CHAPTER 12

Spiritual Exercises and Spiritual Exercises: Ascetic Intellectual Exchange in the English Catholic Community, c.1600–1794

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Composed by Ignatius of Loyola (c.1491–1556) after his conversion and experiences in Manresa as a pilgrim, the Spiritual Exercises (first published 1548) are a work of fundamental importance for understanding how the Society of Jesus operated in its early years and continues to function to this day.¹ Use of the Exercises was an essential component of Jesuit missionary successes worldwide. Within the context of English Jesuit missionary work, examples of engagement with and uses of the text can be found wherever the Jesuits were active. This chapter examines how they were used within the English and Welsh Catholic community in two distinct missionary settings—the clandestine missionary work within the network of colleges and residences in England and Wales; and in mainland Europe, where English Jesuit colleges were located, and where members of the Society might also provide spiritual support and guidance to the English convents in exile.²

One way in which Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises was utilized was through the making and circulation of manuscript compilations of appropriate meditations and readings, in the form of spiritual commonplace books.³ Normally a collection of extracts from pertinent readings, notes, or important points copied into an appropriately sized notebook for ease of reference, the examples examined in this chapter are a distinctly spiritual version of the genre,

¹ Nine editions of the text were printed before the end of the sixteenth century, at Rome (1548, 1576, and 1596), Coimbra (1553), Burgos (1574), Douai (1586), Seville (1587), Toulouse (1593), and Valencia (1599): see Detlev Auvermann and Anthony Payne, The Society of Jesus 1548–1773: A Catalogue of Books by Jesuit Authors and Works Relating to the Society of Jesus Published between 1548 and 1773 (London: Bernard Quaritch, 2006), 64–68.
² Throughout this chapter, “English” is used in the broadest sense and should be read as incorporating all nations of the British Isles where applicable, but particularly both England and Wales.
³ Although a large number of manuscript works survive in English Catholic libraries throughout mainland Europe, comparatively few of these have been studied in any great detail, and there is still no detailed catalog of exactly what survives. Some scholars have drawn attention to the proliferation of manuscript culture among English Catholics in this period; see Alexandra Walsham, Catholic Reformation in Protestant Britain (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 247–252.
with a particularly Ignatian focus. They record spiritual journeys undertaken through readings, prayer, and meditations, and although key differences can be detected in their composition, it is clear that these spiritual commonplace books were compiled by their author(s) in order to facilitate the use and dissemination of the *Exercises* within a specific missionary environment.

The examples under examination are from two distinct missionary settings within which the English Jesuits lived and worked. The first example is a pair of spiritual commonplace books that survive from the library of the Welsh district missionary headquarters, the territorial College of St. Francis Xavier, at the Cwm estate on the Wales-England border. Founded in 1595, the Welsh district of the English province was one of three initial missionary areas targeted by the Jesuits in the early years of the English mission, chosen for strength of adherence to Catholicism, and functioning as a pilot test for a wider national missionary focus. Missionary work in the district flourished virtually uninterrupted throughout the seventeenth century, until the closure of the Cwm in December 1678 as a result of the so-called Popish Plot. Although undated, manuscripts U.6.13 and U.7.15 were composed in the seventeenth century and can be broadly dated to around 1600–78.

The second example is a set of three manuscripts from the surviving library of the English Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre, or the Sepulchrines, a community of English women religious, founded in exile in Liège in 1642 by Susan Hawley (1622–1706). One of twenty-two communities of English women authors, the Sepulchrines used spiritual commonplace books to record their spiritual journeys and meditations. Manuscripts U.6.13 and U.7.15 were composed in the seventeenth century and can be broadly dated to around 1600–78.

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5 Other conventual examples of these manuscript compilations have been described as a “type of florilegium,” which is a monastic version of a commonplace book; see Jenna Lay, “An English Nun’s Authority: Early Modern Spiritual Controversy and the Manuscripts of Barbara Constable,” in *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality: Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain 1200–1900*, ed. Laurence Lux-Sterrit and Carmen Mangion (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 99–114, here 104.

6 The others were the London district, which became the College of St. Ignatius Loyola, and the Lancashire district, later the College of St. Aloysius [Gonzaga]. See Thomas M. McCoog, S.J., “The Establishment of the English Province of the Society of Jesus,” *Recusant History* 17 (1984): 14–33.

