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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the main text in reference to the works of Ignatius of Loyola, from Ganss, George E., trans. *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991)

EXX *The Spiritual Exercises*
Aut *The Autobiography*

Introduction

The ‘Spiritual Exercises’ of St. Ignatius of Loyola have a continuing appeal. Although written in Rome between 1539 and 1541, they appear to have adapted well for the modern psyche. Numerous popular books on spirituality advocate and expound Ignatius’ texts and ideas¹, and Christians of many denominations make use of Ignatian spiritual practices².

This study is concerned with the relationship between ‘Subjective Well-Being’ (SWB) and the practice of Ignatian spirituality. The approach’s longevity may result from its adaptability and, most significantly, the fact it appears to ‘work’ for many people in the twenty-first century. In other words, the continuing appeal is likely to be a result of a perceived positive impact on SWB for those who use it. If practices which bring spiritual benefit lead to positive feeling, SWB may not be disconnected from spiritual health, but could rather be considered a possible marker of it. Therefore, this thesis can be seen as an enterprise in ‘empirical theology’, addressing the relationship between Ignatian practice and SWB. In assessing this relationship, I will investigate research within psychology in the hope of finding empirical evidence that Ignatian spiritual practices may develop SWB.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to engage with epistemological questions, the approach taken in this thesis, which assumes the possibility of fruitful dialogue between theology and psychology, cannot proceed using an epistemology which is based upon *revelation* alone. Rather, I take seriously the Ignatian contention that ‘God is in all things’³ and believe it is possible to draw theological insight from the secular empirical sciences. I assume that it is at least conceivable that science can tell us something about the world God created which is theologically valuable.

Chapter one engages with the question of why a study of well-being is a legitimate concern of Christian theology. This chapter outlines how the biblical tradition understands salvation as bringing well-being in the present. It then explores why well-being should be an important dimension of our missiological thinking.

¹ For example: Muldoon, Tim *The Ignatian Workout: daily spiritual exercises for a healthy faith* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004); Hughes, Gerard W. *God of Surprises* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1996); Silf, Margaret, *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999)

² Huggett, Joyce, for example, explains why Ignatian spirituality is particularly helpful for many Protestants in ‘Why Ignatian Spirituality Hooks Protestants’ *The Way, Supplement 68* (Summer 1990), pp.22-34

³ For the centrality of this idea in Ignatius’ thought see Hebblethwaite, Margaret, *Finding God In All Things: Praying with St. Ignatius* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1987), pp.223-232

Chapter two examines the connections between Ignatian spirituality and well-being. Here I argue that, while Ignatian spirituality appears to be unconcerned with questions of life satisfaction, it revolves around the discernment of deeper well-being which is found in living according to our created purpose. Here I also explore the method of dialogue between spirituality and psychology that is used in this thesis.

Chapter three explores what positive psychology is and engages critically with the movement. It then investigates SWB and the question of whether it can be increased. Finally, connections between positive psychology and Ignatian spirituality are made.

Chapter four focuses on *gratitude* in Ignatian spirituality, which I argue is one of the key features of this tradition. I use gratitude as the focus for whether the insights of positive psychology shed light on how these spiritual practices might increase SWB. I suggest that positive psychology might usefully explain some mechanisms by which Ignatian spirituality enhances well-being. Insights from Ignatian spirituality for psychology are also offered.

Chapter 1: Christian theology and well-being

Revealing that my dissertation in applied theology is a study of how spirituality increases well-being has raised a few eyebrows in my theological college. Ellen Charry recounts informing a class in the opening lecture of a theology course one year that theology is concerned with human happiness: ‘Two students became uneasy at this statement and let me know indirectly that from that moment on, they discounted me’⁴. The problem is that ‘happiness’ is often understood in a way that lacks depth in secular culture. As Charry notes, the ‘trivial notion is that happiness is a state of mild euphoria’ whereas in Christian thought ‘it is precisely living peacefully, justly, fairly, and wisely... that makes a person truly happy’.⁵ According to many Christian writers, the basic problem is that popular secular notions of happiness revolve around the belief that we must content ourselves ‘with material goods and control over nature in this life... Without a transcendent perspective that locates enjoyment of life in a pattern of meaning more dignifying than self-gratification, enjoyment withers on the vine’.⁶

While it is certainly true that some popular notions of happiness are trivial, many of those found within secular positive psychology are much more sophisticated and may map onto Christian notions of *shalom*. In this opening chapter, I seek to show that well-being in the present is an essential dimension of salvation in Christian theology. First, I examine the importance of well-being in this life in the biblical tradition, suggesting that *shalom* is characteristic of the *present* dimension of salvation. I then explore why our current cultural context makes *shalom* an important consideration for missiological discussions. Having critiqued a classical theological position which is wholly focused on salvation in the hereafter, I argue that *shalom* in the present should be a key goal of *missio Dei*.

Biblical approaches to well-being: *shalom*

If Hughes is correct to note that healthy ‘Christian spirituality has its roots in Judaism’⁷, we must remember that early Israelites theology of the afterlife is undeveloped compared with the New Testament’s emphasis on the resurrection of the body. As Wright highlights, in the Hebrew Bible ‘the hope of resurrection makes rare appearances, so rare

⁴ Charry, Ellen T. ‘On Happiness’, *Anglican Theological Review*, 86:1 (2004), p.19

⁵ Charry, *Happiness*, p.20

⁶ Charry, *Happiness*, p.22

⁷ Hughes, Gerard W. *Oh God, Why? A journey through Lent for bruised pilgrims* (The Bible Reading Fellowship, Oxford, 1993), p.19

that some have considered them marginal'.⁸ After death one's spirit went to a land below earth, usually referred to as Sheol: 'Sheol, Abaddon, the Pit, the grave. The dark, deep regions, the land of forgetfulness. These almost interchangeable terms denote a place of gloom and despair, a place where one can no longer enjoy life, and where the presence of YHWH himself is withdrawn'.⁹ Death was seen as a sad thing, but this 'is the corollary of the Israelite belief in the goodness and god-giveness of life in this world'.¹⁰ Thus the blessings of God sought by the ancient Israelites were blessings for the *present*. When the psalmist hopes that 'those who seek the LORD lack no good thing'¹¹, this is a hope for this life.

Jewish hopes gradually developed into various forms of belief in an after-life, including ideas of a general resurrection. The New Testament writers, in making sense of Christ's resurrection, are full of the hope for resurrection in the Age to Come. According to Paul, 'the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first'.¹² Nevertheless, the New Testament also bursts with images which seek to explain how the Christ event makes possible a salvation which begins in the present – a salvation which qualitatively enhances well-being. I will briefly explore three images of this present dimension of salvation: the Johannine understanding of 'life'; the Pauline account of the blessings of the Holy Spirit; and the image of 'peace' which runs throughout the New Testament.

The Fourth Gospel's stated purpose is that readers may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing may have [*subjunctive present*] life in his name'.¹³ 'Eternal life' seems to be the central theme of Jesus' teaching in this gospel, replacing the proclamation of the Kingdom of God in the synoptics. The Greek word *zoe* occurs thirty-six times in John and the phrase *zoe aionios* ('eternal life') seventeen times. There seems to be no clear difference between the two. Ladd suggests this concept's background is found in the Old Testament in which 'life' is 'not immortality or life after death, but complete well-being in earthly existence'.¹⁴ In intertestamental Judaism it began to be understood eschatologically to refer to the life of the resurrection. The exact phrase 'eternal life' appears only once in the LXX in Daniel 12.2 to refer to

⁸ Wright, N. T., *Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), p.85

⁹ Wright, *Resurrection*, p.89

¹⁰ Wright, *Resurrection*, p.91

¹¹ Psalm 34.10

¹² 1 Thessalonians 4.16

¹³ John 20.31

¹⁴ Ladd, G. E., *A Theology of the New Testament* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1974), p.255

resurrection life of the Age to Come. As in the synoptic gospels, 'life' retains its eschatological meaning in John¹⁵, whilst also emphasising well-being in the present. Ladd argues that the 'central emphasis of the Fourth Gospel is not to show men the way of life in the Age to Come but to bring them a present experience of this future life'.¹⁶ Jesus expresses the purpose of his mission in John very clearly: 'I have come that they may have life [*subjunctive present*], and have it abundantly'.¹⁷ Jesus is depicted as the 'bread of life' who satisfies spiritual hunger and thirst.¹⁸ What the Johannine Jesus offers is life in the here and now, which will be most fully realised eschatologically: 'The water that I will give them will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life'.¹⁹

The blessings brought by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit are one way in which Paul depicts the well-being of the present life made possible by the Christ event. Paul is characteristic of early Christians in thinking that the outpouring of the Spirit is an eschatological event.²⁰ The blessing of the Spirit now is a guarantee of our eschatological salvation. This is achieved through the language of *arrabon*. In the second letter to the Corinthians, Paul reasons that it is 'God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment [*arrabon*]'.²¹ As Dunn suggests, the 'Spirit is the "down payment," the "first instalment" – in other words, the beginning of the salvation process'.²² The same word is used in other Pauline literature. The author of Ephesians speaks of the Holy Spirit as the 'pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people'.²³ Muddiman notes that Paul uses a comparable metaphor in Romans 8.23 drawn from the sacrificial cult in which the Spirit is described as 'first fruits': 'These metaphors are attempts to explain the relation between present salvation and its future completion'.²⁴ What blessings are characteristic of the reception of the Holy Spirit? Many of the ways in which Paul describes the gifts of the Spirit have at least an apparent association with well-being. In 1 Thessalonians he reminds his hearers how they received the word 'with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit'.²⁵ Similarly, in Galatians

¹⁵ See, for example, John 5.28-29: '...the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.' See also John 12.25.

¹⁶ Ladd, *Theology*, p.257

¹⁷ John 10.10

¹⁸ John 6.35

¹⁹ John 4.14

²⁰ Cf. Acts 2.16-21 which connects Pentecost with Joel 2.28-29.

²¹ 2 Corinthians 1.21-22. See also 5.5.

²² Dunn, James D. G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London: T&T Clark Ltd., 2003), p.421

²³ Ephesians 1.14

²⁴ Muddiman, John *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Continuum, 2001), p.80

²⁵ 1 Thessalonians 1.6

the fruits of the Holy Spirit include love, joy and peace.²⁶ The Spirit also gives freedom from slavery²⁷, the ability to live according to the Spirit²⁸, and the knowledge of adoption²⁹. Numerous other examples could be given, but I hope these serve to illustrate the present well-being in Paul's though made possible by the Christ event.

Finally, the concept of 'peace' is used throughout the New Testament, found in almost every document, to explain the well-being which Christians may enjoy as a result of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Klassen notes that the Hebrew concept of *shalom* underpins the Christian view of peace (most commonly the Greek word *eirene*, which appears over 100 times in the New Testament) and has the broad meaning of 'the state of being well'.³⁰ Its richness is conveyed in its many uses throughout the bible which involve physical and mental well-being: it is used to refer to 'health or restoration to health, to general well-being such as sound sleep, length of life, a tranquil death, and even to the physical safety of an individual'.³¹ Further, it is used 'to describe quiet tranquillity and contentment' and the root ideas of the Hebrew word are 'well-being, wholeness, soundness, completeness'.³² It was almost certainly frequently used by the historical Jesus: he says 'Go in peace' to the woman who is haemorrhaging having healed her (a clear instance in which peace is linked with both physical and mental well-being)³³, the same words are used to the woman who approaches him while he is eating with a Pharisee³⁴, and 'Peace be with you' is a characteristic greeting of the risen Christ to his disciples.³⁵ Thus peace, characteristically used by Jesus, with the overtones of *shalom*, is a given throughout the New Testament as a marker of the new life found in Christ. Such peace is thought by Paul to surpass all understanding, and guard hearts and minds in Christ.³⁶

I have explored only three New Testament images, though there are many more, which emphasise the fact that the Christian life in the *present* should contain elements of the well-being which characterise the life of the *not yet*. The Christ event opens the possibility of a salvation in the present which means that the Christian life is spiritually satisfying, contains love, hope and joy, and has all the blessings of *shalom*. The task of this

²⁶ Galatians 5.22-23

²⁷ Romans 8.2

²⁸ Romans 8.4-6

²⁹ Romans 8.15-16

³⁰ Klassen, William 'Peace' in (ed.) Freedman, David Noel, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 5* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p.207

³¹ Hawthorne, Gerald F., 'Peace' in (ed.) Metzger, Bruce M. & Coogan, Michael D., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.579

³² Hawthorne, 'Peace', p.579

³³ Mark 5.34

³⁴ Luke 7.50

³⁵ Luke 24.36; John 20.19, 21, 26

³⁶ Philippians 4.7

study is to see how this concept of *shalom* maps onto empirical measures of SWB. I now turn to explore the contemporary quest for happiness in order to investigate the importance of *shalom* for the mission of the Church today.

Dialogue between Christian and secular approaches to SWB: an opportunity for mission?

The quest for ‘happiness’ is very much on the agenda in secular thought: self-help texts on happiness line the shelves of bookshops, newspaper headlines declare that scientists can reveal what makes us happier, and now politicians are taking happiness seriously as an issue of policy. Since David Cameron has become Prime Minister, the Office for National Statistics has launched a ‘well-being’ index.³⁷ While in opposition, he declared it was time ‘we admitted there’s more to life than money, and it’s time we focused not just on GDP but on GWB – General Well-Being’.³⁸ The economist Richard Layard gives the rationale for such policy:

...the government should monitor the distribution of happiness and misery, and focus especially on those who are the most miserable. It should develop a proper qualitative understanding of the causes of happiness, and the effects of different policies in changing the happiness of those affected. And it should then choose among policies those which will produce the greatest increase in happiness (suitably weighed) for any given cost.³⁹

The secular world certainly seems to be taking the issue seriously. As we shall see, the growth of the positive psychology movement over the last decade reveals that happiness is being treated as a scientific topic worthy of investigation and funding. The evidence suggests, however, that happiness levels are not on the increase: ‘Life may be better for some, but the evidence is that for most... people in the West, happiness has not increased since 1950’.⁴⁰ Of particular note is the fact that as income per head has gradually risen over the last sixty years in the West, happiness levels have changed little.⁴¹

Perhaps then a key opportunity for mission today is the fact that many with a secular worldview are seeking happiness through spirituality. As Yvonne Richmond highlights “‘spirituality’ has become an “in” word; today it covers everything from different moral and ethical codes to a diverse range of esoteric, sometimes occult,

³⁷ Grice, Andrew, ‘PM’s “happiness plan” could lift Ed’s spirits, says Campbell’, *The Independent*, January 11th 2012

³⁸ Cited in Layard, Richard *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2011)

³⁹ Layard, *Happiness*, p.257

⁴⁰ Layard, *Happiness*, p.29

⁴¹ Layard, *Happiness*, pp.29-31

practices. It is largely influenced by Eastern religions and the New Age movement'.⁴² The success of the BBC's 2010 programme *The Big Silence*, however, provides one recent example of the fact that the direction of travel in this quest is not exclusively towards New Age or Eastern spiritualities. Further, in his investigation of whether mind can control mood, Layard explores the possibilities of Buddhism, Cognitive Therapy and Positive Psychology for improving well-being – and sandwiched in-between these perhaps unlikely bedfellows, the Christian mystical tradition gets a mention, with particular reference to Ignatian spirituality. Layard notes that Ignatius' understanding of 'praise' means being grateful, 'an essential condition for happiness and easier if you have some idea of who or what you are grateful to'.⁴³ The resources of the Christian tradition it seems are being noticed by those who seek well-being through spirituality.

Indeed, research suggests that interest in spirituality is increasing. Belief in a soul has increased by 10% between 1980 and 2000.⁴⁴ Britons still believe in God and 'believe in a soul and their sense of spiritual awareness is increasing. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is becoming more acceptable to admit to such awareness'.⁴⁵ A poll in 2000 revealed that over three-quarters of people (76%) are likely to admit to a religious experience; this stands in sharp contrast to the figure of under half (48%) in 1987.⁴⁶

Perhaps at a time when so many are open to spirituality as a source of a 'happier' life, Christians might delve into their tradition to rediscover the riches available which promote well-being. In what follows I will build on my brief survey of well-being in the bible to show that a missiology which has also a holistic understanding of salvation should view *shalom* as an important goal of *missio Dei*.

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In seeking the appropriate place for well-being in mission, much depends upon the nature and extent of salvation. In identifying various 'constants' in missional thinking, Bevans and Schroeder delineate various 'types' of theology⁴⁷. If mission as 'Saving Souls and Extending the Church'⁴⁸ is the dominant paradigm it is easy to see that well-being in the present life would not be valued so highly. The eschatology in such a model tends to be

⁴² Richmond, Yvonne in (ed.) Croft, Steven et al. *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age: communicated faith in a changing culture* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), p.8

⁴³ Layard, *Happiness*, p.194

⁴⁴ Barley, Lynda *Christian roots, contemporary spirituality* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), p.3

⁴⁵ Barley, *Christian*, p.3

⁴⁶ Barley, *Christian*, p.4

⁴⁷ Bevans, Stephen B. and Schroeder, Roger P. *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), pp.32-72.

⁴⁸ Bevans & Schroeder, *Constants*, pp.36-49

‘futurist in orientation and might contain some apocalyptic tendencies as well... such thinking tends to regard the world and human history as ultimately unimportant in the scheme of salvation’.⁴⁹

Type A theology views human beings as enmeshed in sin... doomed to eternal punishment and damnation. It is through Christ’s satisfactory, redeeming work that people become “disentangled” and so are able to live in ways that will ensure eternal life. Though it may in some way have beginning in this life... salvation was conceived as something that is accomplished *after* death and *out of* this world.⁵⁰

Bosch notes how this theology leads to a distinction between God’s ‘salvific’ activities and his ‘providential’ activities ‘in respect of the well-being of individuals and society’.⁵¹

Thus even if... remarkable service has always been rendered in respect of the care of the sick, the poor, the orphans, and other victims of society... these ministries were almost always viewed as “auxiliary services” and not as missionary in their own right. Their purpose was to dispose people favourably toward the gospel... and thereby prepare the work of the *real* missionary, namely, the one who proclaimed God’s word about eternal salvation. In most cases, then, a strict distinction was maintained between “horizontal” and “external” emphases (charity, education, medical help) on the one hand and the “vertical” or “spiritual” elements of the missionary agenda (such as preaching, the sacraments, church attendance) on the other. *Only the latter had a bearing on the appropriation of salvation.*⁵²

This soteriology would justify the use of spirituality to develop well-being in today’s context as part of ‘disposing people favourably toward the gospel’, but it could never view the development of life satisfaction as a legitimate *end* of mission.

With the triumph of human reason during the Enlightenment, however, this soteriology came under attack. The idea of ‘salvation coming from outside, from God... became extremely problematic’ and religion as ‘expression of total dependence upon God and as eternal salvation in the hereafter’ was seen as an anachronism.⁵³ Instead, salvation was the improvement of humanity in terms of welfare and morality. Thus, an ‘alternative soteriology emerged, an understanding of salvation in which humans were active and responsible agents who utilized science and technology in order to effect material improvements and induce socio-political change in the present’.⁵⁴ Such optimistic thinking, however, could not last; Bosch notes that by the middle of the 1970s it was generally recognised that it was ‘self-deception... to think and act as if salvation lay in our

⁴⁹ Bevens & Schroeder, *Constants*, p.43

⁵⁰ Bevens & Schroeder, *Constants*, p.44

⁵¹ David Bosch *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Orbis Books, New York, 1991), p.394

⁵² Bosch, *Transforming*, pp.394-395, my italics

⁵³ Bosch, *Transforming*, p.395

⁵⁴ Bosch, *Transforming*, p.395

grasp, was at our disposal, or was something *we* could bring about'.⁵⁵ Bosch concludes that 'salvation and well-being, even if they are closely interlocked, do not coincide completely'.⁵⁶

I believe Bosch is correct, however, to warn against the dangers of returning to the 'classical interpretation of salvation': 'Its problem lies first, in the fact that it dangerously narrows the meaning of salvation, as if it comprises only escape from the wrath of God and the redemption of the individual soul in the hereafter and second, in that it tends to make an absolute distinction between creation and new creation, between well-being and salvation'.⁵⁷ Rather, salvation 'in Christ is salvation in the context of human society en route to a whole and healed world'.⁵⁸

While we must recognise that salvation will never finally come through human hands, a concern with 'life in abundance'⁵⁹ *now*, without losing sight of the *not yet*, makes the development of *shalom* not only a legitimate by-product, but an important *goal* of God's mission in the world. As Bosch suggests, those who believe that 'God will one day wipe away all tears will not accept with resignation the tears of those who suffer and are oppressed now'.⁶⁰

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In this chapter I have endeavoured to outline how the biblical tradition understands salvation in the present as bringing a sense of well-being to the believer: *shalom*. In a context in which the quest for happiness is high on the agenda in the secular world, *shalom* should be an important dimension of our missiological thinking. In the following chapter, I will explore the distinctive approach taken by the Ignatian spiritual tradition to *shalom*.

⁵⁵ Bosch, *Transforming*, p.397

⁵⁶ Bosch, *Transforming*, p.398

⁵⁷ Bosch, *Transforming*, p.398

⁵⁸ Bosch, *Transforming*, p.399

⁵⁹ John 10.10.

⁶⁰ Bosch, *Transforming*, p.400

Chapter 2: Ignatian spirituality and well-being

It may seem *prima facie* that Ignatius' writings are typical of a theology concerned only with saving souls and extending the Church. The first principle of the *Spiritual Exercises* states that humans 'are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of this to save their souls' (Exx 23). From the outset it appears that salvation in the hereafter is the only goal. Further, the principle and foundation continue that the exercitant should make themselves 'indifferent to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to my freedom of will and is not forbidden' and 'should not seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honour rather than dishonour, a long life rather than a short one, and so on in all other matters' (Exx 23). Asking Ignatius of Loyola whether he thought that his spiritual exercises would (let alone *should*) promote well-being would have been a rather puzzling question for him. The thought patterns of his world were clearly different from our own.

That Ignatius was concerned with eternal state of his and others' souls is in no doubt. In the first exercise, the exercitant meditates on 'how many people have been damned for committing a single mortal sin, and how many times I have deserved eternal damnation for my many sins' (Exx 48). Later in the same 'week' the exercitant meditates on hell and is asked to 'see in the imagination the length, breadth, and depth of hell' (Exx 65). Ignatius gives some prompts: 'the huge fires', 'the wailing, the shrieking, the cries', the smell of the 'smoke, the sulphur, the filth, and the rotting things' (Exx 66-71).

Ignatius records in his autobiography that when he made his first confession in writing it lasted three days (Aut 17). During a period of spiritual desolation at Manresa he suffered from extreme scruples of conscience.

But here he began to have much trouble from scruples, for even though the general confession he had made at Montserrat had been carefully done... it seemed to him that he had not confessed certain things. This caused him much distress. (Aut 22)

This gives the impression of a man who was concerned about being tormented in the kind of hell which he could imagine so readily, and whose missiology was shaped by a desire to prevent others from suffering such a fate.

This is the initial impression from his writings, but is by no means the last word on Ignatian spirituality. A closer look at the sources suggests a far richer theology which places value on well-being in a much deeper sense than momentary happiness. Further, in

using the Ignatian spiritual tradition we are not constrained to the historical Ignatius of Loyola, as though the only authentic Ignatian spirituality is one which can be traced to his life or exercises. It is to this latter point that we turn first.

Being authentically 'Ignatian'

In an age in which 'spirituality' is in vogue, with Christians 'rediscovering' celtic spirituality or ancient monastic practices, the question of *authenticity* (the relationship between a particular practice and the tradition it claims to represent) is important. How can we know whether a particular practice, prayer or insight is authentically Ignatian?

The answer is made easier by the fact that Ignatius himself did not expect his followers to copy the exercises exactly. In the 'Eighteenth Annotation' suggests they '*should be adapted to the dispositions of the persons who desire to make them, that is, to their age, education, and ability*' (Exx 18).⁶¹ Nor did Ignatius expect everyone to pursue a 30 day retreat. In the 'Nineteenth Annotation' he suggests that someone 'involved in public affairs or pressing occupations... may take an hour and a half each day to perform the exercises' (Exx 19). Further, as Endean explains, '*Spiritual Exercises* is not a book to be read; Ignatius is quite explicit that the person making the Exercises should not have the full text to hand, and not know what is coming (Exx 11). Rather, Ignatius' book is a collection of resources that "the one who gives to another the way and order of meditating and contemplating" (Exx 2) should have in mind the particular individual who is undergoing the process'.⁶²

Ignatius clearly envisaged from the outset that the exercises would and should be adapted for use. This, of course, leaves the question of how far they can be adapted, and what makes any adaptation a faithful one. Endean suggests the following.

We cannot... give an exhaustive account of which procedures are authentically Ignatian, but we can proceed more negatively... It would not be Ignatian were we to neglect completely the experience and circumstances of the person making the retreat. It would not be Ignatian were we to proceed as though the Ignatian text in particular, and the Christian tradition in general were of no relevance whatever for what happens in the retreat.⁶³

⁶¹ My italics.

⁶² Endean, Philip 'The Spiritual Exercises', in (ed.) Worcester, Thomas *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), p.53

⁶³ Endean, Philip 'How Far Can You Go?: Ignatius's Exercises, Fidelity, and Adaptation', *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, 29/1 (Spring 1998), p.39

One need not be a Jesuit, go on 30 day retreat, or follow the pattern of the four ‘weeks’ slavishly to practice Ignatian spirituality⁶⁴. Endean’s negative account, however, does not tell us very much. It seems to me that we can positively state certain characteristic features that must be present for authentic Ignatian spirituality, even if they are adapted and modernised. These include: the centrality of God in all things (Exx 235); the desire to live in accordance with the end for which we are created (Exx 23); the discernment of spirits using consolation and desolation (Exx 313-336); and the importance of gratitude, as I shall explore in the final chapter. Thus, Ignatius’ texts may be authentically searched for ‘gems’ which deepen a person’s encounter with God, but they must be ‘gems’ which are characteristic of Ignatius’ thought and have their origin in his life and work. In our dealings then with Ignatian spirituality we are not searching for a historical artefact of ‘what Ignatius thought’. Rather, we are concerned with it as a *living tradition* whose origin is found in the writings of Ignatius of Loyola, which contains practices that can be used by any Christian.

Well-being in the Ignatian tradition

While it is undoubtedly true that Ignatius’ thinking was characterised by aspects of the theology of his time in which the threat of damnation was felt keenly, it is clear that his spirituality also has the holistic soteriology involving *shalom* in present life which characterises the New Testament writings. In a letter to a bereaved widow he reveals a clear concern for her well-being: ‘the Lord does not require you to do anything exhausting or harmful to your person. He wants you to live taking joy in him and granting the body whatever it needs’.⁶⁵ At the heart of Ignatian spirituality, I suggests, stands the desire to help people live in the way they have been created by God. A life lived in such a way, I believe, is characterised by *shalom*.

Ignatian spirituality helps individuals discern the movements of God within their lives so they will not be ruled by momentary changes of affect, but rather know how to identify what leads to deeper satisfaction, even if this may involve suffering, cost, and a denial of certain pleasures. The principle and foundation, as we have seen, is that ‘Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save

⁶⁴ Martha Skinner provides an example of the exercises with mothers among whom she lived in a peripheral housing scheme in Glasgow in ‘The Experience of the Exercises’ in (ed.) Sheldrake, Philip, *The Way of Ignatius Loyola: Contemporary Approaches to the Spiritual Exercises* (London: SPCK, 1991), pp.131-141

⁶⁵ Ganss, George E. trans., *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), p.327

their souls' (Exx 23). This need not only be taken as an exhortation to avoid damnation (though for Ignatius this is part of it), but rather as Ignatius calling humans to live according to God's original blueprint because this is the more satisfying life to lead. Tim Muldoon understands 'by these means to save their souls' as '*by these means to achieve our eternal well-being*'.⁶⁶ This, I suggest, is a good way to translate the phrase: 'eternal well-being' captures nicely the *now* and *not yet* element salvation, as we have seen in our discussion of John's gospel. 'Eternal life' begins in the present moment and I 'ought to desire and elect only the thing which is more conducive to the end for which I am created' (Exx 23).

It is for this reason that we are encouraged to be 'indifferent' to all created things, except in so far as they help us to live to the end for which we are created. According to Ignatius, we 'should not seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honour rather than dishonour, a long life rather than a short one, and so on in all other matters' (Exx 23). None of these things in and of themselves brings *shalom*.

The method for helping people to find out how to live in accordance with God's purpose is known as 'discernment'. Ignatius notes how when he began to reflect upon his feelings while he was convalescing after injury in battle. It is here that he 'took the first steps in discernment,' according to Lonsdale, 'by noting and reflecting upon his own experience'.⁶⁷ He read novels about chivalry and Ludolph of Saxony's *Life of Christ*. He paused to reflect upon his reading and experience.

He imagined what he would do in the service of a certain lady... Nevertheless Our Lord assisted him, by causing these thoughts to be followed by others which arose from the things which he read. For in reading the life of Our Lord and of the saints, he stopped to think, reasoning with himself, "What if I should do what St. Francis did, and what St. Dominic did?" ...These thoughts lasted a good while; then, other things coming in between, the worldly ones mentioned above returned, and he also stayed long with them. (Aut 6-7)

Crucially, however, Ignatius reflected upon his subjective feelings after each of his fantasies, noting the difference in his moods.

When he was thinking of those things of the world he took much delight in them, but afterwards... he found himself dry and dissatisfied. But when he thought of going to Jerusalem barefoot... and of practicing all the other rigors that he saw in the saints, not only was he consoled when he had these thoughts, but even after putting them aside he remained satisfied and joyful. (Aut 8)

The practice which Ignatius was discovering is now crucial to Ignatian spirituality. As Hughes notes, 'When he spotted the qualitative difference in the after-effects of his

⁶⁶ Muldoon, *Ignatian*, p. 69

⁶⁷ Lonsdale, David, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: An Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1990), p.67

daydreams – noting the boredom, sadness and emptiness which followed his dreams of valour and of winning the love of a great lady, contrasting these feelings with the joy, peace and strength which followed his dreams of outdoing the saints – he had started on a process which he was later to call “Discernment of Spirits”.⁶⁸ Here Ignatius, in recognising the difference between feelings of momentary happiness, and sources of more enduring peace, was beginning to appreciate how we may be led spiritually by distinguishing feelings of ‘consolation’ and ‘desolation’.

In the *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius describes *consolation* as ‘that which occurs when some interior motion is caused within the soul through which it comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord,’ and includes ‘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 in its Creator and Lord’ (Exx 316). Later he notes that it is ‘characteristic of God and his angels, by the motions they cause, to give *genuine happiness* and spiritual joy, and thereby to banish any sadness and turmoil induced by the enemy’ (Exx 329).⁶⁹ *Desolation* is characterised by ‘darkness of soul, turmoil within it, an impulsive motion toward low and earthly things, or disquiet from various agitations and temptations’ (Exx 317). It is characteristic of the enemy ‘to fight against... happiness and spiritual consolation, by using specious reasonings, subtleties, and persistent deeds’ (Exx 329).

Lonsdale notes that Ignatius’ language harks back to ‘a previous age of psychology,’ coming from ‘the time when the variety and changes of often contrary feelings... were attributed to the presence and actions of “good”... and “evil” spirits’.⁷⁰ While continuing to use his language, we need not accept the theoretical framework. We are concerned with ‘the deeper levels of affectivity’ experienced: ‘those which actually influence our behaviour; the areas where our affective life and the life of the spirit interpenetrate; the places from which spring our commitments, our most significant choices and the fundamental directions that we give to our lives’.⁷¹ The ‘discernment of spirits’ is about identifying true spiritual consolations, differentiating what leads purely to hedonic pleasure from choices which bring *shalom*. Modern psychology suggests that moods do in fact bias cognition. Davidson notes that ‘individuals in a depressed mood have increasing accessibility to sad memories and decreased accessibility to happy

⁶⁸ Hughes, *God*, p.91

⁶⁹ My italics.

⁷⁰ Lonsdale, *Eyes*, p.69

⁷¹ Lonsdale, *Eyes*, p.70

memories’ whereas ‘positive moods facilitate cognitive flexibility’ and ‘result in more creative responses’.⁷²

Lonsdale provides a helpful example. He imagines a teacher who works for ten years and then gives up the job for a career in administration in industry which is a better fit for her qualifications, higher paid and involves a shorter commute. During the course of a retreat after five years in this new job she reflects on her unhappiness and dissatisfaction in it: ‘Her reflection on her experiences of “consolation” and “desolation” brings home to her that her feelings of consolation are in fact associated with teaching, and her opposite feelings are associated with her present work, although there seemed to be excellent reasons for changing jobs when she did’.⁷³

A key concern of the Ignatian spiritual tradition then is making decisions in accordance with our created purpose, decisions which lead to *shalom* rather than trivial happiness. In ‘every good election insofar as it depends on us, the eye of our intention ought to be single. I ought to focus only on the purpose for which I was created to praise God our Lord and save my soul’ (Exx 169).

I have noted how many with a secular worldview have a strong desire to seek happiness through spirituality. Some popular notions of happiness are trivial and are based upon seeking self-gratification. Ignatius offers a Christian vision of happiness that might be differentiated from the momentary hedonic pleasures. A Christian life, characterised by *shalom*, may be experienced as short, dishonoured, and in poverty. The Ignatian spiritual tradition helps in ‘disposing our soul to rid itself of all its disordered affections and then, after their removal, of seeking and finding God’s will in the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul’ (Ex1). The heart of Ignatius’ vision was that people live in accordance with their created purpose in praise of their Maker.

Dialogue between Ignatian spirituality and positive psychology

In chapter three I explore the positive psychology movement as a dialogue partner for Ignatian spirituality; my hope is to find empirical evidence that Ignatian spiritual practices enhance *shalom*. It is important to be clear about the nature of the dialogue that will take place between Ignatian spirituality and psychology.

⁷² Davidson, Richard. J., ‘On Emotion, Mood, and Related Affective Constructs’, in (ed.) Ekman, P. & Davidson, R. J., *The Nature of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.52

⁷³ Lonsdale, *Eyes*, p.74

Parsons and Jonte-Pace raise the question of the relation between psychology and religion: ‘Does psychology attack, critique or challenge religion? Or does psychology collaborate with religion in promoting mental and spiritual wholeness?’⁷⁴ In reference to their volume, they question whether ‘the multiplicity of dialogues and approaches gathered... can be said to constitute a single “field”; that, for example, what has been called the psychology “of” religion should be marked as a single field apart from those enterprises that champion more religiously toned, dialogical approaches’.⁷⁵ They suggest the terminology ‘psychology of religion’ originally assumed a ‘method (“psychology”), a series of cultural phenomena (“religion”), and a specific relation between the two: the psychology of religion referred to the analysis of the psychological meanings, origins, and patterns in religious ideation and practice’.⁷⁶ As Watts notes ‘psychology of religion has generally sought to take as neutral a view of religion as possible’.⁷⁷

The current study does not fall into this category, but is rather *religion in dialogue with psychology*. Psychology ‘is used not simply to explore and interpret religious phenomena. It is utilized to further, through dialogue, the very aims of religion... Religion is understood as a category *sui generis* that maps an area of human subjectivity extending beyond the conceptual parameters of secular psychology’.⁷⁸ I am concerned with *Christian theology, specifically Ignatian spirituality in dialogue with positive psychology*. Dialogue implies the possibility of psychology gaining insights from the Ignatian tradition, just as psychology may well explain the mechanism of Ignatian practices. Christian spirituality is an important, if under-used, potential source for this movement in psychology. Watts notes that theology and psychology ‘can be seen, in some ways, as offering complementary perspectives on reality, even though psychology is concerned with only a fragment of the broader reality that is the scope of theology’.⁷⁹ Watts argues that scientific ‘explanations of any phenomena can be offered, and such accounts might even be complete in their own terms... Nevertheless, a theological account can, in principal, always be offered alongside the scientific account, complementing it and cohering with it... Having an adequate scientific account does not make a theological account redundant’.⁸⁰ Furthermore, a theological account may well provide deeper riches or insights which a scientific account

⁷⁴ Jonte-Pace, Diane & Parsons, William B. ‘Introduction: Mapping religion and psychology’ in (ed.) Jonte-Pace, Diane and Parsons, William B. *Religion and Psychology: Mapping the Terrain: Contemporary dialogues, future prospects* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.1

⁷⁵ Jonte-Pace & Parsons, *Religion*, pp.1-2

⁷⁶ Jonte-Pace & Parsons, *Religion*, p.2

⁷⁷ Watts, Fraser *Theology and Psychology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p.2

⁷⁸ Jonte-Pace & Parsons, *Religion*, p.3

⁷⁹ Watts, *Theology*, p.8

⁸⁰ Watts, *Theology*, p.9

may need to explore. As Watts et al. note, even for those who have no religious beliefs, ‘the religious inheritance provides a rich repository of subtle conceptualization and practical wisdom that it would be unwise of positive psychology to ignore’.⁸¹

⁸¹ Watts, Fraser, Dutton, Kevin, & Gulliford, Liz, ‘Human spiritual qualities: Integrating psychology and religion’, *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 9 (3) (June 2006), pp.277-289

Chapter 3: Positive Psychology, Subjective Well-Being and Ignatian Spirituality

What is positive psychology?

The origins of the positive psychology movement are usually traced to Martin Seligman's 1998 Presidential Address to the American Psychological Association in which he declared an intention to use his presidency to begin to change the focus in psychology towards the positive.⁸² In their introduction to a special issue of *American Psychologist* devoted to positive psychology, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi lamented the fact that psychologists have 'scant knowledge of what makes life worth living' and 'know very little about how normal people flourish under more benign conditions'.⁸³ In light of this, they would 'begin to catalyse a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities'⁸⁴ and 'to remind our field that psychology is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue'.⁸⁵

Why was this change of focus necessary? They argue that, while before the Second World War psychology in America had three objectives (to cure mental illness, to make relatively untroubled people happier, and to study genius and high talent), the end of the war meant that researchers turned to the study of mental disorders because that was where the funding was. Although there have been significant successes in this area, the downside of this narrow focus 'was that the other two fundamental missions of psychology – making the lives of all people better and nurturing genius – were all but forgotten'.⁸⁶ As Gable and Haidt put it, the 'science of psychology has made great strides in understanding what goes wrong in individuals, but these advances have come at the cost of understanding what is right with people'.⁸⁷

It is clear, of course, that positive psychology was not entirely absent before 1998. Researchers are now enquiring into areas which 'were not truly neglected, such as

⁸² Linley, P. Alex, Joseph, Stephen, Harrington, Susan, & Wood, Alex M., 'Positive Psychology: Past, Present, and (possible) future', *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 2006), p.4

⁸³ Seligman, Martin E.P. & Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, 'Positive Psychology: An Introduction', *American Psychologist*, Vol. 55, No.1 (January 2000), p.5

⁸⁴ Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 'Positive', p.5

⁸⁵ Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 'Positive', p.7

⁸⁶ Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 'Positive', p.6

⁸⁷ Gable, Shelly L. & Haidt, Jonathan, 'What (and Why) is Positive Psychology?', *Review of General Psychology*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2005), p.105

attachment, optimism, love, emotional intelligence, and intrinsic motivation,' but there are others who are studying aspects of human experience 'about which there was very little published before the year 2000, such as gratitude, forgiveness, awe, inspiration, hope, curiosity and laughter'.⁸⁸ Indeed, Duckworth et al. suggest positive psychology has many 'distinguished ancestors and modern cousins', drawing on, for example, Aristotle's account of the 'good life', through to Jung's thinking about personal and spiritual wholeness, and more recently to Bandura's work on self-efficacy.⁸⁹ Seligman and other key players are selective in acknowledging this earlier work, paying scant attention to humanistic psychologies such as those of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, who were interested in the positive side of human development through 'self-actualization', largely because these writers did not employ scientific methods. In contrast, the movement started by Seligman and others took these ideas, originally framed in a therapeutic context, and attempted to give them scientific respectability. As Peterson and Seligman argue, what 'distinguishes positive psychology from the humanistic psychology of the 1960s and 1970s and from the positive thinking movement is its reliance on empirical research to understand people and the lives they lead'.⁹⁰ Thus, 'positive psychology has always been with us, but as a holistic and integrated body of knowledge it has passed unrecognised and uncelebrated, and one of the major achievements of the positive psychology movement to date has been to consolidate, lift up and celebrate what we do know about what makes life worth living as well as carefully delineating the areas which we need to do more'.⁹¹

With a movement which is so clearly focused on investigating what makes life worth living, one criticism of the field is that it casts the rest of psychology as *negative*, 'and if we need a positive psychology it is because this so-called negative psychology has taught us little'.⁹² Advocates of the movement argue that it is rather the *imbalance* within psychology that makes such work necessary, and the success of psychology in the past has made this all the more obvious. There may be a parallel here with soteriological thinking. As I have shown, certain models of salvation emphasise what we have been saved *from* (damnation), which could map onto symptom reduction models of psychology; in contrast,

⁸⁸ Gable, & Haidt, 'What', p.104

⁸⁹ Duckworth, Angela Lee, Steen, Tracy A., and Seligman, Martin E. P., 'Positive Psychology in Clinical Practice', *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 1 (2005), pp.632-633

⁹⁰ Peterson, Christopher & Seligman, Martin, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.4

⁹¹ Linley, P. Alex, Joseph, Stephen, Harrington, Susan, & Wood, Alex M., 'Positive Psychology: Past, Present, and (possible) future', *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 2006), p.4

⁹² Gable, & Haidt, 'What', p.104

those accounts of soteriology which emphasise what we have been saved for (*shalom*) perhaps map onto positive psychology.

If positive psychology is an attempt to redress an imbalance in psychology, what exactly is its domain? Succinctly put, it is ‘the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions’.⁹³ Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi’s explanation gives a fuller flavour:

The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic.⁹⁴

With all this focus on positivity critics may suggest that those who study positive psychology ‘fail to recognize the very real negative sides of life, preferring a Polyanna view of the world’.⁹⁵ The aim, however, is not to erase or supplant the work done in the past but to ‘complement the existing knowledge base’.⁹⁶ Many positive psychologists maintain that ‘often one form of solution to problems... is to build the positive rather than directly work on the problem’.⁹⁷ The key is the belief that such positive topics are ‘worthy of scientific investigation’ and that its methodological approach is the ‘normal descriptive science of which just the sort that made clinical research scientifically respectable’.⁹⁸

Just how ‘scientifically respectable’ is this movement? One concern is that the ‘applications are outstripping the science’.⁹⁹ There is such a demand for interventions that some have been implemented before the science has been in place. This is perhaps inevitable in a field which is investigating some topics scientifically for the first time. Lopez and Gallagher suggest that many of those who are working in ‘applied areas are attempting to ground their work in scientific findings, and interventions are increasingly being tested empirically’.¹⁰⁰ In particular, of course, endeavouring to investigate ‘happiness’ (what it is, and whether and how it can be increased) is clearly an area which will be very controversial as to its scientific credentials.

⁹³ Gable, & Haidt, ‘What’, p.104

⁹⁴ Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, ‘Positive’, p.5

⁹⁵ Gable, & Haidt, ‘What’, p.107

⁹⁶ Gable, & Haidt, ‘What’, p.107

⁹⁷ Lopez, Shane J. & Gallagher, Matthew W., ‘A Case for Positive Psychology’, in Synder, C. R. and Lopez, Shane J. (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.10

⁹⁸ Duckworth et al., ‘Positive’, pp.633-634

⁹⁹ Lopez & Gallagher, ‘Case’, p.9

¹⁰⁰ Lopez & Gallagher, ‘Case’, p.9

The science of ‘happiness’

When pressed to delve into what they are seeking and what is most important in life, most people will produce an answer which involves ‘happiness’. While this may be the desire of many people, the problem which the positive psychology movement faced as it sought to gain momentum was put starkly by Seligman: ‘the scientific evidence makes it seem unlikely that you can change your level of happiness in any sustainable way’.¹⁰¹ Lyubomirsky et al. note that ‘the happiness-boosting techniques proposed in self-help literature generally have limited grounding in scientific theory and even less empirical confirmation of their effectiveness’.¹⁰² They acknowledge that it is possible that the advice given in such texts may work, but no empirical research confirms the claims. Seligman, however, argues that new research reveals that happiness can be lastingly increased and that positive psychology shows ‘how you can come to live in the upper reaches of your set range of happiness’.¹⁰³

Before we examine the essential question of whether Seligman’s claim is true, we must be clear about how we understand ‘happiness’. Duckworth et al. suggest that the term ‘happiness’ is ‘scientifically unwieldy’ and therefore ‘parse the subject matter into three domains’ each of which consists of a kind of life.¹⁰⁴ The first kind of life is the *pleasant life* which ‘maximises positive emotions and minimizes pain and negative emotions’.¹⁰⁵ The second is the *engaged life*, is said to correspond to Aristotle’s ‘eudaimon’ life, consisting of ‘using positive individual traits, including strengths of character and talents’.¹⁰⁶ Such a life will involve ‘flow’: the experience of becoming completely absorbed in what one is doing.¹⁰⁷ As meaning is said to be derived from ‘belonging to and serving something larger than oneself,’ the third kind of life is the *meaningful life* which is a ‘life led in the service of positive institutions’.¹⁰⁸ These lives are seen as ‘different roads to happiness, each with its own respectable provenance’.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰¹ Seligman, Martin, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realise Your Potential for Deep Fulfillment* (London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2002), pp.xi-xii

¹⁰² Lyubomirsky, Sonja, Sheldon, Kennon M. & Schkade, David, ‘Pursuing Happiness: The Architecture of Sustainable Change,’ *Review of General Psychology*, Vol.9, No.2 (2005), p.112

¹⁰³ Seligman, *Authentic*, p.xii

¹⁰⁴ Duckworth et al., ‘Positive’, p.635

¹⁰⁵ Duckworth et al., ‘Positive’, p.635

¹⁰⁶ Duckworth et al., ‘Positive’, p.635

¹⁰⁷ Nakamura, Jeanne & Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, ‘Flow theory and Research’ in Snyder, C. R. and Lopez, Shane J. (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.195-206

¹⁰⁸ Duckworth et al., ‘Positive’, p.636

¹⁰⁹ Duckworth et al., ‘Positive’, p.636

At first glance it seems that this investigation with a focus on spirituality would value such distinctions between different forms of happiness. Surely, spirituality should be concerned with the meaningful life? Such divisions of ‘happiness’ into different domains have not gone unchallenged, however. In particular, Kashdan et al. have argued against dual category approaches to happiness which distinguish hedonics and eudaimonia.¹¹⁰ While most empirical research in hedonic psychology has assessed SWB, there is ‘no single theory or approach that captures the essence of eudaimonic happiness’.¹¹¹ A key problem is that, while these categories may be entirely appropriate concepts philosophically, ‘they do not translate well to modern scientific and empirical enquiry’.¹¹² There is no scientific way to measure eudaimonic well-being; Aristotle, for example, believed that the eudaimon life could only be assessed once a person had died. Further, ‘studies reveal that there is far more overlap between models of well-being than there was believed to be in the original philosophical conceptualizations’.¹¹³ Instead of seeing SWB as a mundane aspect of the Good Life, Kashdan et al. suggest that it may help us to understand the Good Life as it is lived by ordinary people:

...by tracking positive and negative appraisals of daily life, SWB researchers are able to tap into people’s fulfillment, dedication to worthwhile goals, and other aspects of human psychology that have traditionally been associated with eudaimonia. Feeling good is concomitant of many of our very best moments, including those that are directly associated with virtue and meaning... To the extent that SWB tracks (so-called) eudaimonic variables in daily living, it provides a means to capture the everyday experience of good lives. At the very least, we suggest that taking emotion and cognitive satisfaction judgements into consideration is fundamental to any holistic examination of well-being and the good life.¹¹⁴

With this in mind, this study will focus on SWB. In investigating what light positive psychology might shed on whether spiritual practices lead to *shalom*, the concept must be open to empirical study. Diener et al. argue that ‘an essential ingredient of a good life is that the person herself likes her life’ and define SWB as ‘a person’s cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life as a whole’.¹¹⁵ Thus, SWB is broad and includes ‘experiencing high levels of pleasant emotions and moods, low levels of negative emotions and moods, and high life satisfaction’.¹¹⁶ All of these map onto the biblical concept of *shalom*, which I have shown involves both mental and physical well-being. Lyubomirsky

¹¹⁰ Kashdan, Todd B., Biswas-Diener, Robert and King, Laura A. ‘Reconsidering happiness: the costs of distinguishing between hedonics and eudaimonia’, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (October 2008), pp. 219-233

¹¹¹ Kashdan et. al., ‘Reconsidering’, p.221

¹¹² Kashdan et. al., ‘Reconsidering’, p.227

¹¹³ Kashdan et. al., ‘Reconsidering’, p.227

¹¹⁴ Kashdan et. al., ‘Reconsidering’, p.227

¹¹⁵ Diener, Ed, Oishi, Shigehiro, & Lucas, Richard E., ‘Subjective Well-Being: The Science of Happiness and Life Satisfaction’, in (ed.) Synder, C. R. and Lopez, Shane J. (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.187

¹¹⁶ Diener et al., ‘Subjective’, p.187

et al. emphasize that SWB is a subjectivist definition of happiness, relying on self-reports: ‘happiness is primarily a subjective phenomenon for which the final judge should be “whoever lives inside a person’s skin”’.¹¹⁷ This does not mean that it is totally unrelated to more ‘objective’ variables and they cite studies in which, for example there is a convergence between self-reported well-being and peer reports.

How then can SWB be measured? There are a number of different surveys.¹¹⁸ Seligman recommends the five-item ‘Satisfaction with Life Scale’ in which individuals evaluate their life according to five statements, including ‘I am completely satisfied with my life’ and ‘If I could live my life over I would change nothing’.¹¹⁹ While such self-report scales are ‘particularly appropriate given the privileged position of the individual in evaluating his or her own experience of well-being’ given the ‘possibility of response bias, memory bias, and other artefacts’ Duckworth et al. recommend a multi-method approach.¹²⁰

Can Subjective Well-Being be developed?

Is it possible then for an individual to develop SWB? The current investigation into how Ignatian spiritual practices might develop SWB hinges on the affirmative answer to this question. Seligman argues that positive psychology demonstrates that SWB *can* be lastingly increased. He commends the ‘happiness formula’ which is the equation: $H = S + C + V$. He explains: ‘*H* is your level of happiness, *S* is your set range, *C* is the circumstances of your life, and *V* represents factors under your voluntary control’.¹²¹ Crucial is the idea that there *are* factors which are under voluntary control.

We must examine whether this claim is true. Lyubomirsky et al. highlight three considerations which have led to the conclusion that we do not have voluntary control over SWB. First, SWB has often been seen as genetically determined and they cite studies which suggest that, although there may be variation around a baseline level of happiness, ‘in the long term people cannot perhaps help but return to their set point’.¹²² Seligman calls this the ‘happiness thermostat’: ‘the idea that we each have a personal set range for our level of positive (and negative) emotion, and this range may represent the inherited aspect

¹¹⁷ Lyubomirsky et al., ‘Pursuing’, p.115

¹¹⁸ Duckworth et al., ‘Positive’, p.637, identify the most widely used.

¹¹⁹ Seligman, *Authentic*, p.63

¹²⁰ Duckworth et al., ‘Positive’, p.637

¹²¹ Seligman, *Authentic*, p.45

¹²² Lyubomirsky et al., ‘Pursuing’, p.113

of overall happiness'.¹²³ Second, they refer to the literature on personality traits which also may account for the stability of a set point. Third, the concept of the 'hedonic treadmill' suggests that 'any gains in happiness are only temporary, because humans adapt so quickly to change'.¹²⁴ The idea is that humans adapt quickly to new circumstances which at first might have seemed exciting to us and we begin to take them for granted.

Lyubomirsky et al. concede that together 'these concepts and findings suggest that trying to become happier may be as futile as trying to become taller'.¹²⁵ They do not, however, believe this to be the end of the story: 'Despite the seemingly compelling reasons we have listed for pessimism regarding attempts to elevate levels of well-being, there are also compelling reasons for optimism'.¹²⁶ They outline four reasons for optimism¹²⁷: researches have had a measure of success in using interventions to increase happiness; well-being may well be linked to motivational and attitudinal factors; some findings suggest that older people tend to be happier than younger people; genes may actually influence happiness indirectly by 'influencing the kinds of experiences and environments one has or seeks to have' which means that 'unwanted effects of genes could be minimized by active efforts to steer oneself away from situations that detract from well-being'.¹²⁸ In addition to this, Diener et al. have made revisions to the 'hedonic treadmill' theory suggesting that 'interventions to increase happiness can be effective, and research supports this conclusion'.¹²⁹

The question for Lyubomirsky et al. then is: 'Through what mechanisms, if any, can a chronic happiness level higher than the set point be achieved and sustained?'¹³⁰ They seek to describe the *architecture of sustainable happiness*. It must be more enduring than moment to moment happiness but also malleable over time. As Seligman explains:

It is important to distinguish your momentary happiness from your enduring level of happiness. Momentary happiness can easily be increased by any number of uplifts... The challenge is to raise your *enduring* level of happiness, and merely increasing the number of bursts of positive feelings will not accomplish this.¹³¹

The factors which causally affect this chronic happiness level are argued to be the set point, life circumstances and intentional activity. Lyubomirsky et al. believe that the *set*

¹²³ Seligman, *Authentic*, pp.47-48

¹²⁴ Lyubomirsky et al., 'Pursuing', p.113

¹²⁵ Lyubomirsky et al., 'Pursuing', p.113

¹²⁶ Lyubomirsky et al., 'Pursuing', p.113

¹²⁷ Lyubomirsky et al., 'Pursuing', pp.113-114

¹²⁸ Lyubomirsky et al., 'Pursuing', p.114

¹²⁹ Diener, Ed, Lucas, Richard E., & Scollon, Christine Napa, 'Beyond the Hedonic Treadmill: Revising the Adaptation Theory of Well-Being', *American Psychologist* Vol.61, No.4 (May-June 2006), p.312

¹³⁰ Lyubomirsky et al., 'Pursuing', p.114

¹³¹ Seligman, *Authentic*, pp.45-46

point accounts for approximately 50% of the variance in individual differences in chronic happiness. This set point is fixed and resistant to change; given ‘its relative inflexibility, the set point is unlikely to be a fruitful direction to increase happiness’.¹³² Contrary to popular belief, a person’s *circumstances* are thought to account for around only 10% of individual differences in chronic happiness. This is because circumstances, such as a person’s national or cultural region, demographics, personal experiences, and life status variables, are relatively constant, meaning that ‘they are more susceptible to adaptation and, hence, have comparatively little impact on happiness’.¹³³

The most promising factor for increasing one’s chronic happiness level is *intentional activity* which perhaps accounts for 40%. ‘Intentional’ refers to ‘discrete actions or practices in which people can choose to engage’ and which require effort to enact.¹³⁴ Such activities can be ‘behavioural (e.g. practicing random acts of kindness), cognitive (e.g. expressing gratitude), or motivational (e.g. pursuing intrinsic significant life goals)’.¹³⁵ Lyubomirsky et al. argue that ‘activity-based change, unlike circumstance-based change, has several desirable features that may help to combat adaptation,’¹³⁶ offering three reasons why.

First, intentional activity is *episodic* and ‘individuals may adapt less readily to new activities than to new circumstances’.¹³⁷ This is because we cannot carry out intentional activity all of the time. Second, intentional activity can be *varied*. Adaptation, by definition, ‘does not occur to stimuli that are variable or changeable but only to those that are constant or repeated’.¹³⁸ Finally, intentional activity can directly *counteract adaptation*. An example of this is the way pausing to savour the good things in one’s life ‘can directly counteract the effects of hedonic adaptation to one’s circumstances by drawing attention to the features that produced the initial happiness boost’ and this helps to keep them from being taken for granted.¹³⁹ This may help to highlight the distinction between circumstances and intentional activities. For example, a person may not need to change career to improve their well-being; instead, they could put more effort into the work they do (behavioural), spend time reflecting upon aspects of the work which are fulfilling (cognitive), and set new career goals to be fulfilled (motivational). Lyubomirsky et al. thus

¹³² Boehm, Julia K. & Lyubomirsky, Sonja, ‘The Promise of Sustainable Happiness’, in Synder, C. R. and Lopez, Shane J. (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.671

¹³³ Boehm & Lyubomirsky, ‘Promise’, p.671

¹³⁴ Lyubomirsky et al., ‘Pursuing’, p.118

¹³⁵ Boehm & Lyubomirsky, ‘Promise’, p.671

¹³⁶ Lyubomirsky et al., ‘Pursuing’, p.120

¹³⁷ Lyubomirsky et al., ‘Pursuing’, p.120

¹³⁸ Lyubomirsky et al., ‘Pursuing’, p.120

¹³⁹ Lyubomirsky et al., ‘Pursuing’, p.121

conclude that ‘intentional activity appears to offer the best prospects for increasing and sustaining happiness’.¹⁴⁰ Further study confirms the predictions of this model for the architecture of sustainable happiness.¹⁴¹ They found that activity-based changes were more variable and less prone to adaptation than circumstance-based changes.

In 2005 Duckworth et al. acknowledged that positive psychology was empirically ‘about where clinical research was in the early 1970s’.¹⁴² The assessment tools were said to be still in development, longitudinal studies were beginning and interventions were in pilot form. While this may still be the case, much progress has been made and empirical data is building up. In the next chapter we will focus specifically on *gratitude* interventions in relation to Ignatian spiritual practices. It is worth noting that other interventions have also had significant successes. Seligman et al. used an exercise in which participants were asked to answer an online inventory of character strengths and then had to use one of these top strengths in a new and different way every day for one week. They found that participants’ SWB increased and depressive symptoms decreased for six months.¹⁴³ Other examples include committing acts of kindness, visualising best possible selves, and processing happy life experiences.¹⁴⁴

Positive Psychology and Ignatian Spirituality

It is not difficult to see why those who have an interest in spirituality would pay attention to the insights of positive psychology. Positive psychology speaks the ‘language’ of spirituality. A science which investigates gratitude, forgiveness, hope, humility, wisdom and love (to name a few areas of research) should not go unnoticed by those with spiritual interests. And the traffic does not only flow one way. ‘Positive psychology,’ writes Joanna Collicutt, ‘concentrates on those aspects of human behaviour that are thought to contribute to human flourishing. These are conceived of as universal character strengths or habits... Crucially, these character strengths were originally identified with reference to the great faith traditions of the world’.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, the Values in Action (VIA) project, which seeks to

¹⁴⁰ Lyubomirsky et al., ‘Pursuing’, p.121

¹⁴¹ Sheldon, Kennon M. & Lyubomirsky, Sonja, ‘Achieving sustainable gains in happiness: Change your actions, not your circumstances’, *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 7 (2006), pp.55-86

¹⁴² Duckworth et al., ‘Positive’, p.634

¹⁴³ Seligman, Martin E. P., Steen, Tracy A., Park, Nansook and Peterson, Christopher, ‘Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions’, *American Psychologist*, Vol 60, No. 5 (July-August 2005), pp.410-421

¹⁴⁴ Boehm & Lyubomirsky, ‘Promise’, pp.672-673

¹⁴⁵ Collicutt, Joanna, ‘Psychology, religion and spirituality’ *The Psychologist*, 24(4) (2011), p.251

describe important strengths of character and ways to measure them¹⁴⁶, deliberately sought the insights of major spiritual traditions. Seligman recalls: ‘...we read Aristotle and Plato, Aquinas and Augustine, the Old Testament and the Talmud, Confucius, Buddha, Lao-Tze, Bushido (the samurai code), the Koran, Benjamin Franklin and the Upanishads – some two hundred virtue catalogues in all’.¹⁴⁷

Parallels between Ignatian spirituality and positive psychology have already been noted. Csikszentmihalyi has examined ‘flow’ in the historical context of early Jesuit history.¹⁴⁸ She argues that ‘the Jesuit rules provided an optimal set of conditions by which young men could live the entirety of their lives as a single flow experience’.¹⁴⁹ The most developed comparison of the two disciplines is by Zagano and Gillespie.¹⁵⁰ They suggest that Ignatian spirituality is also ‘in many ways positive in its approach to the world and the self’ and that ‘both have as a particular focus the freeing of the individual to engage the world in social commitment’.¹⁵¹ While noting that the two disciplines diverge in their grounding and practice, they suggest ‘each can be seen as informing and assisting the other’ and perhaps positive psychology ‘can offer the Ignatian movement some useful techniques and resources’.¹⁵² In particular, they note some of the *overlapping terminologies* and begin to compare the *practices* of Ignatian spirituality and positive psychology.

There may seem to be little overlap between SWB and the goal of Ignatius’ first principle, the salvation of the soul (Exx 23). However, as we have seen, it does little justice to the Ignatian spiritual tradition to focus entirely salvation in the hereafter. A meaningful comparison can be made between Seligman’s distinction of momentary and enduring happiness, and the way believers ‘distinguish transitory pleasures from the causes of genuine happiness, and... recognise the negative affections arising from specific unfreedoms’.¹⁵³ Further, both disciplines use the term ‘exercises’; while this may not be unique to Ignatian spirituality, ‘the fact that psychologists have adopted both specific

¹⁴⁶ Peterson, Christopher & Park, Nansook, ‘Classifying and Measuring Strengths of Character’, ‘The Promise of Sustainable Happiness’, in Synder, C. R. and Lopez, Shane J. (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.25-33

¹⁴⁷ Seligman, *Authentic*, p.132

¹⁴⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, Isabella S. ‘Flow in a Historical Context: The Case of the Jesuits’, in (ed.) Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly & Csikszentmihalyi, Isabella S. *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies in Flow in Consciousness*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 1988), pp. 232-248

¹⁴⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, ‘Flow’, p.232

¹⁵⁰ Zagano, Phyllis and Gillespie, C. Kevin, ‘Ignatian Spirituality and Positive Psychology’, *The Way*, 45/4 (October 2006), pp.41-58

¹⁵¹ Zagano and Gillespie, ‘Ignatian’, p.42

¹⁵² Zagano and Gillespie, ‘Ignatian’, p.42

¹⁵³ Zagano and Gillespie, ‘Ignatian’, p.43

practices and the term demonstrates that modern psychology can recognise the soundness of Ignatius' foundations'.¹⁵⁴

Zagano and Gillespie also begin to compare the practices of the two disciplines. In particular, they focus on Ignatian gratitude practices in relation the 'Three Blessings' exercise and the 'Gratitude Visit'.¹⁵⁵ This seems to be the most fruitful area of connection and will be explored in further depth in the next chapter. Other less convincing comparisons are also drawn between practices.¹⁵⁶

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In the following chapter, I will use positive psychology as a dialogue partner to investigate how practising Ignatian spirituality develops SWB, with particular reference to *gratitude*. One criticism of the positive psychology movement is the lack of engagement with spiritual traditions on their own terms. As Collicutt suggests, 'Positive psychology talks of these faith traditions with respect, but essentially understands them as womb-like receptacles that have housed and nurtured character strengths, and may now be able to give them up to the world. Positive psychology thus has a definite "spiritual-but-not religious" feel'.¹⁵⁷ She warns that the focus on spiritualities shorn of their religious roots might pose a danger to the life of the spiritualities: 'A wild rose that works in the chaos of a thorny hedgerow may wilt when plucked and put in a vase on the mantelpiece'.¹⁵⁸

Zagano and Gillespie raise the question, how 'far can we go towards regarding Ignatian spirituality as a Christian expression of Positive Psychology, and Positive Psychology as a secular version of Ignatian spirituality?'.¹⁵⁹ I suggest the answer to this is 'not far'. They are correct to note that 'a term like "gratitude" has richer, more specific nuances in Christian spirituality, arising from a sense that all things depend for their very existence on a creator God'.¹⁶⁰ We do well to heed this as a warning: we must not deal with Ignatian spirituality outside of its explicitly theological context. Further, they are correct to highlight 'Christian spirituality's ambivalence regarding the simple pursuit of happiness, and its discouragement of a preoccupation with personal self-development'.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁴ Zagano and Gillespie, 'Ignatian', p.45

¹⁵⁵ Zagano and Gillespie, 'Ignatian', pp.47-49

¹⁵⁶ Zagano and Gillespie, 'Ignatian', pp.47-52

¹⁵⁷ Collicutt, 'Psychology', p.251

¹⁵⁸ Collicutt, 'Psychology', p.251

¹⁵⁹ Zagano and Gillespie, 'Ignatian', p.56

¹⁶⁰ Zagano and Gillespie, 'Ignatian', p.46

¹⁶¹ Zagano and Gillespie, 'Ignatian', p.57

Thus in what follows in my use of positive psychology as a dialogue partner for Ignatian spirituality, I will endeavour to engage the tradition authentically on its own terms and suggest insights which psychology may take from this spirituality.

Chapter 4: Does Ignatian *gratitude* develop Subjective Well-Being?

The reasons for focusing on gratitude¹⁶² are compelling. Not only is gratitude one of the key features of Ignatian spirituality, but it is also at the heart of the Judeo-Christian tradition.¹⁶³ Over the last ten years or so, positive psychologists have taken up studying gratitude in earnest and find clear links with SWB. This chapter focuses on gratitude in order to discover whether positive psychology sheds any light on how Ignatian spiritual practices increase SWB.

Gratitude in the biblical tradition

Achtemeier believes no ‘motif more adequately reveals the nature of Biblical faith than does gratitude or thanksgiving... because it formed the only proper response to that which had happened in history – namely, the salvation of [God’s]... people’.¹⁶⁴ Schimmel notes that the ‘Hebrew Bible is replete with the motif that humans owe God gratitude for life, health, and sustenance’.

There are numerous thanksgiving psalms and other prayers in which the person or community that is praying pours forth expressions of gratitude. Many of the sacrifices offered on altars and, later, in the Temple in Judaism were infused with the sentiment of gratitude... as was the elaborate bringing of the first fruits – *bikkurim* – to the priest, the representatives of God in the Temple... The sentiment of gratitude is central to the very relationship between God (YHWH) and the people of Israel.¹⁶⁵

The gratitude we find is heartfelt. One psalmist declares that they will ‘Give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart’¹⁶⁶; another exhorts worshippers to ‘give thanks to the LORD, for he is good’¹⁶⁷.

This emphasis on a grateful attitude is developed in the New Testament. It ‘becomes more sharply defined,’ reaching its ‘culmination in the bread and wine of the

¹⁶² According to Peterson and Seligman (‘Character’, p.554), gratitude ‘is a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether that gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty’ The word derives from the Latin *gratia*, meaning ‘grace’, ‘graciousness’ or ‘gratefulness’.

¹⁶³ The word ‘thanks’ and its cognates (‘thankful’, ‘thankfulness’, ‘thanksgiving’) appear over 150 times in the Old and New Testaments.

¹⁶⁴ Achtemeier, E. R. ‘Gratitude’ in (ed.) Buttrick, George A. *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia, E-J* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp.470-471

¹⁶⁵ Schimmel, Solomon, ‘Gratitude in Judaism’, in (ed.) Emmons, Robert. A. and McCollough, Michael E., *The Psychology of Gratitude* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.38-39

¹⁶⁶ Psalm 9.1

¹⁶⁷ Psalm 118.1

Lord's Supper'.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, the word 'eucharist' is derived from the Greek '*eucharisteo*' ('I give thanks'). Chase notes that thanksgiving, 'exemplified most concretely in the Lord's Supper, becomes in the New Testament a motive for life and conduct, a general attitude towards life's blessings and trials, and an essential component of prayer'.¹⁶⁹ For Paul, the 'basic attitude of everyone vis-a-vis his or her Creator should be one of gratitude and praise'.¹⁷⁰ He writes in Romans that humans are without excuse, 'for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him'.¹⁷¹ Each of Paul's letters (with the exceptions of 2 Corinthians and Galatians, each with good reason) begins with a thanksgiving. Wolff notes that this was 'not an invariable feature for letters in antiquity' but rather shows Paul's 'consciousness that it is only by God's grace that he is a successful and responsible proclaimer of the gospel'.¹⁷² Furthermore, Paul encourages an attitude of gratitude in those to whom he writes. In one passage he connects it explicitly with *shalom*:

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving* let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.¹⁷³

Other Pauline writings simply urge thanksgiving as an important dimension of Christian behaviour.¹⁷⁴

Gratitude has continued to play a vital role in Christian spirituality. Martin Luther referred to gratitude as the 'basic Christian attitude' and Karl Barth suggested that 'grace and gratitude go together like heaven and earth'.¹⁷⁵ Shelton notes that although 'a number of Christian saints, such as Thomas Aquinas and Bernard of Clairvaux, wrote about the virtues of gratitude, it is Ignatius of Loyola who made gratitude the core of his approach to God'.¹⁷⁶ It is to Ignatius distinctive emphasis on gratitude that we now turn.

Gratitude in Ignatian spirituality

In one of his letters, Ignatius reveals what he thinks of *ingratitude*.

¹⁶⁸ Chase, Steven, 'Thanksgiving' in (ed.) Sheldrake, Philip, *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (London: SCM Press, 2005) p.16

¹⁶⁹ Chase, *Thanksgiving*, pp.616-617

¹⁷⁰ Wolff, Christian, 'Thanksgiving' translated by Fuller, Reginald H. in (ed.) Freedman, David Noel *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 6* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp.435-438

¹⁷¹ Romans 1.21

¹⁷² Wolff, 'Thanksgiving', p.437

¹⁷³ Philippians 4.6-7

¹⁷⁴ Ephesians 5.4; Colossians 3.15; 1 Thessalonians 5.18

¹⁷⁵ Cited in Emmons, Robert A. *Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), p.95

¹⁷⁶ Shelton, Charles M., *The Gratitude Factor: Enhancing Your Life through Grateful Living* (New Jersey: Hidden Spring, 2010), p.28

I consider... ingratitude among the most abominable of all imaginable evils and sins in the eyes of our Creator... For it is the disregard of the benefits, graces, and gifts we have received; it is the cause, principle and origin of all evils and sins... On the contrary, awareness and gratitude of the benefits and gifts received – how much is it to be loved and esteemed'.¹⁷⁷

Wilkie Au suggests that 'Ignatian spirituality understands gratitude as more than a transient feeling; it is an abiding vision that recognises the gift-nature of everything'.¹⁷⁸ Au argues that 'gratitude constitutes a leitmotif of the Spiritual Exercises and that the basic dynamic by which Ignatius leads people to a commitment to service originates with gratitude'.¹⁷⁹ Drawing on the work of Michael Buckley¹⁸⁰, he argues that the contemplation to attain love (Ex 230-237), found at the end of the *Spiritual Exercises*, is a 'recapitulation of the entire experience' and 'underscores the centrality of gratitude as a motive for service'.¹⁸¹ The four considerations of this contemplation summarise and recapitulate the major themes of four Weeks of the Exercises.¹⁸² In the first point (Ex 234) we call to mind the gifts of creation and redemption which reminds us of the Principle and Foundation's emphasis on God's creation and of the exercises which help us to reflect upon our redemption.¹⁸³ In the second, we are reminded that God 'also dwells in all created things, especially in the human person' which corresponds with 'the Second Week of the Exercises and the Incarnation, the mystery that celebrates the enfleshment of divine compassion in the person of Jesus'.¹⁸⁴ The third asserts that 'God labours and works for me in all creatures on the face of the earth' (Ex 236) which calls to mind 'the Third Week of the Exercises when we pray over the passion and death of Jesus, whose love for us enabled him to endure painful labour and suffering, even unto death on the cross'.¹⁸⁵ The fourth consideration 'portrays all of God's blessings as descending from above'; this vision is possible because of the Risen Christ's witness to the creating and redeeming love of God.¹⁸⁶

Thus the concept of gratitude is central to the whole of the Exercises: the Principle and Foundation foster gratitude for 'the gifts of creation and one's personal life'; the First Week's 'reflection on sin fosters gratitude for God's saving and merciful love'; the Second Week 'evokes gratitude for the gift of Jesus, the Compassion of God made flesh, and for

¹⁷⁷ Cited in Shelton, Charles M., 'Graced Gratitude', *The Way*, 42/3 (July 2003), p.138

¹⁷⁸ Au, Wilkie, 'An Ignatian Path to Gratitude', *The Way*, 49/3 (July 2010), p.65

¹⁷⁹ Au, Wilkie, 'Ignatian Service: Gratitude and Love in Action', *Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits*, 40/2 (Summer 2008), p.4

¹⁸⁰ Buckley, Michael, 'The Contemplation to Attain Love', *Supplement to the Way* 24 (Spring 1975), pp.92-104

¹⁸¹ Au, 'Ignatian', p.5

¹⁸² Au, 'Ignatian', p.6

¹⁸³ For example, Ex 45-54, Ex 55-61, and Ex 65-72.

¹⁸⁴ Au, 'Ignatian', p.6

¹⁸⁵ Au, 'Ignatian', p.6

¹⁸⁶ Au, 'Ignatian', p.6

the Good News of God's unconditional love proclaimed by Jesus'; the Third Week 'elicits gratitude for Jesus' sacrificial love'; the Fourth Week 'fosters gratitude for the ongoing presence of the risen Christ as an abiding source of consolation'; the contemplation to attain love 'fosters gratitude by inviting us to recall all of God's gifts of creation and redemption and to rejoice in God's loving presence and action in all of reality for us'.¹⁸⁷ Further, Au suggests that an *inclusio* highlights gratitude as the leitmotif of the *Spiritual Exercises*. He argues that the 'thematic similarity between the first exercise, the First Principle and Foundation... and the final exercise, the Contemplation to Attain Love... allows us to view the entire work of the Exercises as a textual unit with gratitude as a central theme'.¹⁸⁸

For Au, the centrality of gratitude in Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* is not simply an interesting literary insight, but shows how practising these exercises can have a profound impact upon one's life. He argues that the *Spiritual Exercises* 'can deepen our gratitude and our love of a good and giving God by expanding our awareness of how richly we have been blessed'.¹⁸⁹ He tells the story of a contemporary follower of Ignatian spirituality, the late William Spohn, 'to show concretely how the Exercises can create an attitude of gratitude in us as we face the challenge of living with faith and dying with hope'.¹⁹⁰

It seems that gratitude lies at the very heart of Ignatian spirituality as the appropriate response to the God who may be found in all things.¹⁹¹ I now explore gratitude through the lens of positive psychology to discover how it may be connected with SWB.

Gratitude in positive psychology

In 2002 Emmons and Shelton lamented that 'gratitude has received relatively little sustained attention in scientific psychology'.¹⁹² Only seven years later and Watkins et al. note that, although the subject still remains understudied, they 'will not bemoan its neglect' as 'recent texts and reviews have begun to give gratitude its just due'.¹⁹³ It is important to be clear about the methodology of research into gratitude. The philosopher

¹⁸⁷ Au, 'Ignatian', pp.7-8

¹⁸⁸ Au, 'Ignatian', p.13

¹⁸⁹ Au, 'Ignatian Service', p.65

¹⁹⁰ Au, 'Ignatian Service', p.65

¹⁹¹ For a more detailed survey of gratitude in the *Spiritual Exercises*, the *Spiritual Diary*, the *Constitutions*, and the *Letters* of Ignatius, see Fagin, Gerald M., 'Stirred to Profound Gratitude,' *Review for Religious* 54 (1995), pp.237-252.

¹⁹² Emmons, Robert A. & Shelton, Charles M., 'Gratitude and the Science of Positive Psychology', in (ed.) Synder, E. R. & Lopez, S. J., *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.459

¹⁹³ Watkins, Philip C., Van Gelder, Michael & Frias, Araceli, 'Furthering the Science of Gratitude', in Synder, C. R. and Lopez, Shane J. (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.437

Robert C. Roberts offers a *conceptual* analysis of gratitude by exploring the conceptual structures of other emotions which he argues are in tension with gratitude in order to show that gratitude contributes to well-being.¹⁹⁴ The task of the present study, however, is to identify whether there is any *empirical* evidence that gratitude develops well-being.

We begin by questioning whether ‘trait gratitude’ is an important personality predictor of SWB. Watkins et al. identify ‘trait gratitude’ as ‘one’s disposition for gratitude’, suggesting that if an individual is high in it, they should experience gratitude more easily and more frequently than one who is not a grateful person’.¹⁹⁵ There are various measures of dispositional gratitude.¹⁹⁶ McCullough et al. found that grateful people tended to be higher in positive emotion and life satisfaction, while lower in negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, and envy in comparison with their less grateful counterparts.¹⁹⁷ Further, they suggest grateful people tend to be ‘more prosocially orientated in that they are more empathetic, forgiving, helpful and supportive’ and ‘less focused on the pursuit of materialistic goods’.¹⁹⁸ In their study of why certain strengths of character are more associated with life satisfaction than others using the VIA inventory, Park et al. found that a disposition for gratitude was among the most robust predictors of life satisfaction along with zest, hope and love.¹⁹⁹ Thus, Watkins et al. argue that correlations of ‘trait gratitude with emotional well-being confirmed that grateful people do tend to be happy people’.²⁰⁰

The problem with such research is that it is correlational; this prevents drawing causal conclusions due to the fact that results could be attributed to a number of variables. As Watkins explains, the ‘gratitude trait and SWB relationship could be due to gratitude causing happiness in some way, but it could also be that gratitude is something of an epiphenomenal result of happiness,’²⁰¹ or both could be caused by a different factor. Thus, we need to find studies which look into the causal relationship between gratitude and SWB. Watkins et al suggest that there is good reason for optimism that such a relationship exists: ‘several experimental studies have added credence to the idea that gratitude actually

¹⁹⁴ Roberts, Robert C., ‘The Blessings of Gratitude: A Conceptual Analysis’, in (ed.) Emmons, Robert. A. and McCullough, Michael E. (ed.) *The Psychology of Gratitude* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.58-78

¹⁹⁵ Watkins et al., ‘Furthering’, p.439

¹⁹⁶ See Peterson & Seligman, ‘Character’, p.560 and Watkins et. al. ‘Furthering’, p.439

¹⁹⁷ McCullough, Michael E., Emmons, Robert A. & Tsang, Jo-Ann, ‘The Grateful Disposition: A Conceptual and Empirical Topography’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (2002), pp.112-117

¹⁹⁸ McCullough et al., ‘Grateful’, p.124

¹⁹⁹ Park, Nansook, Peterson, Christopher, & Seligman, Martin E. P. ‘Strengths of character and Well-Being’, *The Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 23, No.5 (2004), pp.603-619

²⁰⁰ Watkins et al., ‘Furthering’, p.441

²⁰¹ Watkins, Philip C., ‘Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being’ in (ed.) Emmons, Robert. A. and McCullough, Michael E. (ed.) *The Psychology of Gratitude* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.172

causes happiness'.²⁰² In what follows, I examine two different kinds of intervention which endeavour to improve SWB through cultivating gratitude: *counting one's blessings* and the *gratitude visit*.

Interventions to develop SWB through gratitude

Emmons and McCullough sought to find out whether systematically counting blessings impacts SWB.²⁰³ They raised the question of whether gratitude 'is a source of well-being, per se, or merely a moderately positive and active emotion that people with high well-being frequently experience'.²⁰⁴ Their study was designed to manipulate gratitude, addressing whether expressing gratitude, rather than focusing on complaints or neutral life events, enhanced well-being. In their first ten week study they assigned participants to one of three writing conditions which were kept in a journal each week: in the *gratitude* condition they wrote about up to five things for which they were grateful over the last week; in the *hassles* condition they wrote about five irritations from the last week; in the *events* condition (the neutral group) they wrote about events which had affected them over the last week. In addition, participants listed their moods, physical health, and overall judgements about their lives. The results of this first study were that, relative to the hassles and events groups, 'participants in the gratitude condition felt better about their lives as a whole, and were more optimistic regarding their expectations for the upcoming week'.²⁰⁵

In the second study they increased the gratitude intervention to a daily practice over a period of two weeks, in which the gratitude and hassles condition were identical. The results for those in the gratitude condition were impressive: 'participants felt more joyful, enthusiastic, interested, attentive, energetic, excited, determined, and strong than those in the hassles condition'.²⁰⁶

In their third study, Emmons and McCullough used a sample of adults with neuromuscular diseases, randomly assigning participants to a gratitude or control condition in which they only completed experience appraisals each day. As in the previous studies, those in the gratitude condition showed a far higher degree of positive affect and

²⁰² Watkins et al., 'Furthering', p.441

²⁰³ Emmons, Robert A. & McCullough, Michael E., 'Counting Blessings Versus Burdens: An Experimental Investigation of Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being in Daily Life', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 84, No. 2, 2003, pp. 377-389

²⁰⁴ Emmons & McCullough, 'Counting', p.378

²⁰⁵ Emmons & McCullough, 'Counting', p.381

²⁰⁶ Emmons, *Thanks*, p.31

satisfaction with life. Further, spouses or partners of those in the gratitude condition ‘reported that the participants appeared to have higher subjective well-being than did the spouses of participants in the control condition, indicating that the positive emotional changes that occur after practicing gratitude are not apparent to the participants alone’.²⁰⁷

Emmons and McCullough believe they have established ‘a rather easily implemented strategy for improving one’s level of well-being’.²⁰⁸ Interestingly, they are rather minimal interventions which only ask the participants to reflect upon blessings either once a week or every day for two weeks. In this light, the results are noteworthy and have been replicated by Lyubomirsky et al. in a six week intervention in which they asked participants to write three things they were grateful for either once a week or three times a week, while control participants completed only happiness assessments.²⁰⁹ They found that well-being increased for those who performed the activity only once a week, suggesting that perhaps ‘counting blessings several times a week led people to become bored with the practice, finding it less fresh and meaningful over time’.²¹⁰

In a different intervention designed to increase SWB through gratitude, Seligman et al. developed the idea of the *gratitude visit* which includes a behavioural element, rather than simply manipulating the feeling of gratitude. Using the internet to recruit participants, Seligman et al. designed five happiness exercises and a placebo control exercise.²¹¹ Two of these interventions focused on increasing awareness of what is positive about oneself, two focused on identifying strengths of character, while the gratitude visit endeavoured to build gratitude. In the gratitude visit participants were given ‘one week to write and then deliver a letter of gratitude in person to someone who had been especially kind to them but had never been properly thanked’.²¹² They found that this resulted in large positive well-being results immediately after the test, more so than the other interventions and continued to result in positive changes for the next month. After six months, well-being levels had returned to the same as pre-test levels. While such an intervention is less practical in everyday life than counting one’s blessings, Emmons notes that the benefits of a gratitude visit ‘extend beyond what we have observed for the gratitude journaling practice’.²¹³

²⁰⁷ Emmons, *Thanks*, p.34

²⁰⁸ Emmons & McCullough, ‘Counting’, p.386

²⁰⁹ Lyubomirsky et al., ‘Pursuing’, pp.111-131

²¹⁰ Lyubomirsky et al., ‘Pursuing’, p.126

²¹¹ Seligman et al., ‘Positive’, pp.410-421

²¹² Seligman et al., ‘Positive’, p.416

²¹³ Emmons, *Thanks*, p.50

In their survey of gratitude interventions to increase SWB, Watkins et al. conclude that ‘it does not appear that gratitude is simply an epiphenomenon of happiness’²¹⁴ and that studies like the ones above show that ‘gratitude has a causative influence of subjective well-being’.²¹⁵ Given that empirical research seems to suggest that gratitude *does* cause higher SWB, we identify the *mechanisms* by which it does so. In what follows I explain various possible ways in which gratitude develops SWB.

How does gratitude develop SWB?

Watkins offers various theoretical suggestions which could explain the contribution of gratitude to SWB.²¹⁶ One mechanism through which gratitude develops SWB may be the fact that it directly enhances positive affect, by increasing ‘one’s enjoyments of benefits’.²¹⁷ Watkins argues that perceiving ‘a positive experience as a gift may be a form of cognitive amplification that enhances positive affect’.²¹⁸

Further, Watkins suggests that ‘another route from gratitude to happiness might be by counteracting the law of habituation’.²¹⁹ Humans tend to adapt to the circumstances in which they find themselves in and, over time, ‘get used to our current level of satisfaction’.²²⁰ As I have noted above, however, intentional activity may counteract such adaptation by enabling us to focus on good things in a way that prevents us from taking them for granted. Specifically in relation to gratitude interventions, Lyubomirsky et al. suggest that counting one’s blessings ‘may directly counteract the effects of hedonic adaptation by helping people extract as much appreciation from the good things in their lives as possible’²²¹.

A third mechanism by which gratitude may contribute to SWB ‘might be by directing our attention away from upward social comparisons’.²²² Various studies show that making comparisons with those around us who have more leads ‘to less positive affect and more unpleasant feelings such as depression and feelings of deprivation’.²²³

A further way in which gratitude may develop SWB is by enhancing adaptive coping: ‘By focussing on positive consequences resulting from a difficult experience that

²¹⁴ Watkins et al., ‘Furthering’, p.442

²¹⁵ Watkins, ‘Gratitude’, p.175

²¹⁶ Watkins, ‘Gratitude’, p.175

²¹⁷ Watkins et al., ‘Furthering’, p.442

²¹⁸ Watkins, ‘Gratitude’, p.175

²¹⁹ Watkins, ‘Gratitude’, p.177

²²⁰ Watkins, ‘Gratitude’, p.176

²²¹ Lyubomirsky et al., ‘Pursuing’, p.125

²²² Watkins, ‘Gratitude’, p.177

²²³ Watkins, ‘Gratitude’, p.177

one may be grateful for, one may be able to make sense of stressful events'.²²⁴ Lyubomirsky et al. note that 'the ability to appreciate their life circumstances may also be an adaptive coping strategy by which people positively reinterpret stressful or negative life experiences, bolster coping resources, and strengthen social relationships'.²²⁵

A fifth mechanism could be that gratitude promotes 'the accessibility and recollection of pleasant life events'.²²⁶ Watkins et al. propose that 'encoding and reflecting on pleasant events with gratitude should enhance a positive memory bias, which in turn should support one's happiness'.²²⁷

Gratitude may also develop SWB by enhancing social relationships.²²⁸ Research suggests that an important predictor of SWB is stable social relationships; if gratitude helps build such relationships, then it brings about greater well-being. Barbara Fredrickson argues that grateful individuals do not simply 'repay the benefactor in a tit-for-tat fashion or... mimic and reciprocate the benefactor's exact prosocial act'; rather, they 'appear to creatively consider a wide range of prosocial actions as possible reflections of their gratitude'.²²⁹ It follows that gratitude seems to 'broaden people's modes of thinking as they creatively consider a wide array of actions that might benefit others' and thus 'gratitude appears to build friendships and other social bonds'.²³⁰

Gratitude and God

What difference does the object of our gratitude make? In the first intervention I examined, participants were not required even to consider a recipient for their gratitude. Watts et al. note that the link between *to whom* one is grateful and SWB is unclear. They ask: 'Does subjective well-being depend on the object of one's gratitude? Is an individual's sense of well-being dependent, for example, on any positive outcome, contingent on their being grateful to their spouse, to their friend, to God, or, indeed, to themselves?'²³¹

²²⁴ Watkins et al., 'Furthering', p.442

²²⁵ Lyubomirsky et al., 'Pursuing', pp.125-126

²²⁶ Watkins, 'Gratitude', p.179

²²⁷ Watkins et. al, 'Furthering', p.443

²²⁸ Watkins, 'Gratitude', p.182;

²²⁹ Fredrickson, Barbara L., 'Gratitude, Like Other Positive Emotions, Broadens and Builds', in (ed.) Emmons, Robert. A. and McCollough, Michael E. (ed.) *The Psychology of Gratitude* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.150

²³⁰ Fredrickson, 'Gratitude', p.151

²³¹ Watts et al., 'Furthering', p.284

Recent research by Rosmarin et al. has addressed this question by comparing religious gratitude with general gratitude.²³² Using an online survey of 405 adults with different religious beliefs and varying commitments to them, they tried to find out what the mediating mechanisms are by which religion relates to greater gratitude and whether religious gratitude produces greater psychological benefits than general gratitude. They found that religion promotes gratitude by ‘providing unique opportunities to experience this trait’.²³³ Whereas gratitude to God ‘can occur with the simple recognition of blessings in one’s life... or even positive happenstance’, non-religious gratitude ‘is constricted by the perception of physical agents, and thus can only occur in interpersonal contexts’.²³⁴ Further they found that, while gratitude is tied to well-being irrespective of religious themes, ‘it appears that religious gratitude has an additional positive effect on well-being for individuals who are religiously committed’.²³⁵ It seems that the object of one’s gratitude *does* matter, and that being grateful to God promotes greater SWB for those with a strong religious commitment.

Ignatian gratitude ‘interventions’

I now examine three Ignatian exercises, each designed to increase religious commitment, which promote gratitude to God. The purpose of the investigation is to ascertain whether they bear enough resemblance to the gratitude interventions we have explored to suggest they promote SWB.

The examen of consciousness (Ex 43) is a prayer of five points which Ignatius believed was the most important exercise for a person to conduct daily²³⁶, involving a review of the previous day. Many have taken the Latin *conciencia* as ‘conscience’, but Aschenbrenner has argued persuasively that we should understand this as ‘consciousness’, thus giving the exercise a much less moralistic tone.²³⁷ St Louis agrees that ‘rather than the moralistic exercise in self-scrutiny that it has become for many people, Ignatius saw the Examen fundamentally as a prayer of discernment, a vitally illuminating and dynamic

²³² Rosmarin, David H., Pirutinsky, Steven, Cohen, Adam B., Galler, Yardana & Krumrei, Elizabeth, ‘Grateful to God or just plain grateful? A comparison of religious and general gratitude’, in *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (September 2011), pp.389-396

²³³ Rosmarin, ‘Grateful’, p.393

²³⁴ Rosmarin, ‘Grateful’, p.393

²³⁵ Rosmarin, ‘Grateful’, p.394

²³⁶ Muldoon, *Ignatian*, p.32

²³⁷ Aschenbrenner, George A., ‘Consciousness Examen’, *Review for Religious*, Vol. 31 (1972), pp.14-21

experience of prayerful reflection that both celebrates and enhances one's awareness of and response to the Lord who is ever-present in our human experience'.²³⁸

Aschenbrenner notes that the 'mature Ignatius near the end of his life was always examining every movement and inclination of his heart' which he believes was 'the overflow of those regular intensive prayer-exercises of examen every day'.²³⁹ He argues that the purpose of the examen is 'developing a heart with a discerning vision to be active not only for one or two quarter-hour periods in a day but continually'.²⁴⁰ The five steps then are to be seen 'as dimensions of the Christian consciousness, formed by God's work in the heart as it confronts and grows within this world and all of reality'.²⁴¹ In other words, the experience of the examen should become a habit in one's consciousness.

Gratitude lies at the very heart of the prayer: 'The first point is to give thanks to God our Lord for the benefits I have received from him' (Exx 43). St Louis suggests that the importance is not an exhaustive list of benefits, 'but rather a deepening sense of one's life as richly blessed by God, as suffused with the gracious presence and action of God'.²⁴² He believes that the examen should be set in the context of the Principle and Foundation which reminds the individual of their giftedness by God: 'In this sense, the first point of the Examen may be seen as a summary of the Principle and Foundation, a reminder of who one is before the living God in all the graced concreteness and uniqueness of one's personal history, and with such an awareness leading to a deepening gratitude and desire to respond in ways that are increasingly "more conducive to the end for which we are created" (Exx 23)'.²⁴³

It is not difficult to note the obvious similarities between the examen and gratitude interventions which focus on counting blessings. In particular, Emmons and McCullough's second study encouraged participants to count blessings each day.²⁴⁴ The empirical evidence seems to point to the fact that regular giving thanks for benefits enhances well-being. The most obvious mechanism by which this may take place would seem to be by the enhancement of positive affect by increasing one's enjoyments of benefits. One important lesson from the replication of this study by Lyubomirsky et al. is that people may become bored with the practice done every day, 'finding it less fresh and meaningful

²³⁸ St Louis, Donald, 'The Ignatian Examen', in (ed.) Sheldrake, Philip (ed.), *The Way of Ignatius Loyola: Contemporary Approaches to the Spiritual Exercises* (London: SPCK, 1991), pp.154-164

²³⁹ Aschenbrenner, 'Consciousness', p.16

²⁴⁰ Aschenbrenner, 'Consciousness', p.16

²⁴¹ Aschenbrenner, 'Consciousness', p.16

²⁴² St Louis, 'Examen', p.156

²⁴³ St Louis, 'Examen', p.157

²⁴⁴ Emmons and McCullough, 'Counting', p.381-382

over time'.²⁴⁵ This is a useful insight for the Ignatian spiritual tradition and reminds that the blessings recalled should be varied in order to counteract adaptation. Emmons' advice may be helpful: 'It is important not to allow your catalog to become stale... [the] process of repeating the same thing each day indicates "gratitude fatigue"'.²⁴⁶

It is clear, of course, that there is not complete correspondence between the gratitude expressed through an examen and that in counting one's blessings. As already noted, Zagano and Gillespie highlight that 'a term like "gratitude" has richer, more specific nuances in Christian spirituality, arising from a sense that all things depend for their very existence on a creator God'.²⁴⁷ Ultimately, the purpose of expressing gratitude within the Ignatian spiritual tradition is part of the process of 'finding God in all things'. Aschenbrenner articulates just how richly gratitude may be seen.

Our stance as Christians in the midst of the world is that of poor persons, possessing nothing, not even ourselves, and yet being gifted at every instant in and through everything. When we become too affluently involved with ourselves and deny our inherent poverty, then we lose the gifts and either begin to make demands for what we think we deserve (often leading to angry frustration) or we blandly take for granted *all* that comes our way. Only the truly poor person can appreciate the slightest gift and feel genuine gratitude. The more deeply we live in faith the more we become aware of how poor we are and how gifted; life itself becomes humble, joyful thanksgiving. This should gradually become an element of our abiding consciousness.²⁴⁸

Gratitude, as understood by the positive psychology movement, involves little by way of viewing oneself as in poverty. According to Aschenbrenner, God will eventually show us that '*all is gift*'.²⁴⁹ Through dialogue with Christian spirituality, positive psychology may gain insights into the nature and scope of gratitude.

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In a meditation from the First Week gratitude arises from a consideration of one's sins. In the First Exercise (Exx 45-54), the exercitant addresses sin objectively in the context of the sin of the angels, Adam and Eve, and those who have gone to hell. In the second (Exx 55-61), which is a 'meditation on my own sins', Ignatius turns the focus upon the exercitant. It may seem strange that focusing on sin should lead to gratitude. As we have seen, however, the First Week's 'reflection on sin fosters gratitude for God's saving and merciful love'.²⁵⁰ Fleming suggests that 'Ignatius always looks at sin within the

²⁴⁵ Lyubomirsky et al., 'Pursuing', p.126

²⁴⁶ Emmons, *Thanks*, p.190

²⁴⁷ Zagano and Gillespie, 'Ignatian', p.46

²⁴⁸ Aschenbrenner, 'Consciousness', p.17

²⁴⁹ Aschenbrenner, 'Consciousness', p.17

²⁵⁰ Au, 'Ignatian', p.7

context of God's love. Sin is essentially a failure of gratitude. We sin because we do not fully grasp what God has done for us'.²⁵¹

Ignatius proposes a prayer of five points for contemplating our personal sins. We first imagine a court-record of our sins in which we 'call to memory all of the sins of my life, looking at them year by year' (Exx 56). We then consider just how evil each of these sins is (Exx 57). The third point asks us to endeavour to humble ourselves by comparing ourselves with others, the angels and saints, and 'all of creation compared with God' (Exx 58). Fourth, the individual is to 'consider who God is against whom I have sinned, by going through his attributes and comparing them with their opposites in myself' (Exx 59). It is the final point of this meditation which leads us to profound gratitude to God who continues to love and bless us, even though we sin.

This is an exclamation of wonder and surging emotion, uttered as I reflect on all creatures and wonder how they have allowed me to live and have preserved me in life. The angels: How is it that, although they are the swords of God's justice, they have borne with me, protected me, and prayed for me? The saints: How is it that they have interceded and prayed for me? Likewise, the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the elements; the fruits, birds, fishes, and animals. And the earth: How is it that it has not opened up and swallowed me, creating new hells for me to suffer in forever? (Exx 60)

Ignatius concludes by suggesting a 'colloquy of mercy – speaking and giving thanks to God our Lord for giving me life until now' (Exx 61).

In this meditation, gratitude arises from the fact that 'Ignatius invites us to look at our own history of sin and evil in the light of the goodness of God'.

Even though we reject God, he still blesses us... Sin is not the breaking of a law or commandment as much as a lack of gratitude... We stand in awe before the majesty of God, the One who is the Giver of the whole of our life. How can we offend the God of our life? If our heart could truly grasp what God is doing for us, how could we sin? We would be too grateful to sin.²⁵²

While I can find no psychological study which explicitly connects gratitude to sin, it may be fruitful to compare this Ignatian meditation with an intervention which investigates the impact of grateful processing on bringing closure to unpleasant emotional memories.²⁵³ As anyone who has called to mind their own sins will testify, the experience brings plenty of unpleasant emotional memories to the surface. I have suggested above that one mechanism through which gratitude may enhance SWB could be through *adaptive coping*, in which individuals may be able to make sense of stressful or difficult life

²⁵¹ Fleming, David, *What is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Loyola Press, Chicago, 2008), p.26

²⁵² Fleming, *Ignatian*, p.27

²⁵³ Watkins, Philip C., Cruz, Lilia, Holben, Heather and Kolts, Russell L., 'Taking care of business? Grateful processing of unpleasant memories', *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (April 2008), pp. 87-99

experiences through reframing memories through gratitude. In a study in which participants were randomly assigned to one of three writing conditions²⁵⁴ after recalling and reporting on an unpleasant open memory, Watkins et al. found that those who were in the gratitude condition showed more closure and less emotional impact of the memory than did participants in other writing conditions.

Watkins et al. note that one way of viewing their gratitude reappraisal treatment is that they ‘encouraged individuals to turn... bad events into redemptive events’.²⁵⁵ The Ignatian exercise in which an individual finds gratitude through focusing on memories of their sins there is clearly a sense in which such memories have been turned into ‘redemptive events’. The nature of ‘redemption’, however, in Ignatius’ case is clearly more theologically loaded: the individual recognises themselves as loved and forgiven by God through their acknowledgement of their sins, through their spiritual poverty. As Au writes, in ‘the First Week we seek a felt knowledge of both our own sinfulness and of God’s merciful love that keeps us in an accepting embrace – no matter how we have faltered and sinned... The grace of the First Week has taken firm root when we can acknowledge our failings with unshakeable confidence in the constancy of God. Deep within, we know that we are loved sinners’.²⁵⁶

The idea of gratitude flowing from the experience of forgiveness could be an interesting area for further positive psychology research. While much research exists on the process of forgiveness from the perspective of the forgiver²⁵⁷, there are fewer studies which address the question of the experience of being forgiven. This is perhaps to be expected in the modern world in which talk of sin is unfashionable. As Watts et al. note, a ‘difference between psychological and religious perspectives is that psychology is almost entirely concerned with giving forgiveness, whereas religion is concerned in a more balanced way with both receiving and giving it’.²⁵⁸ Indeed, the witness of the New Testament suggests that forgiveness of others is made possible through the experience of having been forgiven (it seems from the evidence of the First Week that Ignatius must have understood this point well).²⁵⁹ Watts et al. argue that this ‘is another point at which psychology might learn from theology; the neglect in the current psychological literature

²⁵⁴ Watkins et al., ‘Taking’, p.88: ‘(1) control condition where participants wrote about issues irrelevant to their open memory, (2) emotional condition where subjects wrote about their experiences pertaining to their open memory, and (3) gratitude condition, where participants wrote about positive consequences of the open memory event that they can now feel grateful about.’

²⁵⁵ Watkins et al., ‘Taking’, p.96

²⁵⁶ Au, ‘Ignatian Service’, p.72

²⁵⁷ McCulloch, Michael E., Root, Lindsey M., Tabak, Benjamin A., & Witvliet, Charlotte van Oyen, ‘Forgiveness’ in (ed.) Synder, C. R. and Lopez, Shane J., *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.427-435

²⁵⁸ Watts et al., ‘Human’, p.282

²⁵⁹ Matthew 6.12, 18.21-35; Mark 11.25; Colossians 3.13

of how forgiveness is received is strange and unsatisfactory'.²⁶⁰ In what seems to be a failure to take seriously the darker side of human nature, Seligman dismisses the doctrine of original sin in a half a sentence as 'the oldest manifestation of the rotten-to-the-core dogma'. Perhaps, however, the positive psychology movement could pay further attention to the negative backdrop against which many positive emotions, such as gratitude, may appear. In the Christian narrative, sin is a fundamental feature of the human condition. Perhaps psychology should engage further with the human experience of, and perhaps need for, feeling forgiveness from it.

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The contemplation to attain love (Exx 230-237) marks the final meditation of the *Spiritual Exercises*. As I have shown, this can be seen as a recapitulation of the exercises as a whole. The Principle and Foundation begin with God's love in creating humans to praise and serve him, and this final exercise allows this love to be explored 'more fully in every dimension and aspect of life'.²⁶¹ Ignatius suggests the exercitant 'ask 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 Diving Majesty in all things' (Exx 233). How does this contemplation foster such gratitude? First we are to call to mind the gifts we have received in 'creation, redemption, and other gifts particular to myself' (Exx 234). We then consider how God *dwells* in all things, including ourselves (Exx 235). Third, how God *labours* for us in all things, for example, 'he is working in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, and all the rest – giving them their existence' (Exx 236). Finally, 'we consider how all good things and gifts descend from above' (Exx 237).

Commenting on the centrality of this exercise to Ignatian spirituality, Hebblethwaite notes that 'there is no need to have gone through the sequence of the Spiritual Exercises before making this Contemplation: it is so much key to Ignatius' entire approach to the spiritual life that we can make this way of prayer our own at all times and in all places'.²⁶² The contemplation to attain love is designed to inculcate an attitude of gratitude at all times. This enables us to find God in all things so that we might serve and love him in everything. Buckley finds there to be a 'developmental purpose' here: 'It immediately aims at an elevation of consciousness, a growth in awareness, that kind of

²⁶⁰ Watts et al., 'Human', p.282

²⁶¹ Lonsdale, *Eyes*, p.108

²⁶² Hebblethwaite, *Finding*, p.225

total human perception and experience which Ignatius called “interior knowledge” which caught up understanding, sensibility and feeling’.²⁶³

It is clear how empirical evidence may support the fact that this contemplation might develop SWB. Here is a practice which enables the individual not simply to count their blessings on a regular basis, but to begin to see all life as blessing. In this sense it goes far beyond any intervention which encourages participants to list, for example, three good things in their lives. Perhaps it would be better to understand the contemplation as a profound *gratitude visit* to God in which the individual takes the time to consciously contemplate all of the ways in which they have received and receive from God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, and then actively express this thanks. Buckley argues that the exercise gives the exercitant interior knowledge of ‘the goodness with which God has surrounded him’ and highlights how this might be perceived in an interpersonal way.

The initial purpose is essentially an assimilation of the good within life, but the good as interpersonal – as from God and for me. It is to experience the good as gift. It is to perceive human history and physical nature, to perceive it as good, to perceive that it is of God... It is for a man to experience overwhelmingly that he has been loved by God, loved by God in all things.²⁶⁴

It would hardly be surprising if genuine gratitude cultivated through the contemplation to attain love led to the ‘boost in happiness and decrease in depressive symptoms’ which were found of individuals who completed a gratitude visit.²⁶⁵

Once again, however, the divergence between Christian spirituality and positive psychology must be noted. As we have seen, Christian understandings of gratitude involve the dimension of spiritual poverty. This especially true in the fourth point of the final contemplation in which ‘all good things and gifts descend from above’ (Exx 236). Barry comments:

If we could only experience all blessings and gifts as descending to us from above, then we would be able to live in spiritual poverty. We would be ‘indifferent to,’ ‘at balance toward,’ all created gifts and blessings because we would have intimate knowledge that these are only pale, even though wonderful, reflections of the deepest desire of our hearts, God, ‘from whom all blessings flow’.²⁶⁶

Further, gratitude in Ignatian spirituality, as particularly highlighted by this contemplation, is a gateway to recognising God’s presence in all things – and as Hebblethwaite notes, this

²⁶³ Buckley, ‘Contemplation’, p.95

²⁶⁴ Buckley, ‘Contemplation’, p.95

²⁶⁵ Seligman et al., ‘Positive’, pp.417-418

²⁶⁶ Barry, William A., *Finding God in All Things: A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1991), p.139

‘does not mean only finding God in beautiful things’.²⁶⁷ She suggests that ‘in the bad and ugly experiences too we can find a way to God’.²⁶⁸ In contrast to the prevailing thought in positive psychology which encourages gratitude in response to things which are perceived as good, Ignatian spirituality shows us how to seek God through gratitude in all circumstances of life. This point is developed at great length in other Christian spiritual literature.²⁶⁹

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These three exercises, each intended to cultivate ‘profound gratitude’ in the one who makes them, like the *Spiritual Exercises* as a whole, clearly bear enough resemblance to the gratitude interventions I have investigated to suggest they may help develop SWB. Each of them encourages an individual to ‘count their blessings’ and to find gratitude in themselves for all things. I have also noted research which suggests that belief in God is a mediating mechanism for greater gratitude, and that religious gratitude has an additional positive effect on well-being for individuals who are religiously committed. As the *Spiritual Exercises* are designed to cultivate greater religious commitment, in part through the experience of gratitude, it would seem highly likely that Ignatian spiritual practices develop SWB. As I have argued, positive psychology can shed light on some of the *mechanisms* by which this may take place.

Christian spirituality then may have much to gain from dialogue between psychology and spirituality. Psychology may help to explain some of what is taking place when the Christian engages in ancient spiritual practices, the mechanisms through which such exercises enhance SWB. In other words, psychology may be able to offer a partial explanation of what God has built into creation, a rationale for why living a life filled with gratitude, as God intended, leads to *shalom*. This may bring a renewed sense of confidence in what is available in the Christian tradition. In a context in which many people in the secular world are open to the exploration of spirituality as a source of the happier life, Christians might rediscover the riches available in the Christian tradition with greater confidence that they promote *shalom*. This has important implications for mission in the modern world as Christians seek to proclaim the blessings of ‘life in all its fullness’.

²⁶⁷ Hebblethwaite, *Finding*, p.231

²⁶⁸ Hebblethwaite, *Finding*, p.232

²⁶⁹ See, for example, Chittister, Joan & Williams, Rowan, *For All That Has Been, Thanks: Growing a Sense of Gratitude*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010)

Dialogue is, of course, a two way conversation, and I have highlighted various ways in which positive psychology might learn from Christian spirituality. Watts et al. note that ‘psychological practice has developed new and potentially more effective ways of helping people to enact spiritual practices in secular contexts’ which may lead some ‘to see positive psychology as supplanting and improving upon centuries of rather imprecise, ineffective religious concern with spiritual qualities’.²⁷⁰ I suggest they are right in their desire ‘to make a contribution to positive psychology that takes account of what religion has to offer’.²⁷¹ As I have shown, concepts such as ‘gratitude’ and ‘forgiveness’ are far richer in a theological context, and positive psychology may gain new insights by attending to Christian spirituality.

²⁷⁰ Watts et al., ‘Human’, p.277

²⁷¹ Watts et al., ‘Human’, p.278

Conclusion

The current context in the West, in which many people in the secular world are interested in spirituality in order to find happiness, provides an opportunity for Christians to rediscover spiritual traditions which promote the holistic form of well-being we know as *shalom*. That well-being in the present is a concern of Christian theology is clear from the witness of the biblical tradition, which understands salvation as beginning in this life. It is important, therefore, that we take *shalom* in the present seriously as a legitimate end of mission, rather than focusing only on life in the hereafter.

The Ignatian spiritual tradition presents a distinctive understanding of *shalom* which is far removed from any popular notions of happiness as mere hedonic pleasure. Ignatius offers a Christian vision, through the practice of discernment, which reveals how *shalom* might be differentiated from momentary positive affect.

I have endeavoured to investigate whether positive psychology can shed light on how Ignatian spiritual practices develop *shalom*. Positive psychology aims to take an empirical approach to the question of SWB, which is not simply about momentary hedonic pleasure, but rather encompasses a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of their life as a whole. Several studies show that it is possible to change the level of one's SWB through intentional activity which makes it possible that Ignatian spiritual practices could promote *shalom*.

In order to address the question of whether practising Ignatian spirituality enhances SWB, I focused on the way in which the Ignatian spiritual tradition cultivates gratitude. Over the last decade various experiments in the field of positive psychology have shown that there may be a causal link between expressing gratitude and the development of SWB. In exploring three Ignatian exercises which promote gratitude, I argued that they bear enough resemblance to gratitude interventions to suggest that practising such exercises may enhance well-being.

I believe these findings should give Christians greater confidence in their spiritual traditions, for the importance of gratitude is not only paramount in Ignatian spirituality, but finds its source in the biblical tradition. This has important implications for mission in the modern world. As Christians seek to proclaim the blessings of 'life in all its fullness', positive psychology may help to explain *how* the Christian life may be one that leads to *shalom*.

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