

God ... cannot literally intervene in the universe because He is always there—just as much in the normal, natural run of things as in the resurrection of Christ or in any other miraculous event. [Hence] a miracle is not a special *presence* of God; it is a special absence of natural causes—a special absence that makes the perpetual presence of God more visible to us. Since God is there all the time, and since He doesn't need to be mentioned when we are doing physics or biology, or doing the shopping, we are in danger of forgetting Him. So a miracle is ... an exuberant gesture, like an embrace or a kiss, to say, 'Look, I'm here; I love you', lest in our wonder and delight at the works of His creation we forget that all we have and are is the radiance of His love for us.²⁸

This is precisely my understanding of what Jesus meant when he said that the sick are healed 'so that God's works might be revealed' in them (John 9:3).

'So what difference does it make for you to be a scientist?'

At one level, to be a scientist makes no difference at all: anyone from any walk of life is invited to embrace God's love. But given that I am a scientist, it would be ungrateful to discard my experience and expertise as I accept the Lord's invitation to communion with the Trinity. So I am called to be the most conscientious scientist I can be; to proclaim my gratitude and praise for all of the wonders of the creation that I have the privilege to observe. But beyond that, I am called to proceed 'way beyond all science', to rejoice that 'my sole occupation is love'.²⁹

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THE IGNATIAN RULES FOR EATING IN A CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

Elizabeth Delbridge

DURING MY FORMATION as a giver of the Spiritual Exercises I was introduced to the Rules for Eating as part of our exploration of the Third Week. Three years later, I was suffering in a stressful leadership role and my doctor strongly encouraged me to change my diet—her goal was to ensure that what I ate would not undermine my energy (adding to the stress on my body) but sustain me properly every day through a challenging time. After all, 'every human activity accomplished in a day gets accomplished because people consume food'.¹ I thought I ate a healthy diet, but feeling chronically tired and with regular migraines I had the motivation to change.

The first six weeks were drastic, as I eliminated many foods regarded as normal and realised, as I did so, that I had become dependent on them. Now I had to listen to my body to discern what it was that I really needed. For example, no longer drinking tea because of its caffeine content, I had to ask myself what I had been seeking from it—refreshment, relaxation or rejuvenation. Gradually I discovered which herbal teas would meet these different needs. Freedom from migraine was a strong motivation to stay on the diet, even though I found it challenging. I struggled to let go of long-held patterns of behaviour and learnt what people mean by 'cravings'. Sometimes I resented the changes and felt frustrated that I had to prepare much of my own food because manufacturers included ingredients that were unsuitable. I remembered the Rules for Eating and wondered if they might provide a framework within which I could understand my experience.

Reading the Rules with the knowledge I now had was illuminating—phrases seemed to leap off the page! Eating was about an ordered future

²⁸ Herbert McCabe, *Faith within Reason* (London: Continuum, 2007), 101–102.

²⁹ St John of the Cross, 'Coplas del mismo hechas sobre un éxtasis de harra contemplación' (my translation), and 'The Spiritual Canticle', stanza 28, in *The Complete Works of St John of the Cross*, translated by David Lewis (London: Longman Green, 1864), volume 2, 151.

¹ Lisa Graham McMinn, *To the Table: A Spirituality of Food, Farming, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), 5.

Rules to Put Oneself in Order for the Future as to Eating

First Rule. *The first rule is that it is well to abstain less from bread, because it is not a food as to which the appetite is used to act so inordinately, or to which temptation urges as in the case of the other foods.*

Second Rule. *The second: Abstinence appears more convenient as to drinking, than as to eating bread. So, one ought to look much what is helpful to him, in order to admit it, and what does him harm, in order to discard it.*

Third Rule. *The third: As to foods, one ought to have the greatest and most entire abstinence, because as the appetite is more ready to act inordinately, so temptation is more ready in making trial, on this head. And so abstinence in foods, to avoid disorder, can be kept in two ways, one by accustoming oneself to eat coarse foods: the other, if one takes delicate foods, by taking them in small quantity.*

Fourth Rule. *The fourth: Guarding against falling into sickness, the more a man leaves off from what is suitable, the more quickly he will reach the mean which he ought to keep in his eating and drinking: for two reasons: the first, because by so helping and disposing himself, he will many times experience more the interior knowledge, consolations and Divine inspirations to show him the mean which is proper for him; the second, because if the person sees himself in such abstinence not with so great corporal strength or disposition for the Spiritual Exercises, he will easily come to judge what is more suitable to his bodily support.*

Fifth Rule. *The fifth: While the person is eating, let him consider as if he saw Christ our Lord eating with His Apostles, and how He drinks and how He looks and how He speaks; and let him see to imitating Him. So that the principal part of the intellect shall occupy itself in the consideration of Christ our Lord, and the lesser part in the support of the body; because in this way he will get greater system and order as to how he ought to behave and manage himself.*

Sixth Rule. *The sixth: Another time, while he is eating, he can take another consideration, either on the life of Saints, or on some pious Contemplation, or on some spiritual affair which he has to do, because, being intent on such thing, he will take less delight and feeling in the corporal food.*

Seventh Rule. *The seventh: Above all, let him guard against all his soul being intent on what he is eating, and in eating let him not go hurriedly, through appetite, but be master of himself, as well in the manner of eating as in the quantity which he eats.*

Eighth Rule. *The eighth: To avoid disorder, it is very helpful, after dinner or after supper, or at another hour when one feels no appetite for eating, to decide with oneself for the coming dinner or supper, and so on, each day, the quantity which it is suitable that he should eat. Beyond this let him not go because of any appetite or temptation, but rather, in order to conquer more all inordinate appetite and temptation of the enemy, if he is tempted to eat more, let him eat less.*

for mission; inordinate attachment to bread was a craving; I was eating and drinking what was helpful and discarding what was harmful. I learnt to be contemplative in my eating, paying attention to and appreciating food, and slowing down the pace. I had to plan ahead so that appropriate food was in the house at all times.

What I was doing was good for my health, but revisiting the Rules for Eating gave me a bigger purpose in terms of living a contemplative life and making daily decisions that would enable my ministry. Becoming more aware of the attention in the media to eating issues, I realised that the encouragement that I had experienced might be of benefit to others. Now, six years on, I have the opportunity to highlight what the Rules offered me.

The Ignatian Background

Within the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius developed five sets of 'rules', given at the discretion of the director according to the needs of the retreatant, of which the Rules for Eating are the first. As the translator George E. Ganss explains, by rules, Ignatius meant 'Directives, guidelines, norms, suggestions, or models as when he wrote that Christ is "our model and rule"².

Ignatius places the other sets of rules at the end of the Exercises, in the supplementary material, but the Rules for Eating are located at the end of the Third Week. By this point retreatants are aware of human appetites being disordered, so Ignatius is offering the opportunity to examine their situation thoughtfully, reorder their behaviours and plan for a better future. However, the rules can actually be presented at any time, again at the discretion of the director. The first four rules explore eating and drinking as such, while the last four focus more on spiritual benefits.

Having finished his studies in Paris, Ignatius went to Venice towards the end of 1535 to await the arrival of the Companions, whom he welcomed in January 1537. In June all were ordained priests, and subsequently Ignatius experienced great consolations. Santiago Arzubialde suggests that it was at this time, informed by access to monastic texts, that Ignatius began the revision of the *Spiritual Exercises* that included the Rules for Eating.

² *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, a Translation and Commentary*, edited and translated by George E. Ganss (Chicago: Loyola, 1992), 181 n. 10.

Thus between 1536 ... and 1541, when the final version of the *Spiritual Exercises* is ready, Ignatius is working out a pneumatological cycle based on criteria from the traditional teaching in *diakrisis* (John Cassian?) ... including discovery of the mean (the ordering of one's life as regards eating) or moderation.³

Moderation was an important lesson for Ignatius, as immediately after his conversion his 'ambitious self-help way to holiness', which included excessive fasting, became detrimental to his health.⁴ Gradually he realised that he had to care for his body, so the austerity he had inflicted on himself is not evident in the Rules for Eating. What does carry through is the goal of self-mastery. Mortification was an essential aspect of his spirituality which Ignatius reiterated to those around him with the two words, 'conquer yourself'.⁵ Early Directories show that,

The sixteenth-century exercitant ... is asked to make conscious and deliberate decisions on his need and use of food and drink, in order to find the mean that better suits him

The suggestion is that the average sixteenth-century exercitant seems to be over-indulgent in food and drink and has need of the asceticism and penance of the purgative way. Might the same be true of the average First-World retreatant of the twentieth century?⁶

Self-mastery means giving up things that are pleasurable, which we do not want to do, so it is easier to ignore the issue. The ordinariness of eating may lead us to dismiss it as trivial and not think of it in relation to the spiritual life. However, Ignatius thought otherwise, following the scriptural injunction, 'So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God' (1 Corinthians 10:31). The guidelines for eating not only lead us towards contemplative eating but also give us a daily opportunity to fulfil the essential goal of the Exercises—to overcome ourselves and make decisions for an ordered

³ Santiago Arzubalde, 'The Development of the Exercises: Recognising the Spirit', *The Way*, 50/4 (October 2011), 92. It is not clear from this comment whether the Rules for Eating were already in the earlier draft of the Exercises or whether they were added at this time.

⁴ Budiarto Comulia, 'A Study of the Development of Mortification and Discernment in the Autobiography of Saint Ignatius of Loyola' (MA thesis, University of Divinity, 2010), 38, 42.

⁵ *Formula of the Institute*, n. 4. The practice of mortification is the context in which the Rules for Eating occur. However, the word is a technical term that I find unhelpful with retreatants. Some have never heard the word while others misunderstand it, so I prefer to use phrases such as self-mastery, overcoming oneself or self-control.

⁶ David Townsend, 'Digesting the Rules for Eating', *The Way Supplement*, 58 (1987), 87–88.

life (Exx 1), within the overall context of the First Principle and Foundation, 'to praise, reverence, and serve God' in all things (Exx 23).⁷

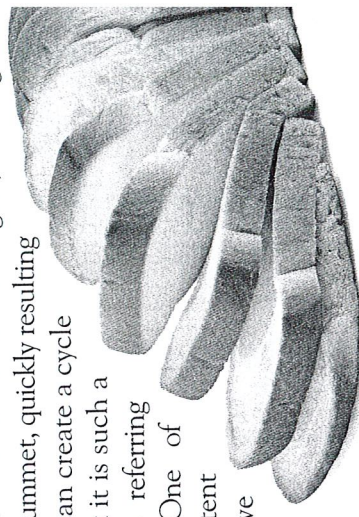
Reviewing Mealtimes

The First Rule

In his First Rule (Exx 210); Ignatius is stressing abstinence or limitation rather than avoidance, and he begins by considering bread. In the time of Ignatius, bread was the staple diet of the poor and was considered sufficient for nutritional needs.⁸ It was certainly more nutritious than bread is today. The organically grown wheat had not been bred for high gluten; the stone-ground flour was not damaged by the heat of metal grinding and, being wholemeal, it retained the bran and nutrient-packed germ. The raising process used fermentation (sour dough) rather than bakers' yeast, so the grain was partly broken down by bacteria, reducing gluten content. This bread had a nutty flavour and a dense, chewy texture maintained its nutrients and kept well. Being wholegrain it was filling, and slow to digest; Ignatius rightly observed that the appetite was less insistent with bread than with other foods.

What Ignatius could not have imagined is the change that happened to bread in the intervening centuries. Bread is still the food of the poor. However, we eat more white bread, made with flour from which the bran and germ have been removed, than any other type, despite the current interest in whole grains. It is easy to eat too much white bread. The fast-acting carbohydrates break down into sugars, causing blood glucose levels to spike then plummet, quickly resulting

in a craving for more. This can create a cycle of overeating; I suggest that it is such a cycle to which Ignatius is referring when he talks in Rule One of inordinate appetite and insistent temptation. These days we might use the language of addiction.⁹



⁷ The translation of the Spiritual Exercises used here is that by Elder Mullan, reprinted in David Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises. A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996).

⁸ Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), 161.

⁹ Robert E. Rakel and David P. Rakel, *Textbook of Family Medicine*, 9th edn (Philadelphia: Elsevier Saunders, 2016), 869.

Judging from the tone of the other rules, Ignatius would be alarmed by this development. He would probably apply Rule Three to bread as well as to other foods: noticing what is harmful and what is helpful and adjusting accordingly. Adapting Rule One is necessary in this era when abstinence may well be necessary for some and complete elimination of bread necessary for others. The sugar spikes are not as high when eating wholegrain sourdough bread, so removing processed bread and grains from the diet and replacing them with wholegrain makes a difference.

The Second Rule

The Second Rule (Exx 211) refers to abstinence in relation to drinking, and focuses on self-care and personal observation. By Week Three of the Exercises, the exercitant will be practised in the examen process so will recognise Rule Two as a form of examen—what drink was helpful today? What drink was harmful today? Exercitants are invited to notice what drinks they are consuming, when and in what circumstances, and to what effect. After this observation, as with any examen, Ignatius encourages more of what is helpful and less of what is harmful. For example, when I realised that drinking wine with the evening meal reduced my concentration the next morning, and hence my attention to prayer, I decided to stop drinking alcohol.

In many countries popular interest in monitoring alcohol intake is increasing at a community level. In Britain there is 'Dry January', inspired by the charity Alcohol Concern; in Australia we have 'Feb Fast', 'Dry July' and 'Ocober'. Participants in Dry July are sponsored to give up alcohol for a month to support people with cancer—as well as improving their own health: 'Taking part in Dry July gives you the chance to also focus on yourself—notice your own drinking habits and the value of a healthy, balanced lifestyle, increased energy levels, a clearer head and clearer skin.'¹⁰ People are thus already taking the time to consider what is harmful and what is helpful in relation to alcohol and taking beneficial action.

But the Second Rule applies to any beverage. Many people are sensitive to caffeine and limit their coffee or tea intake. Currently there is concern at a public health level about the amount of sugar in soft drinks; a recent advertising campaign in Australia has encouraged us to 'rethink sugary drink' and enjoy the benefits of water.¹¹

¹⁰ Dry July Foundation, 'About Dry July', at <https://www.dryjuly.com/about>, accessed 15 March 2018.

¹¹ See 'Rethink Sugary Drink', at <http://www.rethink sugarydrink.org.au/>, accessed 15 March 2018.

Seeking an Ordered Life

The Third Rule

In the Third Rule (Exx 212) Ignatius suggests practical ways of focusing on everyday foods. Ignatius contrasts other foods with bread as a staple—intending to limit consumption of more attractive or luxury foods. He uses the word 'abstinence' twice, emphasizing not penance or austerity but to be in a 'right temperance' with food.¹² This is an expression of the overarching intention whereby, 'The Exercises have to do with the conversion of affectivity, with letting the Spirit enter into our affectivity, change it and act through it'.¹³ The emphasis on practice allows retreatants to decide in freedom what to eat.

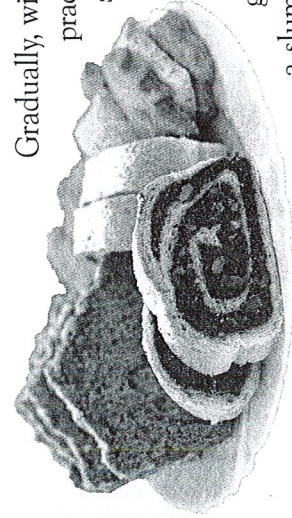
Ignatius would be gratified to learn that modern dietary guidelines recommend the same approach. But these guidelines exist because the population does not naturally follow this way of eating. Such a variety of food is plentifully available in the developed world at any time of day or night that the expectation of eating the 'delicate foods' of which Ignatius speaks gradually increases. At the same time serving sizes of 'coarse foods' also increase in a subtle movement towards excess.

Observing the times of deliberate or unconscious excess may offer us clues as to the reason behind the 'disordered' appetite of which Ignatius speaks. What is occurring for me when I feel this appetite? Am I craving sugar? Do I want more of a delicious flavour? Is it the novelty of trying new foods? Is it social pressure to eat as others eat? Is it expectations about behaviour in specific situations? Is it seeking comfort in a stressful life? For me a gentle dissection of what is going on and how my body is feeling at such a time has led to more freedom.

A few years ago I realised that I was at my most vulnerable to eating too much on Sunday afternoons. At the time I was a parish priest, so I would have led two services, with all that that entails, and spoken to innumerable people. I would come home ravenous and exhausted, eat a healthy meal, but then 'graze', returning to the kitchen for snacks frequently during the afternoon. While food could satiate my body's hunger, it could not restore the energy depleted by stress or the psychospiritual reserves that had been drawn upon that morning. I had to find ways of addressing each of the three aspects.

¹² Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 161.

¹³ Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 2.



Gradually, with the support of an integrative medical practitioner, I experimented with meals that sustained me for longer periods. I discovered that foods that appeared to appease in the short term, such as sandwiches, cake or desserts, would give me a blood-sugar spike followed by a slump that I experienced as ‘fog brain’ and further exhaustion. In terms of the stress, I learnt more about the effects of adrenaline and cortisol, and found ways to cooperate with the body’s natural recovery pattern, ensuring that I had plenty of rest, listening to soothing music and doing routine low-adrenaline activities. For spiritual rejuvenation I would meditate once or twice over the afternoon and perhaps read uplifting literature. This way each aspect of my appetite was acknowledged and given what it needed, thus changing my relationship with my body and with food.

The Fourth Rule

The introduction to the Fourth Rule (Exx 213) begins with a qualification: not to become ill through lack of food. We know that this happened to Ignatius from overzealous fasting and now he is careful to protect others from the danger, encouraging the exercitant to find ‘the mean which he ought to keep in his eating and drinking’. The purpose of cutting down on food is to arrive at this mean, in an example of deliberately ‘going against’ a disordered tendency:

This is an application of the principle of ‘going against’ (*agere contra*): a disordered tendency should be dealt with by a deliberate emphasis on its opposite, in order eventually to find the mean. The principle appears in the Exercises frequently It operates against excess in both rigour and indulgence.¹⁴

What we might think of today as a sufficient diet may actually be overeating. Ignatius’ suggestion to reduce intake and observe the effects is a timely reminder of good stewardship and self-responsibility. With too much food available, most people in the West end up eating it—over

60 per cent of them are unhealthy fat—or throwing it away.¹⁵ Moreover eating highly processed, unhealthy food is regarded as normal.¹⁶ When the norm is over-consuming there is room to pull back safely without falling sick and without becoming anorexic. The point is to find ‘the right mean’: the optimum intake for health and vitality for that particular personal environment.

The second part of the Fourth Rule offers two ways towards discerning the mean and makes clear the purpose behind all the rules for eating: first, to be open to receiving the joys of consolation and secondly, to have the stamina to complete the Exercises. Basically it is about what is excessive or undermines the spiritual life and what is conducive to the spiritual life. The Camaldolese Fr Cyprian Consiglio tells the story of taking lunch to one of the recluses living in his community. In those days the community had dessert only with the midday meal on Sundays. As Cyprian handed over the tray of food, old Fr Joseph said to him, ‘Watch what you eat on Sunday, Brother, it will affect your prayer on Monday’.¹⁷

Ignatius desires the exercitant to extend the relationship between the body and food to include the Spirit, recognising that when we act irresponsibly with our bodies (our personal environment), we are actually putting at risk the temple in which God dwells. ‘Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.’ (1 Corinthians 6:19–20)

Imitating Christ

The Fifth Rule

The Fifth Rule (Exx 214) reminds us of the ‘know, love, follow’ pattern learnt in Week Two as Ignatius encourages exercitants to imitate Christ. The first part of this rule is about imagining Christ eating with the disciples and noticing the manner in which Jesus approaches his meal and the community with whom he is sharing it. This contemplation should permeate the exercitants’ own approach to meals. The second part of the

¹⁵ See World Health Organization, ‘Prevalence of Overweight among Adults, BMI ≥ 25 ’, *Global Health Observatory Data*, available at <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.main.BMI25CV?lang=en>, accessed 15 March 2018.

¹⁶ See, for example, Jennifer M. Foti, Michelle A. Mendez, Shu Wen Ng, and Barry M. Popkin, ‘Is the Degree of Food Processing and Convenience Linked with the Nutritional Quality of Foods Purchased by US Households?’, *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 101/6 (June 2015), 1251–1262.

¹⁷ Personal communication with the author, used with permission.

¹⁴ Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 12.

rule focuses on the immediate outcome of this process: that the exercitants are thinking about Jesus rather than their bodies. The third part of the rule reiterates the original goal of the Rules for Eating and the ultimate goal of the Exercises—ordered and harmonious living. This is why David Fleming highlights rule five as the overarching general principle of the Rules for Eating.¹⁸

By Week Three, exercitants have considerable experience with imaginative contemplation of scripture, so imagining Christ eating with the disciples is within their reach. There are various accounts of Jesus eating that can be recalled, and many exercitants will already have contemplated Jesus at the wedding at Cana, Jesus at table with Zacchaeus, Jesus blessing the food to feed the Five Thousand and Jesus attending the meal at Simon's house. During Week Three the exercitants are contemplating the Last Supper so that will take priority. Exercitants should notice the demeanour of Jesus and intentionally allow that demeanour to reshape their own manners so that ordered conduct emerges. This has the effect of placing the focus less on food as assuaging our hunger and more on the manner in which it is approached.

I am reminded of 'taking strength from his Creator and Lord' (Exx 324), one of the means of handling desolation, since allowing Christ's demeanour to permeate our own is a form of taking strength. I am also reminded of the 'Three Methods of Prayer' that Ignatius prescribes to encourage prayer at other times, specifically (Exx 248) for those who want to imitate Christ in the use of their five senses. The contemplation here focuses on the sensations of the bodily creature and how they might be used for God's glory, thus insisting 'that it is the whole person—the person as bodily and sensate as well as endowed with the higher Powers—that must be assimilated into Christ'.¹⁹

In eating a meal, Jesus is using each of the senses—hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching. Noticing how Jesus uses his senses illuminates the attitude that Jesus has to his own body and this is important because, as Sam Keen observes, 'Our body is our bridge to and model of the world; therefore, how we are in our body so we will be in the world Thus the danger of not loving one's body. Love of both neighbour and cosmos rests on love of self.'²⁰ Imitating Christ as he cares for his body by eating

allows us to care for our own body. Caring for our body is the basis of living the two great commandments, loving God (in the cosmos) and loving neighbour. Eating has far-reaching implications!

The Sixth Rule

The Sixth Rule (Exx 215) is about staying attentive to Christ and his passion or, after the Third Week, maintaining a more general spiritual focus rather than being distracted by eating for the sake of it. Ignatius uses the word *consideration* (*consideración*), which reminds me of the Prayer of Consideration, a form of prayer that calls on our reason and understanding.²¹ The Prayer of Consideration offers us creative options for mealtimes, the simplest of which is noticing what occurs as we eat, observing a process that is usually taken for granted. This experience leads us to attend both to the food and to our manner of eating. The desire to eat more slowly may develop, which is explored in Rule Seven.

Another dinner table consideration is to remember the various 'memberships' to which we belong: 'Eating ... establishes a membership that confirms all creatures as profoundly in need of each other and ... God to provide life's nutrition and vitality'.²² We belong to God. We also belong to each other as members of the human race. We belong to the earth, being made from the same elements. We belong to the animals, particularly mammals. We belong to the plants on which we depend for oxygen and food. We belong to our unique microbiome; our gut contains about 100 trillion bacteria.²³ A sense of these connections can be heightened by eating outdoors. In remembering our memberships we realise that we are sustained by the sacrifice and work of the earth and its produce as well as by the people who harvest, process, deliver and sell that produce.²⁴ So begins the development of an ecological consciousness.²⁵

²¹ See Joseph A. Tetlow, *Making Choices in Christ: The Foundations of Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola, 2008), 65–67.

²² Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2011); and see McMinn, *To the Table*, 23.

²³ See Guilia Enders, *Gut: The Inside Story of Our Body's Most Under-Rated Organ* (Melbourne: Scribner, 2014), 137.

²⁴ At a retreat entitled 'Responding to Creation's Love for Us' held at Loyola House, Guelph, Ontario in April 2017, a plaque was displayed on each dining table. It read 'In this food I see the presence of the entire Universe supporting me'.

²⁵ See Ilija Delio, 'Food, Ecology, and Consciousness', Woodstock Theological Centre, Georgetown University, 2010, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywiegm8H6Lc>.

¹⁸ Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, 161.

¹⁹ Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 186.

²⁰ Sam Keen, *To a Dancing God: Notes of a Spiritual Traveler* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1970), 148, 150.

In many retreat centres music is played during meals as an aid to reflection; this can also be done at home during the Retreat in Daily Life. Personally I find that spiritual reading at breakfast is an inspiring start, heightening my attention to spiritual matters as the day progresses. All such considerations are helpful in creating a focus at meals beyond simply the gratification of hunger.²⁶ Avoiding attachment to a particular food, whether for pleasure or emotional support, is the goal here, not a dualistic dismissal of matter as bad. We can pay thankful attention to food and eating as an enjoyable contemplative practice without being attached to the food; this is important to the Ignatian goal of spiritual freedom.

Seeking Consolation

The Seventh Rule

The Seventh Rule (Exx 216) highlights the challenge of self-control both in demeanour and in actual consumption. The phrase 'guard against' reminds me of the Second Week Discernment of Spirits, through which the soul may 'guard for the future' (Exx 334), alerting me to the possible place of the bad spirit in affecting the eating behaviour of exercitants. What movement of the spirit is occurring when someone is preoccupied by eating or 'absorbed' by eating? Gentle exploration of the interplay of thoughts and feelings behind the eating can lead to naming the bad spirit and disempowering it.

Ignatius does not want exercitants to be preoccupied with eating, but that does not mean they should be dismissive of eating and food. He uses the image of relishing or savouring food as a key metaphor in understanding the spirituality of the Exercises, when he talks about what 'contents and satisfies the soul' (Exx 2).²⁷ He also shows regard for the sense of taste among the five senses (Exx 69, Exx 124). Appreciating tastes implies that the manner of eating should be attentive and reflective rather than hurried. When we are ravenous we tend to eat quickly to satiate the feeling of hunger, and could well overeat as a result. Ignatius suggests that curbing that initial rush strengthens self-control in the exercitant. Aware of eating too quickly myself, while on retreat I resolved to slow down. As it takes ten minutes for the feeling of hunger to dissipate after eating, slowing down means I feel satiated sooner, which means I eat less.

²⁶ Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, 165.

²⁷ Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 4.

The social aspect of eating with others also needs consideration:

Accounts of Ignatius eating with his companions suggest that, however little he ate, he took his time and never finished before his companions. He paced himself in harmony with the conversation and with the eating habits of those around him, 'giving the impression that all along he had been eating with them'.²⁸

Keeping pace with others provides another strategy for slowing down as well as strengthening the sense of community at meals.

In terms of controlling the amount consumed there are some simple measures, such as refraining from second helpings, stopping eating before we feel completely full, using a smaller plate, serving smaller portions and deciding in advance what to eat then sticking to that decision—which lead to the eighth and final rule.

The Eighth Rule

The Eighth Rule (Exx 217) offers a practical strategy for deciding how and what to eat. Rather than stumbling from one meal to the next, driven by hunger pangs that often result in our eating more than we need of the wrong food, Ignatius urges forward planning. 'When one feels no appetite for eating' is the opportune time to consider what to eat. As this is a time of consolation, it is wise to make a decision about what it will be good to eat in the future—and stick to it. Ignatius discourages changing decisions in times of desolation, in this case when hunger or craving is dominant.

This is the idea of 'precommitment': 'limiting our own choices while we're safely distant from the temptations we suspect we can't otherwise handle'.²⁹ Dan Buettner, originator of the Blue Zones health and longevity project, observes that among the world's most long-lived communities 'the healthy choice wasn't just the deliberate choice; it was the unavoidable choice', since the only foods available were healthy ones.³⁰

The second part of this rule is more challenging to the modern ear. When we find ourselves wanting to eat more than we planned, Ignatius

²⁸ Phillip Shano, 'Dining with St Ignatius of Loyola: Rules for Regulating One's Eating', *The Way*, 52/4 (October 2013), 19, quoting the *Memoriale* of Luís Gonçalves da Câmara.

²⁹ Daniel Akst, *We Have Met the Enemy: Self-Control in an Age of Excess* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 34.

³⁰ Dan Buettner, *The Blue Zones of Happiness: Secrets of the World's Happiest Places* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2017), 23.

asks us to eat less! This follows the principle of *agere contra*, counter-attack, where the best defence is offence.³¹

Using the Rules for Eating with Retreatants

In their book on the Exercises, George Schemel and Judith Roemer suggest that, when considering the Rules for Eating, retreatants should also ask themselves, 'What are your particular pain killers? Alcohol, tobacco, food, T.V., tranquilizers, mall shopping, conversation, chitchat, busyness, sleep? ... They all soothe consciousness and one needs to be careful how they are used.'³² What is there in my daily life that will hinder me from fully living into God's personal call to me, or the Election made during the Exercises? What aspects of my life prevent a full embrace of the way of life offered by Jesus? Am I more attached to created things than to God?

The season of the Exercises offers an opportunity to experiment by applying the Examen to various different aspects of life, thus becoming conscious of our frailties and abilities. After reflecting on this experience with a spiritual director and evaluating the consolation after each change, retreatants can plan for returning to ordinary existence, keeping what is helpful and preventing what is harmful, then and into the future.

In applying the principles of the Rules for Eating to other aspects of life, however, we should not neglect food, as 'food and drink are the areas where "spiritual" people are most likely to be intemperate'.³³ I have noticed in parish life a move away from abstinence with food during Lent towards other responses—a workaholic takes quiet walks, an avid shopper only buys the necessities of life. Although broadening the scope of abstinence might be useful, I wonder about the loss of focus on food in an era when chefs have become celebrities, every television station has food programmes and fast food is ubiquitous. I wonder if the Church feels a degree of embarrassment to be speaking about abstinence in Lent in the midst of a cultural expectation of consumption. Are we colluding with our culture? Are we in denial about the likelihood of intemperance?

³¹ Gomulias, 'Study of the Development of Mortification and Discernment', 12. The practice of *agere contra* reflects Ignatius' military background.

³² George J. Schemel and Judith A. Roemer, *Beyond Individualism to Discipleship: A Directory for Those Who Give the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius* (Scranton: Institute for Contemporary Spirituality, 2000), 254.

³³ Townsend, 'Digesting the Rules for Eating', 99.

Discussing food as Ignatius does may be counter-cultural today, yet there are sympathetic tendencies in secular life. There is a growing fear in the community of the effects of processed food, and detoxification regimes are increasingly popular. How we eat and drink is certainly topical, and it remains a valid subject for attention during the Exercises, provided a person is ready to give that attention. Towards the end of Week Two and moving into Week Three, exercitants come to realise that they want to reform their way of life as followers of Christ.³⁴ They understand that 'the whole person is what/who is meant to be transformed in the spiritual life, so that no aspect of one's being is left behind'.³⁵ It behoves directors to be alert to the need and desire of their exercitants, offering them support for the transformative process in the areas where they are able to progress and only giving the Rules for Eating to those ready to undertake them. Offering them as early as Week One is conceivable if desire and readiness have clearly arisen from the retreatant's experience of God's love.

Introducing the Rules for Eating occurs naturally either in Week Two, when the desire for a more balanced life is expressed, or in Week Three, when discussing the ethos of that week or the prayer on the Last Supper. In conversation the director can discern what is relevant to the exercitant's need and explain it. A reminder about the Principle and Foundation (Exx 23) can be timely, as that is the context in which the Rules occur: 'it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things ... desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.' Simply put, our daily habits either help or hinder us in our purpose, 'to praise, reverence, and serve God'. This broadens the perspective of the exercitant, to see eating as serving not just for sustenance, or enjoyment or health but also as an act of worship and service that benefits not only the individual but the world.

These rules are important because of the repetitive everyday event of eating. Eating is an accessible activity to which we can begin applying aspects of the Exercises, such as exploring attachments to particular foods and noticing the influence of the bad spirit on eating behaviours and decision-making. Why wait for big life decisions when the small

Eating ... as an act of worship and service

³⁴ Townsend, 'Digesting the Rules for Eating', 92.

³⁵ Cyprian Consiglio, *Spirit, Soul, Body: Toward an Integral Christian Spirituality* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2015), 2.

choices made about eating give the exercitant daily practice and have far-reaching consequences? If a person is praying for, say, an hour a day and eating three meals a day, those two activities may be the mainstays of his or her life.

Ignatius entitles these rules 'Rules to Put Oneself in Order for the Future as to Eating' (Exx 210), which means working in the present to secure the future. Although the short-term emphasis is on stamina for making the Exercises, the long-term goal is stamina for continuing apostolic ministry. Placing the Rules in Week Three makes them a bridge into Week Four and beyond into ordinary life. As the exercitant moves into the resurrection stories, two of which involve sharing food with Jesus, further opportunities arise for reflection on how Jesus engages with people and food. This is followed by the Contemplation to Attain Love in which reflections on God's indwelling (Exx 235) and God's working and labouring (Exx 236) specifically mention the plants and animals from which we derive food to be received as divine gift (Exx 237). What a wonderful place of gratitude to end the Exercises and go forth to live the resurrection life with eating as a contemplative practice.

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RULES FOR EATING

Gemma Simmonds

THIS LENT I HAVE BEEN STRUCK by the number of articles and conversations I have engaged with on the subject of giving things up, especially in the food line. Some writers remark on how people they know who have given up all other practices of religion continue to observe some sort of Lenten fast. Others looking from a secular perspective at the problem of non-sustainable consumption decide that maybe the Christians have a point. Still more disagree altogether. 'Where's the real spiritual benefit or meaning in all of this?', asks a philosopher colleague, who is never short of a killer question backed up by the sort of relentless thinking that has me reaching for the migraine tablets. 'It's like a sort of reverse Christmas, where people look forward to getting all these goodies. Except for Lent they give up whatever it is they really like, safe in the knowledge that in six weeks' time they can go back and stuff their faces. In fact it probably makes them indulge even more, because during the six weeks they'll have lost a bit of weight and given their liver a chance to recover so they don't need to worry about the consequences. It's like a fad diet followed by compensation.'

This is not an unreasonable observation and tackles a highly topical subject. In a decade, deaths from liver disease in the UK have risen by around 25 per cent; 90 per cent of those deaths occurred among the under-70s and many of them among the under-40s.¹ In the prison where I volunteer there are more people serving life sentences for murders committed under the influence of alcohol than under the influence of drugs. We are binge-drinking ourselves and other people to death. We

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¹ See *Deaths from Liver Disease: Implications for End of Life Care in England* (London: National End of Life Care Network, 22 March 2012), available at <http://www.endoflifecare-intelligence.org.uk/view?rid=276>, accessed 15 March 2018.