

## AT THE FRONTIERS

### **MAZANGA IS THE JESUIT SPIRITUAL CENTRE IN NAIROBI, KENYA.**

It thrives—thirty-day, eight-day, week-end Exercises, programs, and workshops—like any other active retreat house. In one way, however, it is not like just any other: outreach. Fr Tony Sequeira, S.J., the Director, reports: "There have been various occasions on which the 19<sup>th</sup> Annotation Retreat has been requested or recommended. Perhaps most remarkable in Nairobi is that, in a parish run by the Missionaries for Africa, some priests and sisters have given the 19<sup>th</sup> Annotation retreat to parishioners with great profit. They have also selected some lay persons and trained them to guide others in the Exercises in Daily Life. The ongoing renewal of parish leaders through *Spiritual Exercises* contributes greatly to the spiritual life of the parish, as also to strengthening the Small Christian Communities which form the structure of the parish. This effort could be fruitfully supported and spread to other parishes, for the greater good of the Church."

Fr Sequeira does not really have to say by whom this fruitful program has to be "supported and spread." It takes the local ordinary, the pastors, and above all, some leadership in the houses and centers. At any rate, that combination has gotten things going in places as far apart as Germany, Australia, and Wales. The combination has launched a program at the Jesuit Retreat House in Cebu, Philippines, spearheaded by Mr Dindo Paradela, member of CIS, and his colleagues Engelberto Alaba and May Alfafara. Contact: Anthony Sequeira, S.J., Mwangaza / P.O. Box 15057 / Nairobi, Kenya. FAX: +254-2 890 987.

**THE REAL TRUTH ABOUT FR TONY DE MELLO** is less exciting than might have been suggested by the media frenzy last August. The real truth is also rather briefer. Here it is: Fr de Mello was not *condemned* by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. An unsigned, unofficial, and probably unwise article in *Osservatore Romano* sounded rather more harsh. But what the Congregation, itself, did was issue to the bishops of the world a *notification*. If the bishops chose, they could require those who sold books

with Fr de Mello's name on them to insert into each copy a little note. The little note was to say: Read this book carefully. Not so bad; the same was said of John Courtney Murray's book about Church-state relations, *We Hold These Truths*, until a number of the truths were adopted by Vatican II as the Church's official position.

Fr de Mello wrote nine books and only nine, according to Fr Xavier Diaz del Rio. He ought to know; he holds the copyrights at India's publishing house, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash. Four appeared during the author's lifetime: *Sadana*, *The Song of the Bird*, *Wellsprings*, *One Minute Wisdom*. A fifth and sixth were in process when Fr de Mello died, the two volumes of *The Prayer of the Frog*. The seventh, eighth, and ninth were being polished by Fr de Mello when he died. After careful review by some who knew him well, they were published posthumously: *Contact with God*, *One Minute Nonsense*, *Call to Love*.

But after his death, books began appearing with his name — their titles will not appear here — which he did not write. They have to be called "post-posthumous publications," surely an oddity. These books appear to be recordings of his conferences. They are unfaithful at least to his mediums if not also to his message. For Fr de Mello understood better than anyone how the spoken word affects listeners differently from the way the written word affects readers. He carefully and thoroughly re-wrote and edited every manuscript before submitting it for publication. He went further. When the material of a talk depended particularly on his tone of voice and his gestures, he would ask that no one tape the talk. Did he discover that someone was taping it in spite of his request, he would stop his talk and leave the room.

Remember all of this when a little printed message falls out of the next copy you buy of one of Fr de Mello's nine books on living more wholeheartedly as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

**FROM THE RETREAT HOUSE, CESKY TESIN, BOHEMIA,** Fr Jiri Sykora responded to 'Notes for the One Giving Exercises.' He is the director of the house. His response is actually a description of what happens when the frontier of religious freedom opens up: "When I want to speak about my experience with spiritual retreats I have to take into account some specific

aspects. (1) There was not for 40 years any religious freedom in the Czech republic and thus people had not any occasion to make the Exercises. So it is something new for them. (2) On the other hand, some people remember an old way of giving Exercises. I mean a kind of lecture about some religious issue and then individual prayer but without possibility of speaking with a director. So people want to hear something interesting—but they are surprised to hear that they are supposed to do something on their own. (3) There are people who search for spiritual guidance through the Exercises and vice versa. Unfortunately I am the only one who does this work and I wish we were at least three or five. (4) People who have an experience with individual Exercises are very happy with them and often come back. I can tell about a group of friends of this retreat house who have been coming back for three years. (5) The number of people who try to find their vocation during the Exercises is growing. I help them with the process of discernment more and more. (6) People want to speak with me. They want to be sure that there is someone who has time for them and who will listen to them. So the Exercises are for them in some way a substitution for the lack of parish care. (7) A lot of people are meeting, for the first time, ignatian spirituality and way of prayer. This brings them a new energy for their lives. And ignatian spirituality also helps them to discover another face of Christianity. (8) I think that lay people appreciate the Exercises more than priests and get more benefit from them. They seem to be more open for God's work in their souls during the Exercises. (9) Environment helps a lot. The importance of silence—the whole atmosphere has a very good and strong impact on people."

A new frontier clarifies what really matters, even for those of us back in the comfortable settlements. Contact: Jiri Sykora, S.J.: Director, Retreat House / Masarykovy sady 24 / 737 01 Cesky Tesin / The Czech Republic. E-mail: <cistesin@traveller.cz>

**LAITY AND RELIGIOUS HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATING THEMSELVES** for centuries. The Jesuit Thirty-First General Congregation urged "closer communion and association" with those laymen and women "who have shared more intimately our spirituality and way of feeling and acting" [590]. Many of the Ignatian Congregations are well along in developing these tighter bonds,

among them the Sisters of Mercy, the Congregation of Saint Joseph, and the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. Members of the last, the SHCJ, raised the issue in the Twenty-Fourth General Chapter this winter in Rome. Reflecting on Cornelia Connelly's dictum, "The ways of God are many and He knows how to lead to the same end by diverse means," the Chapter adopted a now-standard definition: "We define *members* as those who live, or who are preparing to live, permanently vowed life in the community of the Society. We define *associates* as women and men who enter into formal relationship with the Society, rooted in the charism of Cornelia Connelly and sharing in our mission."

The SHCJ wants to keep learning from the experiences of both members and associates. So the general chapter required each province to "establish a group of associates and SHCJ to draw up criteria for forms of association." The central leadership team in Rome is to encourage communication of these criteria around the provinces. SHCJ, like the rest of us, does not yet know where this is leading, or whether the ultimate forms of association have yet begun to appear, "forms which could include more than vowed members and associates." We have good historical reason to believe that St Ignatius would find this all quite fine. Done properly, an associateship might have saved him and his colleague, Isabel Roser, from a rather vexing misstep. However done, associates (religious and lay) seem to be the next step today. Contact: SHCJ Generalate / Via della Maglianella, 379 / 00166 Rome, Italy.

**THE EXPERIENCE COULD BE INTERESTING**, Fr Marco Rueda writes to his province from the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador in Quito. He goes on to say that even there, they continue working at retreats for faculty and students in the university community—for eight years now. Participants are asked to do three things. "First, they gather for an hour and a half once a week in the evening after classes are over. During this time, there is a conference for the group, then a presentation of the materials for the coming week. The participants receive a 'road map,' always two long pages indicating how to proceed, the grace to ask, a development of the material with scripture passages (basically, these present the way laid out by St Ignatius), and finally some observations and clarifications. Second,

they commit themselves to pray for at least half an hour daily. This is the fundamental commitment. And third, they agree to have a session with a guide at least every other week. We have managed to do this with four priests. Each of us takes a turn presenting the broad outlines of the materials, and from the four of us, the participants usually choose a guide. The number of participants has sometimes been pretty large, but ordinarily it's been between forty and fifty. Usually we've managed to hold at least two weekends—one at the end of the First Week for a serious penance service and the other around the time of the 'elections'—and often we've held a final weekend at the end of the Exercises.

"It is a big risk to omit talking to them about the discernment of spirits. At the beginning, they feel anxious to know what God's will is, right now, without recognizing that this is the purpose of the whole experience. And then, when the time comes to make an election, they cannot face their struggle. In my opinion, Fr Cusson's approach is the preferable one in ordinary cases: It is better to choose to follow Jesus, at the level of an absolute commitment to live the Gospel radically." Contact: P. Marco V. Rueda, SJ. Centre Ignaciano de Espiritualidad (CIDE) / Apartado 17-08-8629 / Quito, Ecuador.

**SPECIAL LITURGICAL TRAINING** for Jesuit pastors was required by GC34. Its wisdom is proven by events. From someplace in the world of liturgical renewal comes the report that a new immersion pool for baptisms has got good use. The first to be baptized, however, was a rather ample person who had been given the simple instruction: recline and allow the priest slowly to immerse the baptizand's head. Theoretically sound. But this person was a floater, and despite all of reverend father's efforts, could not be dunked. Aforesaid baptizand thrashed about mightily and dampened in goodly measure priest and all bystanders. We must learn more from the Baptists who have been doing this for centuries. Contact: any of them.

**THE E-MAIL TOPIC "JESUITS AND JEWS"** caught the attention of both Jesuits and colleagues. The item reported the First International Congress of Jesuits who work in Jewish-Christian relations. It met in Krakow, Poland, on 27-31 December 1998, more than thirty years after Vatican II's *Nostra*

*Aetate* radically renewed this dialogue. The meeting's purpose, "Towards Greater Fraternity and Commitment," honored GC34's claim that "sincere and respectful relationship with the Jewish people is one aspect of our efforts to 'think with and in the Church'" [149]. The congress, hosted by the South Polish Province and organized by the Secretariat for Interreligious Dialogue, gathered forty Jesuits from nine assistancies. They shared concerns, experiences, and their research in four areas: (1) Biblical themes relevant to Jewish-Christian relations now. (2) Historical research on Christian attitudes towards Jews, the experience of the Holocaust, and Jewish-Christian relations after it. (3) The encounter with modern Jewish thought. (4) Interreligious concerns in the state of Israel. They marked the event with a memorial service at Birkenau, led by a rabbi who acted as a peritus for the Congress, and Jesuit Fathers Joseph Sobb of Austria and James Conn of Maryland.

The group discussed plans for a meeting in Jerusalem in the year 2000: a Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue. They proposed to repeat the congress as part of that dialogue. Anyone interested in knowing more about either Jerusalem 2000 or the projected Second International Congress, contact: Tom Michel, S.J., Secretary for Interreligious Dialogue, at the Jesuit Curia in Rome, e-mail: <interrel@sjcuria.org>

**THE WORKSHOP ON THE FAMILY** convened by the then Provincial of Spain, Fr Melecio Agundez, took place last year in Alcala de Henares. Participants included fifty Jesuits, a diocesan priest, and twelve married couples. The objective of the workshop was "an apostolic strategy adapted to the opportunities and demands of a new culture." The keynote address, an analysis of the current situation, was given by the director of the Department of Sociology at the Pontifical University of Comillas. A response, opening some issues from a point of view complementary to the sociological, was given by a priest of the diocese of Huesca. Three briefer presentations by lay men and women outlined the various responses to the current situation: unbelieving couples, broken marriages, and marriages among believers. There was small-group work in the mornings, and in the afternoons, meetings by apostolic sectors: Colleges and universities; Parishes

and residences; Centers of Faith and Justice and the intellectual apostolate; and, finally, Marriage movements.

Then each Jesuit province met separately. Each laid the basis for follow-up in the province, following the line of conclusions they had come to. In a final general session, the Pastoral Delegate from each province indicated how he would proceed after the workshop ended. What were the conclusions? "That a lot of Jesuits work in the pastoral care of families, one way or another; that we have a good deal to learn about the spirituality of marriage; that we have to work *with* married people and not just *for* them. And a lot more." Contact: P. Carlos Maria Sancho de Claver, SJ. / Medico Vicente Torrent, 3,20 / 46015 Valencia, Espana.

**ADAPTING EXERCISES TO THE GLOBAL CULTURE** means *spiritual Exercises* on internet. Not the text of the book; but week by week, the Exercises for prayer, throughout the year. Daily points and sound instructions are always waiting for the exercitant at The Creighton University's *Online Exercises in Eiteryday Life*. It announces that, "The Online Retreat for Everyday Life is a new medium adaptation of the kind of 'exercising' that has been a school to learn to find God in the midst of a busy life, a source of great personal freedom for service, and a way to face important life choices. Come visit the retreat site today: <<http://www.creighton.edu>>." The work of the Ministry Team, the homepage has an interesting feature. Every week the directors put on the internet a picture representing the theme for the week. The picture is programmed to be downloaded as a screen saver. Retreatants see on their computers, all during the day, something that reminds them of the Exercises. A sort of postmodern mantra.