

## NOTES FOR THE ONE GIVING EXERCISES RESPONSES FROM THE FIELD

**B**emused by the above titles, some readers may feel that they have stumbled into the middle of a conversation, in a foreign language, at that. So some introductions may be in order. What are these Notes and Responses about?

They help along a project to gather and share current experiences of *Spiritual Exercises*: purposes and practices, reflections and wisdom. The project obviously means a process first of all. The first step had to be listening to what is happening all around the globe, since this generation's experiences are wonderfully diverse and dense. That step was taken by an international meeting convened in Rome last February. The polyglot members asked: Who is making Exercises? What do we give them? What do we hope they experience? What in fact do they experience? The members answered from their own and many others' experiences, and their answers were printed in the prior issue, #87, as "Notes for the One Giving Exercises."

Those Notes, in addition to being printed in the review, have been sent individually to many experienced and expert people--religious, lay, Jesuit. They went to the Council on Ignatian Spirituality. They went to Jesuit provincial delegates for Ignatian Spirituality (or are on the way to the newly appointed). They were given to the members of the General Chapter of the Religious of the Cenacle, and to members of the Christian Life Communities. They went to one out of four directors of Jesuit retreat houses. They were discussed--as appears just below--by a team in Frankfurt and by a seminar in Cebu. All of these persons were asked whether they found their enculturated experience in the Notes, and what needed to be corrected, deleted, or added. Their answers have been coming in; some are reported in the "Responses" of the above title.

This long project, *si Deus vult*, will eventually produce some kind of "directory." Far from a collection of rules and mandates, such a directory would be meant to help us all to remain doubly faithful--to the great tradition of *Spiritual Exercises*, and to the actual inculturated experience of people making them today.

In the hope of such an outcome, the respondents here addressed the Notes and gave their Responses: In Frankfurt, Frs Andreas Falkner, Gundikar Hock, and Alex Lefrank. In Cebu, a long list of lay and Jesuit directors of retreat houses and programs, led by Frs Thomas O'Gorman of Manila and Richard Buhler of Sedalia, CO, in the United States. In Melbourne, Fr Andrew Hamilton. And in Cagliari on Sardinia, Fr Michele Lavra.

## Response One: Gruppe für Ignatianische Spiritualität

*The Group for Ignatian Spirituality serves all of the German-language provinces in Europe from its center at Ignatiushaus in Frankfurt. Its current members are Jesuits Andreas Falkner, Gundikar Hock, and Alex Lefrank. For ten years, while doing other tasks, the Group have given Exercises in all their forms and have conducted courses and workshops to train spiritual directors and directors of Exercises. (See "At the Frontiers" in these pages.) Their personal experience in ignatian spirituality and Exercises goes back to the earliest days of directed Exercises. In March, the members considered "Notes for the One Giving Exercises" during a full day.*

In these paragraphs, we report some of the more important issues that we touched on during a day-long discussion. We suggest here that the Notes add certain points; and we have left some further suggestions and points with the Secretary of Ignatian Spirituality to be passed on to the Committee.

♦ "On the one directing Exercises": Ignatius of Loyola had prepared his companions for four years before he guided them through Exercises. In the same way, the one who gives Exercises today needs to give the more serious exercitants a long preparation (particularly for the thirty-day retreat). Perhaps because that preparation is so difficult today, and in many circumstances actually impossible, we are finding other forms of Exercises more effective than the long retreat.

♦ The notes "Concerning the process of directing" are correct. Add that the one who gives Exercises has to be both close to and distant from the one who goes through them and--to say that in other words--to respect both persons' "boundaries". Add, too, a remark on authority in Exercises. We are clear that the one who gives Exercises does indeed exercise authority, and for God's sake must exercise it for the single purpose of enlarging the exercitant's freedom.

♦ On Annotation 5: The *magnanimity* may be universally present among those we guide through Exercises, but it is present in widely varying ways and degrees. Many exercitants come to Exercises needing to figure out what is right and wrong; most people want to keep on growing in God. Add about the thirty-day Exercises that they do challenge people, as in [135] and [189], but they do not work *ex opere operato*. The truth is that few have the real freedom to face the challenge; many are bound by inordinate affections, unregulated emotions, fixed resentments and even hatreds. And many religious men and women, persons in ministry, and CLC members allow *career* to encroach on their magnanimity--a disorder that emerges only very slowly, when it emerges at all. We find our practice moving to the more gradual approaches of Annotation 19 Exercises. We must reach people where they are.

♦ "Concerning some who need help before doing Exercises" offers some necessary admonitions. Add to the list those who do not yet desire to come to know Christ. Add

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freedom*

those--this is subtler--who live "above conversion," that is, those who cannot imagine needing ongoing conversion of heart (among whom are religious and clergy). Add those who doggedly hold on to some permanent commitment which is not obligatory or necessarily good. Add those who are not willing to question an habitual disorder in their lives or a gravely sinful attachment. None of these are yet ready to go directly into Exercises.

◆ Annotation 18. G.I.S. gives these Exercises as a valid experience, not necessarily as a preparation for further Exercises like the thirty-day retreat. But if these Exercises are given to large groups to whom no kind of personal guidance can be offered, they are not yet Ignatian. For Exercises without some kind of direction are not Ignatius's Exercises. Add, however, that we use a number of different forms of spiritual guidance--for groups, for instance, as well as for each individual.

◆ The Four Weeks. The Notes definitely require some paragraphs about the dynamic of the Four Weeks. Each of the Weeks embodies a long existential experience--for instance, the purgative way and the illuminative way. We find it crucial not to tell people that they have grown into these ways if in fact they have not, and we tend to expect exercitants to be able to enter onto the way appropriate to each Week before we take that person into the materials for the Week. We think of this rather dramatically as a categorical imperative for the director: Don't lie!

One model for the growth through the Weeks would begin with a disciple receiving the blessings of taking some *action* away from the sinfulness in humankind. People commonly take such action to fulfill a human need or to reach some human growth. At this stage, the person asks for God's grace and feels Christ above or behind him or her. Next, the disciple feels the desire to *serve*, and goes through some purification so that he or she hears the call to stand next to Christ laboring for the Reign of God. Finally, the disciple comes to live not only *with* but *in* Christ, and reaches being on *mission* with Christ. At this stage, what one does is Christ's mission, and somehow is not "self." The Cross runs through all four of these Weeks.

◆ "Introduction to embracing the Cross" resonates in our experience. The Notes' central assertion on the cross applies to every exercitant in every Annotation: "accepting the cross means choosing to accept the gift of life in one's own *subjecta materia*, one's concrete gifts in a disordered world." Those who make Annotation 18 Exercises, we expect, will learn that even in suffering they are to keep a proper relationship (that is, Jesus') with God the Father, who dared to give this same experience of suffering to the Son. For God protects us *in* suffering, not *from* suffering. All exercitants come to accept suffering in the knowledge that Jesus died for me: Jesus Christ gives *meaning* to suffering. Or another way to put the pattern: diakonia, koinonia, and the kenosis / apeinosis.

Here are a few of our reflections about how the cross runs through the Weeks: The reality of the cross lurks in the shadows of the Principle and Foundation, in genuine indifference. Its presence must surely be in the director's mind while the exercitant prays the Principle.

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The exercitant, however, will be experiencing the rise of hope, particularly from seeing personal history within the whole of salvation history, and will be finding the boldness to follow The Way and Jesus Christ. Hence, the exercitant will not yet be fully aware of how the Principle entails the cross. Hope continues into the First Week, when the exercitant stands at the cross of Jesus and finds that Jesus did this for each of us--one is not one's own redeemer! The exercitant has to accept his powerlessness and helplessness. He surrenders to the love of the crucified and risen Lord. In doing so he finds access to God's wisdom which is described in 1 Cor. 1:18-31. (We found the text on the First Week here a bit short. The Paschal mystery seems to us to be very central.)

In the Second Week, the exercitant is getting ready to face the cross--the real cross in his or her life--and so prays and makes offerings so that fear will not stand in the way of freedom and a holy election. In the Triple Colloquy [168], the exercitant finds the desire to be a companion of Jesus--as the Notes put it--with him who suffered out of love for me, so that out of love for Him, I might be admitted to his way of actual poverty, obscurity, and ignominy (if the Father so choose). The whole point here is love for Jesus Christ. How many people can honestly and actually make the prayer in the Triple Colloquy? Few. Yet exercitants do make this colloquy. Some have to go directly against some yearning or desire [16, 157]; all make an offering to imitate Jesus and accept all the consequences [98]. These experiences prepare one to embrace the cross in imitation of Christ.

The Third Week is not easy to integrate since the point is to be with Jesus in his suffering, not to find and embrace one's own cross. Once again it becomes clear that the whole issue is love for Jesus Christ. The exercitant has to be with Jesus with all his or her forces. Some go through great darkness; some have a hard time entering into Jesus' pain, so that to actually make the colloquy, they have "to force [themselves] to grieve, be sad, and weep." Throughout the Week, exercitants are summoned to have Jesus' experience of trusting--of being able to trust--only and solely in the Father. And this is worth noting: When exercitants can indeed consider the pain of Jesus, and leave aside their own, they find themselves helped to join the poor.

The Fourth Week, too, requires self-forgetfulness. In a real experience of Jesus Christ's joy, all things become transparent and Christ is everywhere. The exercitant matures and begins to move into what the Church has achieved through the centuries. He or she reaches a deep inner peace in the middle of the real ugly world. Now, one has come into a new mode of the presence of Christ, Victor for the whole of humankind.

♦ A conclusion: We find these Notes a good beginning, and would want to insist that the *process* may be rather more important than any document at all. If we are to share the wisdom of experienced people around the globe, we will have to continue this dialog.

*Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, 21 March 1998*

## Response Two: The Cebu Seminar

*Précis: These lay and Jesuit directors of retreat houses and programs participated in the Seminar: Mr E. Alaba, Cebu Fr M. Amoros SJ, Tokyo; Fr V. Baltazar SJ, Manila; Fr V. Calpotura SJ, Manila; Fr J. Cavanagh SJ, Saipan; Fr P. Chan SJ, Hong Kong; Fr S. Chu SJ, Taipei; Fr J. Clarkson SJ, Nagasaki; Fr P. Coutinho SJ, Pune India; Fr H. Fernandes SJ, Singapore; Br. K. Huddy SJ, Sevenhill Australia; Fr V. Hurley SJ, Sydney; Mr D Paradel, Cebu Br R. Priyarsa SJ, Klaten Utara Indonesia; Fr R. Rice SJ, Cebu Fr M. Smith, Melbourne; Fr M. Sriyanto SJ, Klaten Utara Indonesia. The participants spent the two weeks after Easter at the Jesuit Retreat House in Cebu holding long spiritual conversations about their successes and failures in giving Exercises, and about Christ in their cultures. They spent a full day on the final section of Notes. These are some minutes of that long conversation.*

**1. Concerning the cross in the Exercises.** The fundamental dynamic and pedagogy of Exercises lies first of all in embracing the will of God for self and for the world, as far as possible without letting sin and disorder affect our choices. The Exercises do not focus on the cross directly, as some forms of piety might. The Exercises focus on Jesus Christ himself--on knowing and loving and being in communion with him. The Notes must suggest really clearly that choosing to embrace the cross is a consequence of choosing to love and embrace Christ.

At the same time, when the exercitants open themselves to God's actual love for us, they find the cross. For the cross is the real way that God achieved our salvation. The cross is the way that Jesus Christ chose. They must be in touch with that, and at the same time, in touch with their own real selves.

**2. Concerning the meaning of the cross.** This section needs filling out, as it does not mention the Resurrection clearly enough. Jesus' cross shows God's love for humankind, so that in the first instance it is not just about suffering, and it must be immediately understood that for us, the cross leads to the Resurrection. Cross and Resurrection must not be separated. To "embrace the cross" for us means to embrace the mystery of Jesus' death and Resurrection in our own selves and lives, and most especially in our own suffering. This is how a priest in prison because of political persecution could feel immense joy in his sufferings.

In the Exercises, the contemplation of Jesus' life brings us to know that Jesus came to do the Father's will through his "total embrace of sinful human nature," as the Notes say, which brought him to the cross. To follow him, then, we embrace the Father's will in our sinful human nature. This is an important point, and in a way it completes the Principle and Foundation, because God tells us to embrace our humanness as we find it. This is God's will for us.

Jesus embraced the cross not in itself as though it were a good, but as the means to the redemption of humankind. In Gethsemani, he begged to have the cup pass away, but then willingly drank it. When we love God and remain faithful, we find ourselves in

situations we would rather not be in, and we have experiences which we would prefer not to have. To follow Jesus, we embrace them in the same way that Jesus embraced his. For those who love, suffering is transmuted; it remains suffering, but is embraced willingly out of love.

As the Notes say--and the point needs to be made emphatic--"the cross comes with every humble obedience to Christ our Creator and Lord."

**3. Concerning the social meaning of the cross.** The Notes suggest that the "experience of Exercises leads to a recognition" that each Christian must take personal responsibility for the sinful disorder in society, for structured evil. What should be made clear is that this "recognition" is actually an *election*. It is a *breakthrough*, a response to Christ inviting me to collaborate with His work of redemption of sinful humanity.

The person who makes *Spiritual Exercises* comes from a concrete background in which social disorders may be very prominent--as is poverty in our regions, for instance, and sometimes political violence. Each person's apprehension of the cross, appreciation of what it is, and embrace of their real concrete crosses, will be colored by this concrete background. The director of *Spiritual Exercises* must know how to help each exercitant integrate their concrete background into their embrace of the cross. In this, the Notes justly say that "the fundamental sense of the cross is linked to mission in the world," which must be understood as mission in the exercitant's real, concrete world.

**4. Concerning the Weeks.** By the time the exercitant comes to the Kingdom, they feel the invitation to live as Jesus lived, serving the Kingdom and yet being poor and--if the Father chooses it--even despised.

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our salvation*

The exercitants learn to distinguish among the sufferings they face in life. The Father is not a harsh vengeful God, and no one is called upon to "pay back" Jesus by their sufferings. They must be led to know and never to forget this. They will be helped by observations like Elizabeth Johnson's concerning Christ, the compassion of God. They do not necessarily have to understand theology like Moltmann's thesis that God

suffers in Christ, or Schillebeeckx's thesis that God is present in Christ's sufferings--but considerations like those help exercitants to a full experience of God the Father.

The Notes ought to remark that embracing the cross will require discernment and choices of experiences to embrace and experiences to shun.

The Notes describe an understanding of God's work in the world when they remark that "*taking up the cross* means the radical decision to walk as Jesus walked with the Father." This takes up the thought that Jesus completely committed himself both to the will of the Father and to sinful human nature, as we noted earlier.

*integrate their concrete  
background into their  
embrace of the cross*

In the Third Week, it might be noted that the first colloquy directs the exercitant to ask to feel sorrow, regret, and confusion *because* of what Jesus suffered. The second goes further than that into communion with Jesus, and directs the exercitant to ask to feel sorrow, regret, and confusion *along with* Jesus, which is a different experience. And it is the one we are talking about.

**5. Concerning some errors.** The first error to avoid is what the Notes call "Christian fatalism." The Exercises help exercitants avoid that fatalism by helping them avoid the sense of surrender, the sense that "I can't do anything," which leads through discouragement to inaction or to running away from pain and disorder. As we learned in the First Week to be with Jesus in his suffering, so we learn through embracing our own crosses to be simply present to others in their suffering.

*Cebu, The Philippines, April 21, 1998*

### Response Three:

Andrew Hamilton, S.J. Australia

*Andrew Hamilton is an Australian theologian who has studied ignatian and Jesuit spirituality. His earlier article ("Our Way of Proceeding" in #84) has evoked responses from many ignatian religious. He is the author of "In Sin Was I Conceived" in this issue.*

In general, I found the Notes interesting and pretty comprehensive. Certainly, they exposed the great limitations of my own experience. I shall confine my remarks to points which may be taken up in the next stage.

The main limitations of the Notes came from their objectivity. They presented without evaluation or making priorities the range of experience and judgment represented by the panel. What would interest me is a statement of the relative importance of the qualities, hopes, and experiences that are enumerated. A consideration like "the criteria for judging the choice of ministries" in the light of our recent experience would be helpful--particularly in the enumeration of those to whom we would prefer to give Exercises.

In the identification of what we are giving as Exercises, I wondered if the implicit model that distinguishes what are Ignatian Exercises from what are not Ignatian Exercises is the most helpful way of thinking. It leads to phrases like "nondescript retreats", surely a pejorative. Might it be better to conceive the *Exercises* as something which is shared to greater or lesser extent in various ways of working with people? Then, we can talk of the *full Exercises* for a sustained experience along the lines described by Ignatius, and of successively attenuated forms of *Exercises*, seeing the attenuation as marking, not a diminution in value, but only in formal Ignatian style.

The whole treatment seemed very centered on the individual person. Is this a necessary characteristic of Ignatius' conversational ministry, I wonder? Or is it simply the reflection of the ways in which we conceive and exercise the ministry of the *Exercises*? Is it a necessary disposition today that people have a sense of social sin and social grace before entering the Exercises, just as they need a sense of a loving God? Must the context of all the Exercises be *public* as well as *private*; or do we believe that the public dimension will be adequately appreciated when the person returns to live out the Exercises (provided that they have gained personal fruit from them)?

I liked the coverage of embracing the cross. This does seem central in Ignatius' vision. But it raises the previous point most strongly.

*Sydney, Australia, Sunday after Easter, 1998*

#### Response Four:

Michele Lavra, Sardinia, Italy

*Michele Lavra has been the Coordinator for the Apostolate of Spiritual Exercises in the Province of Italy for some years. He has given Exercises in all its forms. Recently, he described in the Spanish journal, Manresa, his experiences giving "light exercises" in the evenings. He has written on discernment and on direction, among many other topics, and is now the main writer of the Italian Jesuits' projected "Direttorio: Uno stile nel dare gli esercizi spirituali."*

##### **A few observations on formalities.**

The term "directory" is being used in recent Spanish and French documents (and English?). I like the term less and less; it would be convenient to find something less traditional and with less flavor of directiveness.

I have been distinguishing between *director* and *companion* [*accompagnatore*], each of which expresses only one component of spiritual help. It seems to me that it would be difficult in current terms to use Ignatius's expression "the one who gives Exercises," while the terms *exercitant* is more conciliatory. More and more in both writing and speaking, I adopt the word *guide*--spiritual guide, guide of the Exercises, and so on--which in Italian carries a meaning both more neutral and more expressive. Perhaps this would not be so in the other languages.

It would be timely to promote a more grammatically correct usage, by letting "Exercises" with a capital letter indicate the title of the book (so, Exercises of St Ignatius; or the third week of the Exercises) and using "exercises" in lowercase in the other contexts (give the exercises; exercises of prayer; the exercises of the first week; and so on). In general, I find either that Exercises is spelled with a capital in every case (which does not make much sense) or that the uppercase and the lowercase are used without any clear criterion.

##### **About the Six Points Proposed by the Questionnaire**



I can say in general that I found myself reflected a good deal in the recorded observations, in a particular way in the third question concerning what we expect will happen during exercises. I underline certain points in the section which would need further explanation or development. I refer, of course, especially to the actual situation in Italy as I currently perceive it.

A good deal of space and a lot of clarification must be given to the interactions between the spiritual exercises and the Scriptures. For we are witnessing today a dissemination of exercises that are very biblical but not very Ignatian. We made a great advance on the one hand by returning to Scripture, but we have suffered loss on the other hand by forgetting the Ignatian way of reading Scripture.

I do not understand, or at least not clearly, the description or distinction indicated between the *dynamic* of the Exercises and the *pedagogy*. The *dynamic*, it seems to me, refers to the explicitated movement of the Exercises as an objective process, which is really the essential way of the life of faith. This is then proposed to stir up the same movement or dynamic in the heart of the individual, as the subjective process. The *pedagogy*, on the other hand, indicates the specific measures--the times and the methods--to awake in the exercitant this personal assimilation of the way of the faith. The Holy Spirit is at work both in the objective process (*revealed* in Scripture, *inspired* in some way in the Exercises), and in the movements in the heart of the one making the exercises, to bring an increase in the liberty of the children of God. I am not sure I have managed to explain this well.

It would really be important to distinguish more clearly among these: *the exercises* in the full sense (Annotations 19 and 20); *some* exercises, done in the Ignatian style (Annotations I and 18); *themes* from Exercises, developed in popular preaching or catechesis; *pedagogy* of the Exercises, which refers to the characteristics of the style, which are applicable even to the full range of pastoral work.

*the Holy Spirit is at work both in the objective process and in heart of the one making the exercises*

Why make this distinction? I am thinking here, for example, of a common ambiguity in interpreting Annotation 19, which allows for giving the whole course of the exercises, but as an ordinary way to first conversion, or as a catechetical course, or perhaps as a group dynamic. These are done with good results, certainly. But the ambiguity comes out when, at the end of this process, generally two years long, it is proposed (here in Italy, at least) to make the thirty-day exercises. Well, what did they do to begin with? Why were they called "the exercises"? Would Ignatius have proposed to someone who had made the exercises seriously according to Annotation 19 that the person make exercises according to Annotation 20? It is necessary to make a clear distinction and to call things by their correct name to avoid ambiguity.

*the spiritual way needs to be awakened, with its objective and subjective processes*

Concerning the experience of the salvific dimension of the cross in spiritual exercises, I find myself in accord with the reflections reported by the Notes. I add these two observations:

The first: This whole discourse is very difficult and hazardous today because we live in a culture strongly characterized by elements all contrary to the logic of the cross: the loss of spontaneous reference to the Lord; consumerism that is sweeping and instantaneous; the search for the easy and the pleasant; technical means of security that coexist with frightful human insecurity; profound existential wounds that must be healed.

The second: the proposal of the way of the cross--so named for the disciple--ought not come suddenly, but at that identifiable point of the process when the person has already established a positive self-image (knowing himself loved and forgiven) and has desires to follow Jesus more closely. If the way of the cross is held out before its time and as the first proposal--to people wounded and without confidence--I do not know that we would be in line with the far-sighted patience of biblical revelation.

#### **Some other observations**

♦ For the sake of simplification, I limit myself in this remark to the experience of the thirty-day exercises. I notice a disproportion between the number of people who make it today (in one of its forms) and the results: the quality does not, it seems to me, match the quantity. The grounds are several, and concern the kinds of exercitants (many, many religious!), the criterion for being invited to the experience, and the way of proposing the month. I have a suspicion that we are far from the later disclosures of St Ignatius: "I give the month only to a few people." Things do not get more valuable by being sold cheaply but by making them more valuable, and by offering to each one the just food.

At the root of this disproportion between quality and quantity in exercises, I find another fact: the great amount of material in this area available today favors using the exercises as a *program* to follow--with points, outlines, groups, steps, and so on. What gets buried is the *spiritual way* that needs to be awakened, with its objective and subjective processes, following a definite pedagogy, personally guided, moving ahead or pausing according to the progress of the individual.

I am finding my way more and more firmly to separate three modes of giving spiritual help (following the traces in Ignatius's life and in his writing): Spiritual conversation, which very many of us can practice; Spiritual guidance (in everyday life), which a good number of people could offer; and guiding the spiritual exercises, which a small number are called to offer. In any case, it seems to me that these are three special ways of exercising the ministry of "helping souls" understood by Ignatius, and valid today. For each of them, different preparations and formations are required.

*Cagliari on Sardinia, Italy, 30 April 1998*

