

UDK 27-583-584.7Loyola I. de
Primljeno: 18. 11. 2017.
Prihvaćeno: 29. 10. 2018.
Pregledni članak

THE IMPORTANCE OF IMAGINATION IN IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

Ivan PLATOVNJAK

Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana
Poljanska 4, SI – 1 000 Ljubljana
ivan.platovnjak@teof.uni-lj.si

Summary

In the book of *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius Loyola provides a variety of contemplations that include imagination. Contemplation, known throughout the history of spirituality, does not usually involve active use of imagination. So why then does Ignatius repeatedly instruct the participants in spiritual exercises to employ their imagination in contemplation? The author puts forward the thesis that imagination in Ignatian spirituality is very important, almost irreplaceable.

In the article, the author first briefly defines imagination and outlines the understanding of contemplation throughout history. Then he shows the role of imagination in Ignatian spirituality and fundamental characteristics of Ignatian contemplation. In the final part of the article, he presents the results of the survey on imagination in Ignatian contemplation among the persons practicing Ignatian contemplation in Slovenia, and thus he empirically evaluates the raised thesis.

Key words: Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatian contemplation, imagination, spiritual life.

Introduction

In his *Spiritual Exercises* manual, Ignatius of Loyola »offers« his readers various forms of prayer. Among these the various types of contemplation that always include imagination are highlighted. Contemplation has been well-known in Greek philosophy and even more so in Christian spirituality throughout his-

tory. Most spiritual schools influenced by Plato emphasized that contemplation does not involve the active use of imagination.¹ Contemplation was related to the last step of *lectio divina* and denoted a state of simply being with God, resting in Him, and gazing at His mystery, a mystery that the chosen passage of God's word caused the one praying to experience in his meditation. Many spiritual teachers also highlighted that contemplation is »infused« which meant that it is a pure gift of God and thus cannot be a result of the praying person's active engagement, which also applies to imagination.

However, Ignatius of Loyola regularly instructed that a person performing spiritual exercises should also use his imagination when contemplating. Why did he insist on this so often? He definitely considered this very important as a result of his numerous personal experiences with the usefulness of imagination in the process of his conversion and gradual spiritual growth, a process that gave birth to the Spiritual Exercises. This is the foundation of author's hypothesis that claims that the imagination in Ignatian contemplation is very important if not irreplaceable.

In the paper, the author will first briefly define imagination and outline the understanding of contemplation throughout history. Then, the importance of imagination in Ignatian spirituality and the fundamental characteristics of Ignatian contemplation will be shown. In the final part of the paper, the results of the survey on imagination in Ignatian contemplation among the persons practicing Ignatian contemplation will be presented to experientially evaluate the proposed hypothesis.

1. A Brief Outline of Understanding Imagination and Contemplation

There are many *definitions of imagination* found across various fields. The scope of the definition will be limited to the understanding of imagination in Christianity, especially with regard to prayer, which also includes contemplation. Steeves, who explored it in his doctoral thesis,² provides a clear and short definition of imagination as »something within us that accepts and forms con-

¹ Cf. Marcin GODOWA, Conditioning of Intellect in Christian Contemplation in the Light of Definitions and St. Augustine's Experience, in: *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 75 (2015) 3, 526–534; Franjo PODGORELEC, *Odabrane metode kršćanske meditacije, Povijest, teologija i pedagogija* [Selected Methods of Christian Meditation. History, Theology and Pedagogy], Zagreb, 2017, 40–41.

² Cf. Nicolas STEEVES, *Grâce à l'imagination: intégrer l'imagination en théologie fondamentale*, Paris, 2016.

cepts of things and persons; its objective is to present reality«.³ In Christianity, a special focus is placed on this objective (presenting reality). Because various types of imagination exist, some of them lead outside the real world into the fantasy world, even into phantasms and a false surreality. There is also an imagination that helps a person learn about reality and its transcendental dimension (*sureale*) by teaching the person what is hiding »behind the virtual world«. It helps him/her discover things (*euristica*), interpret them (*ermeneutica*), take concrete action when he/she is imagining how to do beautiful and good things (ethics). Imagination also helps the person discover God in all things (mysticism). Actually, imagination is »the locus of spiritual experience«⁴.

Most authors agree that, among other forms of prayer, *contemplation* is particularly recognizable. Above all, contemplation is about the personal relationship or experience with God through intimate union.⁵ It is a direct awareness of God, but not in the manner as God dwells within Himself, but in the way He is present through His gifts of mercy, through His presence in the person, and through the virtues endowed (faith, hope, and love). Imagination functions by the principle of faith, though it is also a loving gaze including will and benevolence (charity). In the first place, it is a passive type of prayer, which is why the gifts and virtues endowed do not play a primary role in it.⁶

Aumann considers contemplation as an unconditional and completely free (undeserved) gift of grace, which is why it is not essential for redemption and thus cannot be a result of a person's own will and power. Therefore, it is relatively rare.⁷

In his comprehensive comparative study on understanding contemplation, J. de Guibert distinguishes very clearly between »infused« contemplation, also termed »mystical prayer«, which is a true gift of God, and »achieved« contemplation, which is a fruit of God's grace and the person's cooperation; here, the initiative may also be undertaken by the person himself/herself.⁸

³ Nicolas STEEVES, *L'immaginazione è Preghiera?*, in: *Ignazina. Rivista di ricerca teologica*, 21 (2016), 62.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 62–63.

⁵ Cf. Franjo PODGORELEC, *Kontemplativna molitva u iskustvu i djelima sv. Terezije Avilske* [Contemplative Prayer in the Experience and Works of St. Theresa of Avila], in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 75 (2005) 1, 132–136.

⁶ Cf. James AUMANN, *Contemplation*, in: *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Washington, D.C., 2003, 207–208.

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 207.

⁸ Cf. James de GUIBERT, *The Jesuits: their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice: a Historical Study*, Chicago, 1964, 558–565, 606.

This categorization is not new. It originates from the 17th century and was formed under the influence of the Carmelite school of contemplation. Such a contemplation is an interim state between asceticism and mysticism, representing the highest stage of asceticism. A person prepares for such contemplation with faith, charity, and purification.⁹ This acquired contemplation does not include the use of imagination. Such an understanding of contemplation is based on the extensive and living tradition of the Church, which opposes the use of imagination in prayer (e.g. Carmelite school). This tradition comes partly from the Decalogue that forbids making an image of God (Ex 20:4-6; Deut 5:8-10) and in part from the (Neo)Platonism that treated imagination as a lower level of awareness which is surpassed when the person achieves higher levels of consciousness.¹⁰

In the first millennium, prayer was mostly unrelated to imagination, which is still so in the Orthodox Church. Up to the 12th century, contemplation was usually a part of *lectio divina* as its last step: reading (*lectio*), meditation (*meditatio*), prayer (*oratio*), contemplation (*contemplatio*). Contemplation is a specific lifting of the mind above oneself, resting in God, tasting the joy of eternal sweetness; it is a direct and ecstatic (enthusiastic) meeting with the Divine according to Guigo II. The author describes his experience of God's loving presence as sweetness (*dulcedo*), which is a very common expression for such a state in the medieval monastic literature.¹¹

In the late Middle Ages, meditation was no longer considered a practice that draws mainly on the concept of associative and well-argued thinking as was the case up to the 12th century, but rather on imagination. The meditation no longer began with reading the Word of God, but with the imagination of biblical scenes. Imagining Christ's life, especially his suffering, became the core activity of meditative prayer. Anyone could picture himself taking a direct part in the mystery of Jesus' life. Aelred of Rievaulx encouraged the praying person to step into the centre of the imagined situation. The meditating person does not only gaze at the inner images, but takes part in the event by using his senses. This person is invited to talk to the imagined persons, to touch them, to listen to them, to smell the scents of heaven and hell.¹²

⁹ Cf. James AUMANN, *Contemplation*, 207.

¹⁰ Cf. Nicolas STEEVES, *L'immaginazione è Preghiera?*, 61; Franjo PODGORELEC, *Odabrane metode kršćanske meditacije* [*Selected Methods of Christian Meditation*], 82.

¹¹ Cf. GUIGO II, *Scala claustralium – Epistola de vita contemplativa*, 2004., in: http://www.santuariodellavittoria.it/File_PDF/Lettera_sulla_VITA_contemplativa.pdf (07. 01. 2017).

¹² Cf. Karl BAIER, *Meditation and Contemplation in High to Late Medieval Europe*, 338–339, in: <https://homepage.univie.ac.at/karl.baier/texte/pdf/Meditation-Contemplation.pdf> (05. 01. 2017).

Visual media from those times were known to be used as an aid to, and sometimes as a replacement for, imaginative meditation. Religious images, drawings, and woodcuts especially designed for this purpose helped lay and religious people a great deal. The images were to serve as a representation or simulation (*simulacra*) of a visual experience. The goal in meditative imagination of biblical scenes is the emotional involvement in the life of Jesus and Mary. This should lead to the formation (*conformatio*) of deep emotional imitation (*mimesis*) of the protagonists from a holy event (not only Jesus and Mary, but also the shepherds, Simon of Cyrene, etc.). This later led also to self-flagellation or standing with arms spread in the same way as the crucified Jesus, etc.¹³

In *Vita Christi* by Ludolph of Saxony (after 1384), one of the most widespread religious books of the late Middle Ages along with *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (around 1300), the basic practice comprises three parts: *lectio*, *meditatio* (sometimes complemented with *conformatio*), and *oratio* being the closing prayer. Ludolph does not define any special concept of contemplation and uses the terms *considerare*, *contemplare*, *meditare*, and *attendere* as equivalents. At the end of some chapters or specific parts, Ludolph summarizes the content of previous meditation and invites the meditating person to allow himself to be overtaken by the meditation. However, the more contemplative mind (mental) process is related to thoughts, intense emotional reflections (movements), painful exclamations, questions, etc.¹⁴

The author of the book *The Cloud of Unknowing* interprets meditation as a practice for the beginners and preparation for the gained contemplation. Imagination may be used in the context of meditation, because it helps the meditating person to remain focused and free from empty fantasies. A large part of the book explains the dangers arising from imaginative meditation. The author criticizes the literal understanding of images and metaphors while drawing the attention to the deceptiveness (falsity) of visions and to the danger of incorrectly used affections (emotions) and imagination. He also warns that this practice is linked to the detrimental curiosity (*coriouse*) which only distracts the attention of the praying person (practitioner). The author argues that a true heart of the spiritual life is accessible only by radically abandoning the inner imaginative space. The person who starts practicing wordless

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 340; Tadej STEGU, Simbolna teologija in povezovalna moč umetnosti [Theology of Symbol and the Connecting Power of Art], in: *Edinost in dialog*, 69 (2014), 137–142.

¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 342; Franjo PODGORELEC, *Odabrane metode kršćanske meditacije* [Selected Methods of Christian Meditation], 45.

prayer in silence, filled with God's love, performs a move from meditation to contemplation. The inner silence is supported or achieved by firm and undivided attention to the meaning of individual one-syllable words, especially to the words God and sin, with no mental activity (discourse). The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* assures the reader that contemplation is a very easy and quick way to God provided that God's grace lights the flame of love in the praying person.¹⁵

The supporters of *Devotio moderna* (14–15th century) wanted to establish the most efficient program of spiritual education that would ensure spiritual success of every pious person and would foster the inner person systemically. They surpassed all prior efforts of systemizing meditation. They built a rational system of meditation (*Ordo scalaris rationalis*), in which the twenty-four steps are based on the structure of the human mind. From the Augustinian perspective, the human mind is divided into *memoria* (memory), *intelligentia* (reason), and *voluntas* (will and emotions) considering the concepts of humanistic rhetoric as well. *Devotio moderna* also influenced Ignatius of Loyola and his formation of the spiritual exercises together with his simplified methods of meditation with the three motions of the soul. This has become the most powerful paradigm in Christian meditation up to the 20th century.¹⁶

The more formal the meditation, the more obvious were its limitations and dangers. Self-reflection and careful examination of individuals' own mind processes, never reaching the point of simply opening to the mystery of God, were overly emphasized. The fear of hell was fostered more frequently than the pure love of God. A large number of books helped the protagonists of contemplative prayer to spread successfully the practices in the reformed (lay) circles and orders of religious life. The main topics of debates among Spanish mystics in the 16th century were limiting the meditation, its abuse, the transition from meditation to contemplation, and fostering inner silence.¹⁷

2. The Role of Imagination in Ignatian Spirituality

Ignatius of Loyola was a man of imagination, which is confirmed by both his autobiography titled *A Pilgrims Journey* and scholars. He converted while recovering at his castle, especially by reading the lives of the saints and the *Vita*

¹⁵ Cf. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, New York, 1989, ch. 33–56, 63–67, 70; Karl BAIER, *Meditation and Contemplation in High to Late Medieval Europe*, 344–346.

¹⁶ Cf. Karl BAIER, *Meditation and Contemplation in High to Late Medieval Europe*, 347.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

Christi (after 1384) by Ludolph of Saxony. While reading these two books, he experienced his first imaginative contemplation and the discernment of spirits.¹⁸

In the beginning, Ignatius of Loyola did not realize that he was seeing images. However, as he inwardly reflected with imaginative intuition, his eyes slowly opened; he realized what the spirits of imagination were teaching him. He slowly became aware that there were good and bad images and that these two contradicted each other. Ignatius was not upset by this and did not reject them as Platonists did. He slowly replaced the bad images with good ones that came from God. Ignatius learned to discern images based on their fruits and in accordance with the Church sentiment (*sentire cum Ecclesia*). The essence of imagination is not in the details, but in the extent of how strongly imagination lets a person experience the mystery. Ignatius did not transform his imagination by himself with his own mind or through spiritual activities. Rather, it was transformed by God who revealed Himself to him by the grace of imagination.¹⁹

Because Ignatius of Loyola was aware of how God led him to Himself, also by means of imagination, he bore this in mind when formulating the *Spiritual Exercises*.²⁰ Through the exercises, he wanted to enable others to discover the presence of God in their lives, to be freed of things that hindered them from living in the freedom that Jesus gives, and to serve God by serving people. Above all, he desired for every person to experience, as personally as possible, how it is to be truly and freely loved, what God the Father does for him/her through Jesus Christ so that the person could generously answer his call for love and start living a serving and self-giving love.

To Ignatius, contemplation was a form of imaginative presence in the Gospel mystery, in every biblical story that verbalizes God's work in the history of humankind,²¹ or every non-biblical story.²² The Gospel mysteries for contemplation are briefly presented by Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises*.²³ The method of entering into the mysteries is well-described in the introduc-

¹⁸ Cf. Ignacij LOJOLSKI, *Romarjeva pripoved: avtobiografija [A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola]*, Ljubljana, 1990, n. 5–10.

¹⁹ Cf. Nicolas STEEVES, *L'immaginazione è Preghiera?*, 63–65.

²⁰ Cf. Ignacij LOJOLSKI, *Romarjeva pripoved [A Pilgrim's Journey]*, 27–32.

²¹ Cf. John F. WICKHAM, *Ignatian Contemplation Today*, in: *Way Supplement*, 34 (1978), 35.

²² Cf. Ignacij LOJOLSKI, *Duhovne vaje [The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola = SEEL]*, Ljubljana, 1991, 68–71; Richard A. BLAKE, *Listen with Your Eyes. Interpreting Images in the Spiritual Exercises*, in: *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 31 (2000) 2, 16–17.

²³ Cf. SEEL, 261–312.

tion to the contemplation on the incarnation²⁴ and the birth of Jesus.²⁵ In the introductory exercises and contemplation points, he invites the praying person: »I will see with the sight of the imagination the road...«²⁶; »I will see the persons...«²⁷; »I will look, mark and contemplate what they are saying...«²⁸; »I will look and consider what they are doing...«²⁹ At the same time, he advises: »I am making myself a poor creature and a wretch of an unworthy slave, looking at them and serving them in their needs, with all possible respect and reverence.«³⁰ In this way, the mystery becomes a present event, a work of God in reality.

In this form of prayer, the praying person enters into the mystery event with the imagination (presentation and settling in) in such a way that he truly becomes a part of the act. Ignatius calls the praying person to be »respectful« (reverent), because this is the only proper attitude in the presence of the mystery of God.³¹ The praying person can also identify with various persons present in the mystery. In this way, the contemplated Gospel mystery becomes truly present and current. Ignatius does not encourage the praying person to reconstruct a historical event or to make a real history movie of an event. Christ has indeed risen and all the mysteries of his life are so present in his eternal life that they become truly present for the praying person.

It is difficult to explain this in a logical way. This is exactly what happens at every liturgy. In a similar way, all biblical mysteries are present in the prayer. The praying person can taste them, feel them, and experience them as if they would be happening now, for him/her in the present moment. Through imagination God reveals Himself to the praying person who is, with every step, closer to a personal dialog with Him and responds to everything that is given to him/her in the contemplation. Two fundamental concepts can be described in Ignatian contemplative prayer: a) with the help of the imagination, the praying person enters the mystery and becomes open to the activity; b) God, who is present in the mystery, actively enters the depths of the praying person by conveying to him/her His life.³²

²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 101–109.

²⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 110–117.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 114–116.

³¹ Cf. John F. WICKHAM, *Ignatian Contemplation Today*, 36.

³² Cf. *Ibid.*, 36–37.

Ignatius particularly emphasizes that »it is not knowing much, but realizing and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul«³³. Thus, after the fourth contemplation of the same Gospel mystery, he invites the praying person to perform a fifth by applying all five senses³⁴ so that the mystery he contemplates would touch him/her interiorly even stronger, enter this body even more deeply, and would »incarnate« within him/her.³⁵

Similarly every prayer contemplation also requires the praying person to give in and to surrender to the relationship with the triune God who is always seeking and visiting him/her, in whom he/she already lives (Ac 17:28). The person often tends to control his/her imagination in order to achieve the desired result. Only when the person surrenders to the image that is given to him/her and happens within him/her, only then can the imagination really act within him/her with all its creative power. At that point, the Holy Spirit can use it as well to realize the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ within the praying person, making him/her God's colleague and partner in dialog.

3. Important Aspects of Ignatian Contemplation

A detailed analysis of the role of imagination in contemplation in the life and work of Ignatius of Loyola provided by many scholars who studied his style of contemplation, revealed the following important aspects of Ignatian contemplation:

1) Ignatius of Loyola was not troubled by the imagination as were many scholars before and after him. He himself experienced how God revealed Himself to him through the imagination and enabled him to respond with all his heart, soul, and strength. By suggesting contemplation exercises, he wanted to help others so that, like him, they could meet God in their depths personally and enter into a personal dialog and cooperation with Him while discovering the paramount role of imagination in contemplation.

2) In his time, it was common for the spiritual directors or manuals to provide rather exact instructions on how to conceptualize biblical events. However, Ignatius provided very little instruction. He respected the freedom of every person so that this person could express his/her own ability of imagination, through which God could speak to every person in his/her way, using

³³ SEEL, 2.

³⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁵ Cf. Nicolas STEEVES, *L'immaginazione è Preghiera?*, 68.

the events that happen within him/her. Imagination must not be planned, but rather encouraged.³⁶

3) Ignatius of Loyola did not want the person making the spiritual exercises to have pictures or images that would help him/her to delve deeper into the biblical passage. This was a common practice for many at the time. He wanted every person to use the imagination given to him/her so that he/she could gain as much as possible. Ignatius did not want the person to create a »historical movie« or to recreate everything exactly as it happened. The person should not spend too much time with the details. The imagination should help him/her tread beyond the text or ideas so that he/she could personally taste the Word of God and enter the relationship with God as personally as possible.³⁷

4) In his time, many discussed and wrote about their imagination, whereas Ignatius of Loyola spoke very little of it. At the end of his life, he even requested that all his spiritual diaries be burned. Only a small volume of manuscripts was saved.³⁸ In this way, he showed how much he wanted the person who takes on his *Spiritual Exercises* to be as free and as open as possible for things that God will provide him/her with through his/her imagination.

5) In the time of Ignatius, people were mainly encouraged to use the imagination in order to focus, above all, on Jesus' suffering and death. In the four-week-long spiritual exercises, Ignatius of Loyola spends only a week on Jesus' suffering and death for humankind.³⁹ At least one week is devoted to the contemplation of Jesus' life and work. The last week of spiritual exercises focuses on the contemplation of Jesus' resurrection, which was a novelty at that time. He desired the person to enter into the joy of the risen Christ so that he/she could live this joy that comes from following Jesus and serving God.

6) Ignatius of Loyola was deeply aware of the importance of the fact that Jesus Christ, the incarnated second person of the Holy Trinity, was a true human being. He knew that it is exactly imagination that can help the person discover the humanness of Jesus and kindle a desire within him/her to live his/her humanity just as Jesus did so as to become more like him.⁴⁰

³⁶ Cf. SEEL, 2; Richard A. BLAKE, *Listen with Your Eyes*, 13–14.

³⁷ Cf. Richard A. BLAKE, *Listen with Your Eyes. Interpreting Images in the Spiritual Exercises*, 12–14.

³⁸ Cf. Ignatius OF LOYOLA *The Spiritual Diary of St. Ignatius of Loyola: Translation, Commentary and Introduction*, Thomas Panikulom (ed.), Anand, 2011.

³⁹ Cf. SEEL 4.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 109, 130.

7) Ignatius was aware how imagination can mislead a person and even harm him/her. For this reason, he set rules on how a person should discern his/her imagination or the spirits working through it.⁴¹

8) Ignatius of Loyola knew that the person himself/herself is often incapable of discerning his/her own imagination, which is why he suggests that imagination is only to be used during the spiritual exercises. During these every praying person is personally accompanied and introduced into imagination by the person who gives spiritual exercises to him/her (»director«), based on his/her current needs for spiritual growth.⁴² Only when he/she gains personal experience and learns to discern by himself/herself, may the person use this type of prayer in everyday life.

9) To Ignatius of Loyola, imagination is not a goal, but merely a means of helping the person achieve what he/she desires: to become more familiar with Jesus Christ and love him even more.⁴³

10) Ignatius does not use imagination only when contemplating the mysteries of the life, work, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He also uses it when contemplating non-biblical events and stories that should help the person develop a deeper awareness of what it means to follow Christ and to make this decision more freely and consciously (e.g. call of the earthly king;⁴⁴ two standards,⁴⁵ three pairs of men⁴⁶ etc.).

11) By using the imagination, Ignatius of Loyola wanted to encourage every person to become aware of how he/she can seek and find God in all things and then to surrender himself/herself entirely to Him.⁴⁷

12) Imagination also plays an important role in Ignatius' classification of the three methods of prayer⁴⁸ that every person can use in his/her daily life once he/she had acquired the capacity of the discernment of spirits during the supervised spiritual exercises. It can be observed that, to Ignatius of Loyola, the use of imagination truly is a path that can help every person enter into a

⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 313–336.

⁴² Cf. SEEL, 6–22; Richard A. BLAKE, Listen with Your Eyes, 15–16.

⁴³ Cf. SEEL, 104.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 92–95.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 138–146.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 151–155.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 232–237.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 238–260.

deeper personal relationship with God so that he/she could be more and more able to live and work for God's glory and honour.⁴⁹

4. The Importance of Imagination in Ignatian Contemplation in the Context of Survey Conducted

4.1. Survey Sample

In 2016, a web survey entitled *Imagination in Ignatian Contemplation*⁵⁰ was drafted and sent to 350 email addresses of people in Slovenia who, according to author's data, had experience with a form of the Ignatian spiritual exercises. The survey questions were partially answered by 217 respondents. Of 176 responses on gender, 27% respondents were classified as male and 73% as female. Of all survey participants, 19% were aged up to 35 years, 24% from 36 to 45, 26% from 46 to 55, whereas 32% were older than 56. Among the participants, 33% were married, 28% were single, and 22% were priests and members of religious orders, whereas the status of the rest was either engaged, widowed, single, or living in domestic partnership. Fifty-nine percent claimed they were religious with 35% stating they were very religious. Nobody declared himself not religious. Fifty-eight percent confirmed that they attend services at least once a week, whereas 30% attend daily services. However, nobody responded that he never attends services. Personal prayer with their own words was practiced by 44% of respondents, among these 45% every day, whereas no answer was provided for never.

Out of 153 respondents to the question on how many times they attended four- or five-day-long Ignatian spiritual exercises, only 18 (12%) stated they had never participated in these exercises, whereas others had taken part at least once, among these 38% up to 10-times or more. A more thorough analysis showed that only two of eighteen persons never attended any form of spiritual exercises.⁵¹ Nineteen respondents attended the thirty-day spiritual exercises once and 14 respondents twice.

Thus, the survey included participants who were all religious and had engaged in personal prayer and some form of religious exercises. It extends over all adult age groups and all civil statuses. Only 27% were men, which

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁰ Survey. *Imagination in Ignatian Contemplation*, Author's personal archives, 2016. It was active on the website <https://www.lka.si> from June 26 to August 16, 2016.

⁵¹ One of these replied that he also desires to attend such religious exercises, whereas the other one already has deep spiritual experience, but not from the Ignatian spiritual exercises.

proportionately corresponds to the sample chosen for the survey with approximately the same quantity of men. The majority of participants in retreats based on Ignatian Spiritual Exercises are women.⁵²

4.2. Results of Select Survey Questions Analysis

4.2.1. How Does Imagination Help the Survey Participants in Their Daily Lives?

In the beginning of the survey, the author wanted to find out how survey respondents understand imagination and how they use it in their daily lives. In the first question, the respondents were reminded of the fact that, to a greater or lesser extent, they frequently or always use imagination (i.e. imaginative capacity, presentation, settling in etc.) without being aware of it, e.g. when they read, watch or listen to the news, meet and talk to people, at the theatre, cinema, in front of the television or radio, when reading literature, fairy tales, studying etc. Then, they were invited to explain how imagination helps them in their daily lives (when reading, listening, watching, meeting, talking...). They had to choose one answer among several options: a lot, little, not, it hinders me, to a various degree, nothing, I do not know, or other. This question was answered by 215 survey participants with nearly a half of them (43%) saying that they consider imagination very helpful. Less than half claimed that help of imagination is medium(26%) or varies (26%). Only 2% believed that imagination does not help them at all (Chart 1).

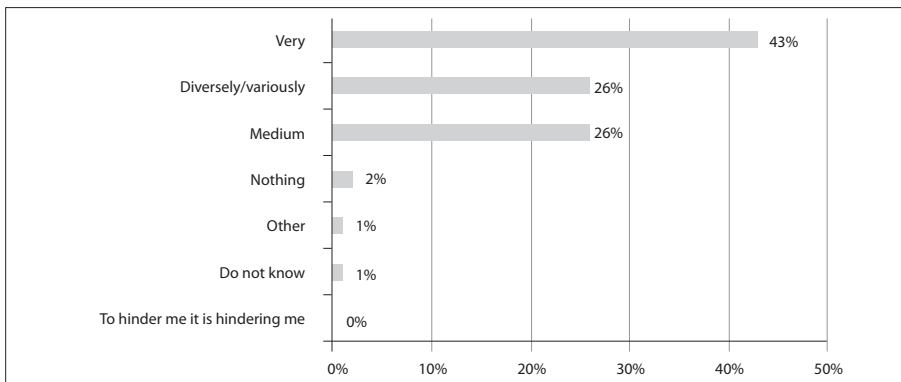


Chart 1: Imagination helps me...⁵³

⁵² Cf. *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

4.2.2 Where Is Imagination Used?

The respondents were asked to explain in what areas of their life they consciously use imagination. Their answers were written as short descriptions. This question was answered by 193 respondents. The answers were classified into nine groups containing fundamental aspects in the use of imagination. Imagination was most frequently (77-times) used »in planning (work, problem-solving, classes, meetings/talks, future, journeys...)«. The second most frequent use (71-times) was »in prayer (every prayer, reading the Word of God and praying, meditation, adoration, services...), and the third most frequent use (68-times) was »in putting yourself in the position of the other person when listening or talking to them, building relationships...« (Chart 2).

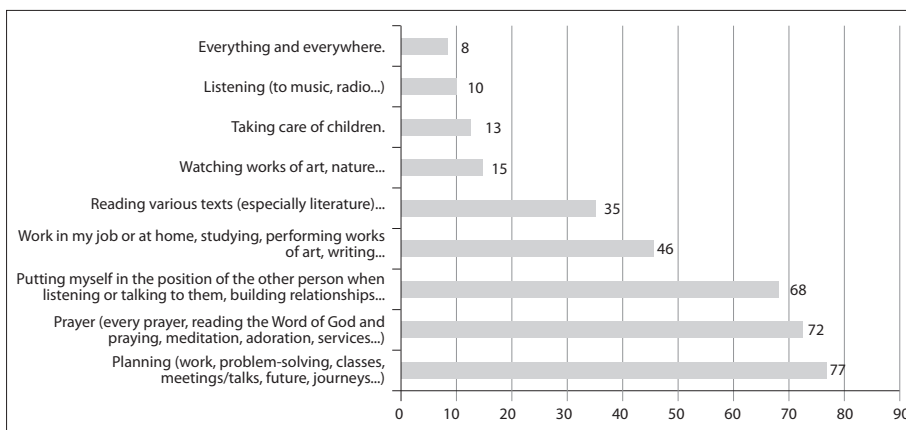


Chart 2: I use imagination in...⁵⁴

The analysis showed that imagination is of great help to the survey participants who use it mostly in planning, prayer, putting themselves in the position of others, and in work.

4.2.3. What Does Imagination Mean to the Respondents?

The author wanted to establish what the imagination means to the respondents, particularly in relation to prayer/Ignatian contemplation. This is why he invited them to choose one of the three possible meanings of the word that they can identify with. They were allowed to choose only one answer. At the same time, they could choose the option »Other« and explain their choice

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

(Chart 3). Most respondents (63%) identified themselves with the meaning of imagination as »putting yourself in the position of the other«. Less than a third (23%) identified more with imagination as »presentation«, whereas 8% considered imagination to be »an imaginative capacity«. Only 4% of respondents chose the »Other« option with most of them explaining that the first meaning and the second should best be used together.

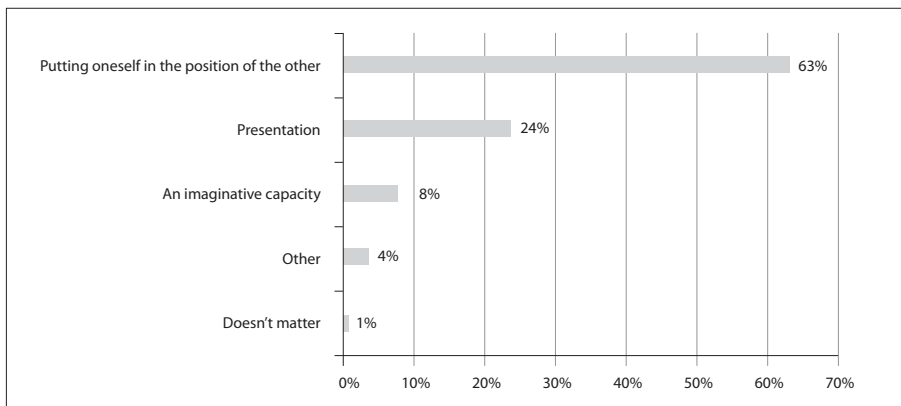


Chart 3: What meaning of imagination do you identify with in relation to prayer/Ignatian spirituality?⁵⁵

The respondents were given the opportunity to explain how they understand a specific meaning of imagination by answering the following question: »Using a few words, describe why you chose one of the above words or why is this not relevant to you as well as what this word means to you in the context of Ignatian contemplative prayer.«

4.2.4. Why Do Some of the Survey Participants Understand Imagination as »an Imaginative Capacity«?

In 15 out of 186 answers to this question, the respondents briefly explained why they consider imagination as »imaginative capacity« in the context of Ignatian contemplation. They provided many reasons for such a conceptualization. In the analysis, three main reasons were established. The most frequent reason for choosing the meaning of »imaginative capacity« was that this phrase expresses the literal meaning of »imagination« (8-times). In 7 answers, it was emphasized that the phrase »imaginative capacity« was the most suitable expres-

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

sion for »a person’s capacity to conceptualize (biblical) places, persons, events and putting oneself in their position« (Chart 4).

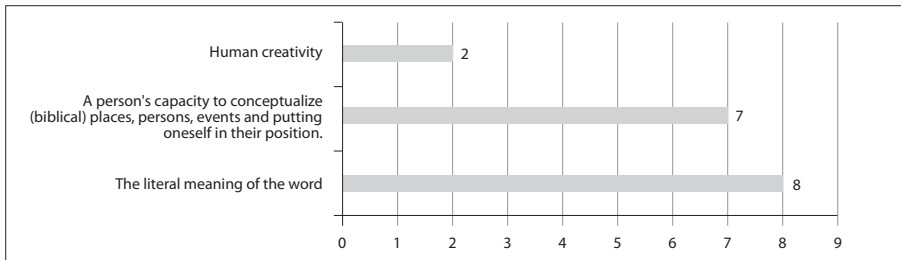


Chart 4: Imagination translates to »imaginative capacity«, because it describes most suitably ...⁵⁶

4.2.5. Why Do Some of the Survey Participants Understand Imagination as »Presentation«?

In 43 out of 186 answers to this question, the respondents briefly explained why in the context of Ignatian contemplation they consider imagination as »presentation/to conceptualize«. They provided many reasons for such conceptualization. Five common reasons were observed in the analysis. The most common reason for choosing the meaning of »to conceptualize« was that this was the most suitable expression for »a person’s inner conceptualization of (biblical) places, persons, events« (34-times). In 14 answers, it was highlighted that the capacity of »conceptualization« is essential in Ignatian contemplation (Chart 5). However, it was less frequently emphasized that such a meaning of imagination was the most suitable expression for »a person’s first step toward settling in (biblical) events and persons« (7-times) and for »a person’s inner comprehension, understanding, insight into a biblical message« (6-times) (Chart 5).

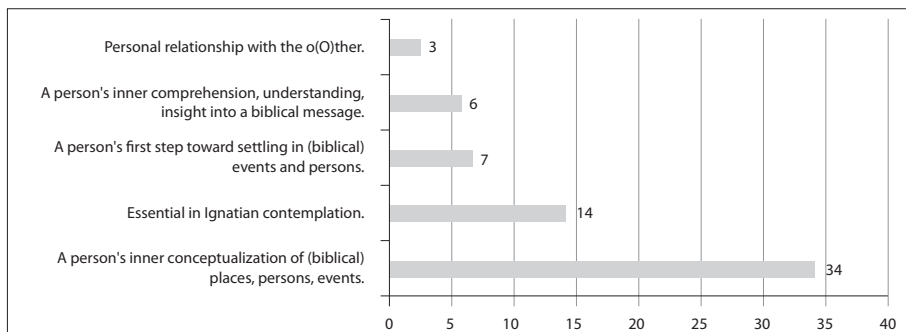


Chart 5: Imagination translates to »presentation«, because it describes most suitably...⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

4.2.6. Why Do Most of the Survey Participants Understand Imagination as »Putting Oneself in the Position of the Other«?

In 118 of 186 answers to this question, the respondents briefly explained why in the context of Ignatian contemplation they consider imagination as »putting oneself in the position of the other«. The most common reason for choosing the meaning of »putting oneself in the position of the other was that this was the most suitable expression for »a person’s integral involvement in a (biblical) event, act« (58-times). Forty respondents stated that it best describes »a person’s settling in the event or another person with all his mind and senses«. In 32 answers, the respondents believed that the phrase »putting oneself in the position of the other« is a more appropriate expression for describing the aim of Ignatian contemplation compared to terms »imaginative capacity« and »presentation« (Chart 6).

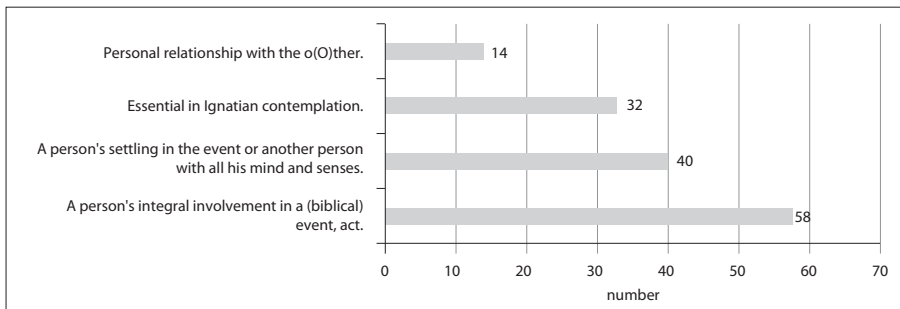


Chart 6: Imagination translates to »putting oneself in the position of the other«, because it describes most suitably...⁵⁸

When comparing the reasons provided by the respondents to justify their choice among the three terms denoting »imagination«, it can be observed that the meaning of »putting oneself in the position of the other« is the most frequently cited reason. This does not mean »empathy«, but rather the praying person’s capacity for becoming an integral part of a biblical event, to settle in completely so that he/she can establish a more personal relationship to everything and to God as well as to accept what God wants to offer him/her.

Such an understanding of the role of imagination in Ignatian contemplation comes to the fore in the selected answers to the question of why Ignatius of Loyola invests a lot of effort to encourage the participants to use imagination as an aid when contemplating passages from the Gospel. As many as 83% of the 217 respondents believed that, in the first place, the reason for this is the

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

following: »Ignatius does not want the person to think only about Jesus, but to help him to let the Lord take over his heart and mind so that he/she can see and feel himself/herself and others in the same way as the Lord sees and feels him/her and that he/she could decide and live in line with God’s empathy and understanding.« The second most frequent reason was that Ignatius did this »so that the Holy Spirit could also use a person’s imagination to hear, see, taste, and recognize Jesus experientially, allowing the person to develop a deeper personal relationship with Jesus and live in His spirit« (78%) (Chart 7).

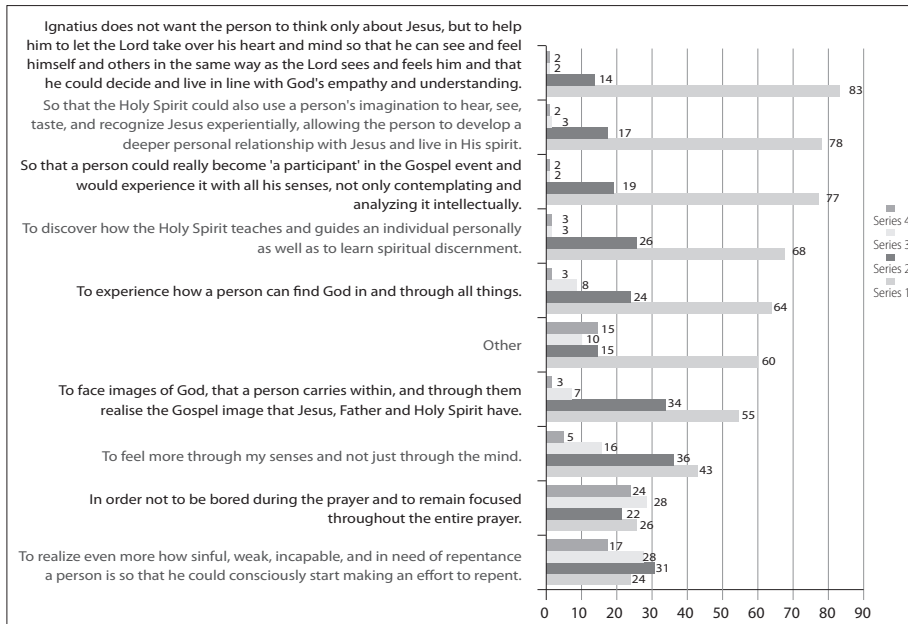


Chart 7: Ignatius of Loyola encouraged the use of imagination in contemplation because...⁵⁹

The third most frequent reason for such an understanding is »so that a person could really become 'a participant' in the Gospel event and would experience it with all his/her senses, not only contemplating and analysing it intellectually« (77%). Two other reasons were deemed important, the first one being »to discover how the Holy Spirit teaches and guides an individual personally as well as to learn spiritual discernment« (68%), and the second one being »to experience how a person can find God in and through all things« (64%). Two less frequently cited reasons for such an understanding of imagination were »in order not to be bored during the prayer and to remain focused throughout the

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

entire prayer« (26%) and »to realize even more how sinful, weak, incapable, and in need of repentance a person is so that he/she could consciously start making an effort to repent« (24%). It is interesting that the fewest respondents chose the last two reasons. At the same time, this indicates that some respondents still believe that this could be a justified reason for the use of imagination (Chart 7).

All answers indicate that most respondents believe that imagination is very important in Ignatian contemplation. This was also confirmed in the answers to the following question: »How would you reply to a person asking you whether the role of imagination in Ignatian contemplative prayer is truly irreplaceable?« Of 177 survey participants answering this question, 65% replied that its role indeed is irreplaceable. Fourteen percent believed that the role of imagination can be replaced at the beginning of a spiritual journey, but not later on (Chart 8).

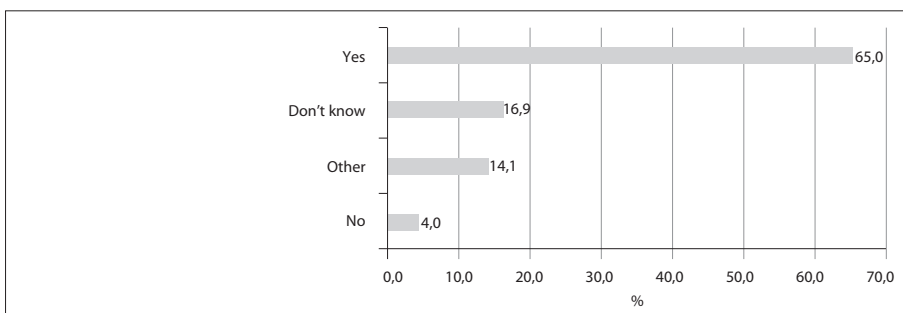


Chart 8: Does imagination truly have an irreplaceable role in Ignatian contemplative prayer?⁶⁰

Conclusion

It can be argued that the analysis of the contemplation exercises as suggested by St. Ignatius of Loyola and most authors on Ignatian contemplation, accompanied by the analysis of the survey conducted in Slovenia, confirm the hypothesis that imagination is very important and valuable in Ignatian contemplation. Imagination always helps establish a deeper relationship with God and facilitates more active cooperation in God's plan for every person and all of humankind. However, imagination is not a goal in itself. To put it simply: God may use imagination but does not depend on it.

Surely, God can use imagination if the praying person uses it. In this case, the praying person can benefit from the instructions and guidelines for the use of imagination in contemplation and the discernment rules provided

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

by St. Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises* or given by the person leading the exercises who himself/herself has a personal experience of such a prayer method.

Praying with imagination is a lived and experienced event surpassing the use of pure reason, because it remains in the memory as a real event in which a true transformative meeting took place. The praying person can live from a memory of some of Jesus' gestures, looks, words, tone of voice, or a lived scene of Jesus' encounter with different people or himself/herself for a long time. Such contemplation refreshes the internal senses and attitudes of the praying person and deepens his/her love for the Father and Jesus in the Holy Spirit. It enables the praying person to establish an ever deeper and authentic relationship with the Triune God – in Him and through Him to himself/herself and to others and to the world. In this way, the spirituality of the praying person approaches a true life in Christ's Spirit that includes all dimensions of himself/herself as well as his/her family life, professional life, involvement in the life of the Church, and society.

Sažetak

VAŽNOST IMAGINACIJE U KONTEMPLACIJI IGNACIJA LOJOLSKOG

Ivan PLATOVNJAK

Teološka fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani
Poljanska 4, SI – 1 000 Ljubljana
ivan.platovnjak@teof.uni-lj.si

Ignacije Lojolski u djelu Duhovne vježbe uglavnom nudi različite kontemplacije koje uključuju imaginaciju. Kontemplacija, kako je poznata u povijesti duhovnosti, obično ne uključuje aktivnu uporabu imaginacije. Slijedom toga, postavlja se opravdano pitanje zbog čega Ignacije učestalo ističe da onaj koji izvodi duhovne vježbe mora u svojim kontemplacijama neprestano primjenjivati imaginaciju? Autor postavlja tezu da je imaginacija u ignacijevskoj kontemplaciji vrlo značajna i važna, gotovo nezamjenjiva. U raspravi autor ponajprije u kratkim crtama definira sam pojam imaginacije te daje jedan sveobuhvatan povijesni prikaz u razumijevanju kontemplacije. Zatim se nastoji prikazati uloga imaginacije u ignacijevskoj duhovnosti kao i značajniji aspekti ignacijevske kontemplacije. U zadnjem dijelu autor predstavlja rezultate ankete o imaginaciji u ignacijevskoj kontemplaciji među onom populacijom koja prakticira ignacijevsku kontemplaciju u Sloveniji. Tim se, dobivenim rezultatima u ovoj studiji, empirijski potvrđuje postavljena teza.

Ključne riječi: *Ignacije Lojolski, Duhovne vježbe, ignacijevska kontemplacija, imaginacija, duhovni život.*