moreover the challenge of applying the Particular Examen is not unique to those who have sustained early-life trauma. It is not pleasing for any individual to discover the source of his or her core sin or wound, which also reveals the temptation to seek self-salvation.

Is it any wonder, then, that an Examen practice designed specifically to access core sin and any trauma associated with it, consciously and unconsciously, causes distress, fear and anxiety? It is not uncommon to hear that the wounds and pain of childhood, beyond which individuals believed they had successfully moved, were reopened by engagement with spiritual methods such as the Particular Examen. The initial research for my doctorate gave clear evidence of this, as did the research we conducted for the study that shaped the final Forty Weeks method. While God has infinite patience with our wounded selves, the path to healing eventually must lead through the mire of sin and trauma if we hope to find integral and holistic growth.

At the time when I was preparing my doctoral thesis for publication and starting work on the larger study that would form the basis for *Forty Weeks*, I became acquainted with the work of the internationally recognised trauma expert Dr Gabor Maté. After reading his study of addiction, I reached out to him and we have kept in contact over the past decade.<sup>15</sup> Maté says in his book *The Myth of Normal*:

<sup>15</sup> See Gabor Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction* (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 2010).

People bearing trauma's scars almost uniformly develop a shame-based view of themselves at the core .... Among the most poisonous consequences of shame is the loss of compassion for oneself. The more severe the trauma, the more total that loss.

Trying to keep awareness of trauma at bay hobbles our capacity to know ourselves .... Facing it directly without denial or overidentification becomes a doorway to health and balance.<sup>16</sup>

The creative spiritual challenge I faced in developing exercises that guide people to reflect on uncomfortable experiences is to encourage reflection on how present events that trigger grief, anger or fear might be unconsciously linked to past events. This method is used in all of our adult and youth programmes and helps individuals neither to deny nor overidentify with their shame, sin and trauma. We constantly reinforce the message that individuals should not be afraid. Fear is one of the chief tools of human nature's enemy to keep us from honestly exploring our lives and the elements in our story that God, in Jesus, is seeking to heal.

I have learned that it is important to help individuals with tools to prevent the conscious remembering of past experiences and/or traumas from being short-circuited. To do this, I urge persons to approach their life stories with *curiosity* and not self-blame. People need to affirm that Jesus knows us for who we are and does not reduce us to our shame, sins and failures.

With Christ by your side, watch with curiosity and detachment, without self-blame. God sees beyond any patterns of sin and failure you have, or think you have. God knows you for whom you are. God loves you. God is the Divine Physician who desires to help you honestly see your life as it is so He can bring forgiveness, healing, freedom and peace.<sup>17</sup>

The evidence that we have achieved a good degree of success is the hundreds of people annually who express their gratitude for the gift of healing and hope they have received through Sacred Story Institute programmes.

<sup>16</sup> Gabor Maté, *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness and Healing in a Toxic Culture* (London: Penguin, 2022), 30, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Watson, *Forty Weeks*, 63–64.

### ***The Sacred Story Institute***

#### *Methods and Community Formation*

Early in my pastoral work at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, where I was founding director of the retreat programmes office, I developed a five-day Ignatian silent retreat. A percentage of the directors in the first two years vigorously questioned spending two-and-a-half days on exercises leading to the sacrament of reconciliation. *Why are you focusing so much time on the negative exercises when there are so many positive ones to use?* Resisting the pressure, I found the fruit of that *negative* focus in the twelve years I directed this Georgetown retreat. Of all the programmes I developed and directed in those years, this one, where people reflected in silence on their lives before Christ, fostered the most intense and long-term friendships post-retreat, much more so than the group-sharing ‘talking programmes’. It seemed evident to me that when people open their lives and hearts to Christ, encountering both their sinfulness and the healing power of Jesus, it is Christ himself who forms the community of the faithful.

All the programmes developed by the Sacred Story Institute, following Ignatius’ authentic method as revealed in the Ignatian paradigm, are done by people on their own. However, we strongly encourage a weekly sharing of what people are experiencing. The solo work with Christ in the day-to-day personal spiritual work fosters an intense sense of community when people gather to share ‘what Christ has done for me’.

I saw this again at the conclusion of the year-long project in the Seattle Archdiocese that gave rise to *Forty Weeks*. On my last monthly visit to each community, at the end of the trial period, I heard the same lament: *You mean you will not come again?* This revealed that a strong community had been shaped by the experience, but they mistakenly associated my visits with the community they had formed for themselves by engaging in the exercises and sharing weekly with each other.

So, I encouraged the six parish groups involved in the project to continue to build that community by leading others through the journey. Many of them are now in years eight and nine of guiding other faithful through the *Forty Weeks*. I see it also very clearly in the priests who use our programme of *Forty Weeks for Priests*. Many diocesan priests have monthly sharing groups. Those who have used our method as the basis for their fraternal gatherings remark in amazement how the spiritual method substantially increases the depth, vulnerability, transparency and their mutual bonding in friendship.



*The Second Decade*

In January 2023, the Sacred Story Institute began its second decade. In the first ten years we have translated *Forty Weeks* into Spanish and Italian, and versions in Mandarin and Slovenian are forthcoming.<sup>18</sup> Two special versions, one for priests and another for incarcerated persons, were researched and developed. We have separate programmes for the Whole Life Confession and spiritual discernment. Two years of research went into our children's version of the Examen, called Sacred Story Youth. Three years of research, in Latin America and North America, were needed to develop our young adult programme called True Heart. A version of True Heart has been created for men considering a diocesan priestly vocation. We are now working on a version for Christian couples dating and thinking of marriage. The pandemic forced our creative imagination to develop online courses, and seven of our book-based programmes will soon be available online. And we have laid the groundwork to develop an online MA programme in transformational evangelization.

God used the dysfunctional, traumatized and sinful Ignatius to create one of the most pragmatic and dynamic spiritualities in the Church, and one of its greatest saints. We fully intend to exploit this most precious treasure in our second decade to minister to those in the great 'field hospital' Pope Francis described early in his pontificate.<sup>19</sup>

**William M. Watson SJ** is founder and president of the Sacred Story Institute. The institute's mission is building Ignatian-based programmes for people of all ages, incorporating the Ignatian Examen and urging the practice of frequent confession. He received his D.Min. at the Catholic University of America. He was formerly director of retreat programmes at Georgetown University; the first vice-president for Mission at Gonzaga University; and provincial assistant for international ministries.

<sup>18</sup> We are working with the Jesuit Michael Agliardo, president of the US Catholic China Association, on networking with communities in South East Asia and China. The Slovenian Jesuit Tomaž Mikuš asked permission to translate the book into his native language because he found it so beneficial in his work in Twelve Step and healing retreats. Many know that 'Bill', author of the *Big Book of AA*, had a Jesuit spiritual director. This appears to be why there is so much complementarity between the movements of the Exercises and Examen, and the Twelve Step method.

<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis first used this image in an interview with Antonio Spadaro of *La Civiltà Cattolica* in September 2013. See *A Big Heart Open to God: An Interview with Pope Francis* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 30–33.