

## FIRST THINGS

Among those who give *Exercises*, and among those who make them, ideas and practices have changed a lot during the past decades. A number of the new ideas and fresh convictions appeared in the "Notes for the One Giving Exercises" in the last number of this review [#87]. More of these new ideas are appearing in responses to it, as some in this review will show--from Frankfort in Germany, Cebu in the Philippines, Melbourne in Australia, and Cagliari in Sardinia.

Some more of the new ways of thinking about Exercises informs the two technical articles in this current review. Antonio Guillén, calling on his own and others' experiences, applies the Additions to Exercises in Daily Life. Françoise Greffe, banking on a quarter-century of experience with Exercises in Daily Life, gives a reading of Annotation 18. That Annotation lay still and unused for so long that most of us thought it had died.

One less technical conviction, however, has been emerging for a generation. Those who give Exercises have come to see that, at the end of the twentieth century, being grateful to God is an important disposition for Exercises. This gratitude to God is described in various ways, not all of which use the word *grateful*. It is mentioned in most descriptions of ignatian indifference, for instance, but not in all. Gratitude is named or strongly implied in descriptions like the justly famous "accepting God's acceptance." And many preparatory exercises in self-acceptance and appreciation turn immediately to being grateful to God for one's gifts.

Among so many descriptions, the exact meaning of this attitude of gratitude can be, like the famous description of an elephant by five blind people, at best perplexing. And isn't it odd that the Principle and Foundation mentions "praise, reverence, and service" and goes into detail about indifference, but says no word about Thanks? Even considering that Ignatius wrote this particular draft for philosophers and theologians who were faced with electing what to do with their lives, one would expect that Thanks would show up somewhere.

Perhaps Ignatius could take for granted that people he talked with were thankful to God. Those who give Exercises today, however, cannot. Hence, the emerging conviction that gratitude is an important disposition, required to make Exercises well, can bear some scrutiny.

It needs more than scrutiny. For certainly we cannot expect ourselves at the end of the twentieth century to be as it were automatically grateful to God. On the contrary. We do not easily combine grateful acceptance of what we are with our technological control over earth and life. Whatever our own cultures may teach us about our relationship with God, the global culture draws us to demand control over our lives and selves. After breaking into the atom and the genetic code, we seem to have only ourselves to thank for our situation, for better or, woefully, for worse.

This is a crucial matter in ignatian spirituality, which begins in a profound appreciation of creaturehood, invites every disciple to enter into the joy of the Lord, and ends in an apostolic identity with Jesus Christ. We might look at each of these in turn: creature-hood, joy, and identifying with Christ.

*combine grateful acceptance  
with control over earth and  
life*

First, about creaturehood. Typical of many both East and West, both North and South, a woman had suffered dejection and deep desolation for years. On one view, she had a psychological problem, an almost psychotic form of "negative self-image." But that view gave only a partial explanation and offered no way out.

Then one morning she woke to these words: "Whatever is, IS." She had finally begun. She had begun to shake off her negative self-image, needless to say. But she had also begun to shake off her practical atheism. In their instinctive way, even squirrels "know" this--whatever is, is. But we humans have to decide it if we want to be fully human. We can always go into denial--things canNOT be the way they are--which was in fact how this woman was living. We are all free to live reluctantly, or to live angry at the way things are. This is, in fact, how many spiritual people do live, more or less permanently desolate.

Moreover, to be fully human and fully alive, we have to get beyond merely acknowledging that what is, is, like squirrels. We have to wake to the fact that we did not and do not create what is. We did not create our selves or our lifeworld (a word that names our limited concrete place and time). We have to come to the truth that we are not the source of the universe or even of our selves. When at some point in our lives we get some little control over reason, we must get on and recognize that Some One Else is involved. It is true that whatever is, is. But there is a further truth: whatever is, is *given*. And the Giver lives.

If we live grateful for what is, we keep mindful that the Giver lives. But going the stark way of thanklessness, we inexorably forget our true Maker, the Holy One with whom we collaborate to create our own self in all of our relations, and to contribute to our lifeworld. If we forget our Maker, we subtly try to take over as the source of all we experience. We may not think of ourselves as absolutely independent. But unless we begin with *Thanks*, we unavoidably act as though we were the Only One. This is our way of falling into the original temptation: we want to be gods. Well, the job is taken. Undaunted, against our will, we decide to be a god at least for our selves, or perhaps for our lifeworld, or at the very least in particular experience. This is radical pride, the root of thanklessness.

*whatever is, is given. And  
the Giver lives*

Few of those who come to make Exercises are conscious of having made such an option. But many find extraordinary difficulty in living thankful to God. This difficulty

shows up in Exercises and in the examen. What is its source in people who acknowledge their Creator?

A split mind. We find it all too easy to live with two minds: giving thanks and getting along on our own. Living in two minds, we thank God only half-heartedly. One consequence of half-heartedness, among many others, is fear of law and rule. When we do not live thanking God, we begin to feel that any commandment is imposed, any law is an intrusion, any norm is forced and dictated. And with that, we can no longer feel the commandments that the Spirit has written in our hearts. We are not obeying from the heart; we are bending down in obeisance. If we are not saying the *Thanks* but intend to remain faithful to Christ, as Pierre Emonet proposes in his brief article, then we unavoidably have to say 'we submit.'

This would be a wretched way to begin the First Week, which raises an instructive point. Among the less experienced of those who give Exercises currently, there is a feeling that the Additions and the Notes in *Spiritual Exercises* are somehow, vaguely, constricting. An interruption. Even an affliction. Those who are grateful, who say thanks for the *Exercises*, as do Michele Lavra and Pietro Schiavone in their notes on the characteristics of the experience of Exercises, see it differently.

But in sin were we born (which affects even our spiritualities, as Andrew Hamilton bravely points out). So there is a third anguish after pride and a split mind that a thankless person suffers: a givenness to one of the great ways of disorder that we call capital sins. Pride, covetousness, lust, and all those things that have not gone away with vaccinations. Each of these red-headline sins is followed by a grey text full of scrambled feelings, unwise thinking, and trammelled freedom. Covetousness, for instance: Under a headline like "I need this stuff," a person hankers to pile things up like coins in a stack, just to have the stacks, unable not to keep stacking them--and not at all free to have some fun with the money. Scrambled feelings, unwise thinking, and trammelled freedom. The greedy, like the envious, the angry, and the slothful, live both thankless and joyless.

*the answer begins "God  
found  
that it was good"*

This raises the second reason why living thankful is crucial in ignatian spirituality: joy. For Christians, it is not enough merely to say Yes to God's creation, to what is. It is not enough merely to endure, like the Stoics. Rather, we are called upon to like the earth and to love humankind; to exult in the universes still being born; to find deep delight in the cells in our bone marrow and the shape of our spirits with all their limitations and failures. Only the humble come to this Yes, which the Psalms sing about: let heaven rejoice, and earth be glad, and all creation sing. Only the humble manage this, for nobody's self and nobody's lifeworld are ideal--Christian or not; on the contrary, they are everywhere on earth famously less than ideal. And we are invited to live joyously?

Yes. The answer begins in God. God creates the sun and breath, bread and friends. And "God found that it was good." In creating us, God passed along this finding of His. "It is good" has been etched into our deepest selves. We are created to know that creation is good. When we creatures wake up to who we actually are, we find that our first task is to enjoy all the good things. We live to find it good, the world and all that is in it. We are made to live in joy, to *enjoy*.

Hence, when we forget the Thanks, the first thing affected is joy. Joy goes away. We may work for and earn happiness and we may have pleasure. Joy, the gift, we will not have. For joy comes as the gift of light and warmth along with saying Yes to God's creating, just the way a light bulb goes from grey to burning bright when it says yes to electricity. And we no more deserve this gift of joy than a mere cold light bulb deserves electricity. We could remember at this point this year of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who gives us these gifts, according to St Paul. His list of the gifts of the Spirit begins this way: "love, joy, peace" (Gal. 5:22). And underlying all of these gifts is humility.

*when we creatures wake up,  
we find that our first task is  
to enjoy*

It is the humble who say Yes to what is. They humbly acknowledge the truth in their selves and in their lifeworlds. They were portrayed by the scholastic dictum: objectively speaking, humility is truth. They are portrayed by current directors in more subjective terms: they accept themselves (and their lifeworld) as they find them. They say Yes because the one whom they follow said it: "with him it was always Yes" (2 Cor. 1:19).

**H**ere is the third thing to notice about gratitude as a foundational disposition for Exercises: identifying with Christ's Yes.

This Yes of Christ's differs from other great Yeses, because he included in it what others consider negative and utterly barren: the cross. Or to say that better, as do the responses from Germany and Cebu on later pages, the Christian's Yes means love for Christ so deep that we want to go where he went and take the way he took. Jesus of Nazareth did not say his Yes to an ideal world. He said his Yes to our world, to human experience as we know it after Adam, in an occupied country, whose civil leaders were ferociously repressive and whose religious leaders were destructively divided. The way he chose to take leads to the cross.

*heartfelt and true thanks  
will run on to giving gifts*

The sound of the Yes in the souls of those who know Christ, consequently, goes beyond an OM, a harmony with the beauties and splendors of the natural world. For the cross is beyond the beauties and the splendors of the natural world. Our Yes must transmute into a tough-spirited *thanks*. While Jesus of Nazareth lived as we live, he began his prayers

with thanks: "I give you thanks, Father." With that thanks, Jesus approved and affirmed the world he knew--the birds of the air and the lilies of the fields, the red skies in the morning and the harvest white and ready, giving to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God, feeling the people's hungers, calling friend those whom God gave him for it--because that is the way things were, as Jesus found them. He chose to see that the way things are depends on the Father's making. Even when he genuinely wanted something different from the way he was finding it and prayed that it be so, he added, "not as I will but as You will." So he let God the Father create things according to his will--"with him it was always Yes."

And with him, this Yes led to sharing. He came to share our humanity and--words do not reveal the mystery of it--to give us a share in his divinity. In the end, he shared a meal with his friends and then told them to share it with the rest of us.

When our Thanks is heartfelt and true to his Thanks, it will run on to giving gifts, to mutual sharing. It is part of the "finding it good" of the One in whose image we are created: the Giver of Gifts, of all gifts. In this lies the root of a faith that does justice. In it lies the root of Ulpiano Vasquez's fine insight that human perfection is apostolic. If we believe that we are made in the image of God the Creator and Lord, then we will act in that belief. We will act like One who creates, and the One who creates gives gifts and shares mutually.

This sharing includes, *mysterium tremendum*, the gift of God the Second Person, come to live in our inspirited flesh. We are entrusted to share this Gift with all humankind. For, to complete what St Paul said about Jesus's Yes: "with him it was always Yes--and however many the promises God made, the Yes to them all is in him" (2 Cor 1:19,20).