

ON THE OTHER HAND

On the one hand, thoughtful readers have found good in the pages of this review, from the first things on. On the other hand, readers did not find here the last word on a given topic. They therefore suggest these further considerations.

The Many Answers to "Who Do You Say I Am?"

Father General's conference, "Ignatius Loyola: Experience of Christ," embodies at least three significant convictions that can enrich current Christology and help it serve discipleship more powerfully: the function of titles or images, the need to hold together trinitarian and christological thinking, and the importance of Jesus's human will for our salvation.

(1) Father Kolvenbach lists some christological titles and images that respond to the question: Who do you say that I am? The New Testament records around 130 such images and titles for Jesus. Drawing on biblical testimony, subsequent Christian tradition has added some more: the Sacred Heart, Jesus the Jew, and Jesus the Liberator. The full version of the famous prayer from St Richard of Chichester (d. 1253) shows how images can express and galvanize commitment: "Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which thou hast given me--for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me. O most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother, may I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly." St Richard begins with two central titles from the Creed: "my Lord Jesus Christ." He makes "Lord" and "Christ" more intimate by saying "*my* Lord Jesus Christ." St Richard creates an even more intimate and personal tone by three further images: "O most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother." There is a touching and effective movement from "Redeemer" to "Friend" and even to "Brother."

Father General's conference recalled the fact that, for St Ignatius, Jesus is the "Lord" and eternal "King." Both titles enjoy a strong scriptural pedigree, even if they are often downplayed today. The New Testament calls Jesus "King" 38 times, and "Lord" around 485 times. In the

latter case one has to say "around," since on at least a few occasions it remains unclear whether "Lord" refers to "God (the Father)" or to Jesus. For instance, when Paul states that "the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:17), he is reflecting on a passage from Exod 34:34, and seems to mean: "the Lord of whom this passage speaks in the Spirit." The reference then would be to God (the Father) rather than to Christ.

In this address Father Kolvenbach lists "Jesus" among the christological titles--something for which a good case can be made. Not only the meaning of the name "Jesus" ("God saves" or "God is salvation") but also the frequent appearance of this personal name encourages one to think in titular terms: in the New Testament "Jesus" turns up in every book except 3 John, for a total of 993 occurrences.

(2) Along with St Bonaventure (d. 1274), St John of the Cross (d. 1591), Blessed Marie of the Incarnation (d. 1672), and Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity (d. 1906), Ignatius of Loyola ranks among the outstanding trinitarian mystics of all times. His experience of Jesus and theological orientation led him to hold firmly together Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity. This emphasis encouraged Father General to retrieve and echo repeatedly a classical patristic conviction: "one of the Holy Trinity has suffered for us." No other single statement of faith ties together more successfully and succinctly Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity.

*the holy titles must
galvanize committed
discipleship*

(3) Like an antiphon, "the way Christ chose," his "choice made out of love," and synonymous phrases ring through the closing pages of Father Kolvenbach's conference. In speaking so, he and St Ignatius before him align themselves with a perennial tradition. St Basil of Caesarea (d. 379), St Leo the Great (d. 461), and many subsequent writers insisted that our deliverance from the power of evil came by means of One who also belonged to us. Through the gift of God, we were saved not only "from above" but also "from below" and "from within," through One who was also our brother and friend. The human choice of Christ entered essentially into the drama of our redemption--a truth classically enunciated by St Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274). This choice made out of love must inspire our decision to follow Jesus on his way through Good Friday to Easter Sunday.

I prize these three major emphases in Father General's address, especially since Daniel Kendall and I aimed to do something similar in our *Focus on Jesus* (Gracewing and Mercer University Press, 1996).

However we do it, christological reflection must express and galvanize the service of committed discipleship.

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Years of Experience Illuminate the Laity's Radical Call to Holiness

I have read Dr Bingemer's article with great joy, not only because it touches on fundamental questions that are particularly relevant today, but because I am in complete agreement with the positions taken. Since I have been asked to express my reaction, I will note a few points which I would like Dr Bingemer to pursue further, and, if possible, complete her reflection.

♦ Number 135 of *Exercises* is, in fact, the key to understanding the pedagogy of Ignatius. In it he uses the word "perfection", to which he assigns two different meanings: in the first case (verse 3) it is obviously a question of the *state of perfection* which is religious life; in the second (verse 6), it is a question of serving Christ in the radicality of the Gospel. It is with this latter meaning that Ignatius, several times, uses the words "perfection", "perfect", "imperfect". It would be quite wrong to refer only to verse 3 and so exclude the laity from seeking evangelical perfection, in a word, sanctity. Dr Bingemer shows very clearly how the spirituality of the laity has baptism as its foundation: the Exercises can be, for them, the way of total reliance on the Grace of God. It seems to me that, especially since Vatican Council II, we have moved away from the distinction between *precepts* and *counsels*; it would be very profitable, therefore, to pursue the reflection initiated by Dr Bingemer in the article, so that the whole process of the Exercises may be better lived as a possible means of sanctity for every christian.

♦ It is necessary, also, that those lay people desirous of following the way of the *Exercises* proposed by Ignatius may be able to do so without their lay status being an obstacle! I applaud Dr Bingemer when she lists the objections raised by certain people that the *Exercises* would not be possible for lay people who, they maintain, are not capable of undergoing such a powerful experience and who would not be in a position to follow them in any case (p.52: "family, professional commitments, and the rest"). Experience has generally proved the contrary, and Dr Bingemer is right in calling for "a

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doing away with fear”: “When there is the desire, there is creativity, strength of will, and the ability to organise everything in such a way as to make the experience possible” (p.52). It is a fact that, throughout the world today, the laity, men and women, are committing themselves to follow the Exercises without leaving their everyday life, whether because they are not able to do so or because they do not experience the spiritual desire to do so. I sincerely hope that Dr Bingemer’s article may stimulate us all to analyse better the reasons why the current movement in favour of the Exercises is developing and bearing so much fruit.

♦ It is true, however, that safeguards must be in place if the Exercises are to maintain the vigour of the Ignatian experience. On this point, I would be willing to say to Dr Bingemer that she is using ambiguous expressions: what are the “integral” Exercises (p.52); the “complete” Exercises (p.46); the “thirty days” Exercises (p.53)? In my opinion, it must be strongly affirmed that the Exercises must *always be adapted*. It is the same process which is offered, whether in a retreat house or amidst daily life, for thirty days or for a period defined by the situation of each retreatant. The “integral” or “complete” character does not depend on the duration, nor on the conditions of life in which the experience takes place. The laity have, in this respect, many things to teach us, because the very manner in which they commit themselves to the experience of the Exercises takes into account, in a spontaneous and harmonious way, their condition of life, the demands of their relationships, the choices they have to make in order to ensure their fidelity to the Spirit that makes itself felt in many ways throughout the days. What words of wisdom Dr Bingemer utters when she says (p.53) that we must “not fear being audacious in daring to propose this experience to the laity, who are not satisfied with anything less than sanctity”!

*are Exercises
one spirituality
or one way to
a spirituality?*

♦ The final pages of the article are particularly forceful and evocative. The “extreme radicality” (p.56) which characterises the Ignatian way indeed brings into play “life or death” (p.57). I wish only that “discernment” did not appear as a “dynamic proper to the Exercises”, as the condition leading to choice (p.55). The Ignatian charism gathers the traditional wisdom of the discernment of spirits, but--and this is its originality--it becomes the means of making a spiritual decision. This, it seems to me, is so much more important to stress than that this way is strictly that of the laity who, as Dr Bingemer very rightly says, are ceaselessly exposed to the difficulties of life “in the world”. The

Exercises are an obvious means of learning to "make a choice" in every detail of daily existence, of learning, through the Exercises themselves, how "to be in the world without being of the world".

♦ While thanking Dr Bingemer for her very positive reflection, I would like to terminate these remarks with the suggestion that an in-depth study might be undertaken of the problems that the very word "spirituality" poses. The author speaks of "christian spirituality" (p.50), and shows very clearly that its richness flows from baptism. But she speaks also of the "spirituality of discernment" (p.54), proper to the baptised, who find themselves committed to both time and eternity. Likewise, she speaks of the "Ignatian spirituality" (p.56) "flowing from the Spiritual Exercises for those men and women, who are called to live the consecration of their baptism in the midst of the world". Does the word "spirituality" have the same meaning and the same significance in each case? This question does not seem to me to be superfluous, because the answer given implies a particular interpretation of *Exercises*: are they the expression of *one* definite spirituality (and, from the points of view expressed in Dr Bingemer's article, it would be a question of the spirituality of the laity), or are they a means of allowing each one (priest, lay person, religious) to discover his or her own spiritual way in the Church? The one who embarks on the way of the Exercises can be a Benedictine, a Carthusian, a lay person, or even a hermit, but that would become a secondary consideration, because what would have become essential would be the experience of God that the Exercises would have sustained through their pedagogy and radicality.

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Clear Election and Conversion of Heart

Dr Bingemer goes to rather scholarly lengths to establish that Ignatius was a man of his time, and did not make all the distinctions we make today. She quotes J. A. Estrada to good purpose, and could have added some points he makes in a later work, *La identidad de los laicos* (1990). "Theologically speaking," he writes, "there is no difference between a baptized

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person and a *lay person*; the lay vocation is the prototype and the reality to which all christian life refers." In this perspective, the difference between the laity and the priest or religious "is not something that the laity do not have," but rather something that grows out of being baptized and gives shape to a group vis-a-vis the laity, the sacrament of orders and religious vows. "It is the priest and the religious who have to define themselves in contrast to the laity--not the other way around" (p.162).

My own experience is that laity of all conditions can make the real Exercises in their radicality, and profit greatly from them. Our annual eight-day retreat as Jesuits, for instance. We used to make the effort to get a topflight Jesuit director from around Latin America. Since our number is relatively small, we decided to invite lay collaborators from all our ministries, telling them that this was the annual Jesuit retreat in silence, with nothing watered down. People like Víctor Codina (BOL), Félix Moracho (VEN), and Jorge Cela (ANT) gave mixed retreats like this, and came away impressed by the spiritual maturity of most of the lay retreatants. And our lay collaborators were grateful for everything they gained from the experience.

My experience with Exercises in Daily Life is similar, though somewhat limited. If the exercitants can organize their lives and time, if they can persevere through the four months or so, I feel that the experience has been very profitable. I still personally find problems in arriving at a clear election or conversion at the conclusion. Yes, there is deeper personal knowledge and love of the person of Christ; there is a pervasive spirituality in their family and professional or workplace lives. However, a clear stance, an option against middle-class or upper-middle-class values or lifestyles, an option for the poor in some concrete manifestation, and so on, are tough decisions. I have found that retreatants back off from them, even in the face of the Two Standards, The Binarios, and so on.

But I am still learning, and questioning myself, and trying to gain skill from others.

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