

AT THE FRONTIERS

At the start of the third millennium, frontiers seem to be everywhere. Which ones should interest those who live ignatian spirituality? Here are a few where religious and laity are collaborating in doing justice, giving Christian education, and forming spiritual companions. And a few more where laity and religious partners develop the frontier of the new evangelization.

15

SIX KINDS OF COLLABORATION, by any count, show up in a spare account of the activities at Belgium's Centre Spirituel "La Pairelle."

This is the Jesuit retreat house at Wépion, about forty-five miles south of Brussels (if that helps), in a spacious park in the countryside near Namur (the second *N* in S*N*D*d*N, since we're being helpful). The center is run by the Jesuits of Belgium's French-speaking province with the help of religious (1) and a team of lay people (2). La Pairelle offers *Spiritual Exercises* in the long retreat and in eight-day retreats, and also three-day retreats, commonly done in silence. The team also gives sessions on themes—for nurses, for instance, or the professional life—and offers weekends for families and for married or engaged couples (3). The center, of course, also welcomes individual retreatants for their own Exercises. For young adults between eighteen and thirty-five, the center offers a rather rustic accommodation, "Bethanie," out on a farm (4). Perhaps indicative of a development in French-speaking Belgium, the center will offer a special session in French this coming May on giving *Spiritual Exercises* according to Annotation 19 (5). The workshop will be guided by Christian Grondin, the lay director of Quebec's Centre Manrèse (6), long active in Exercises in Daily Life. For more information about the Centre search at a www.lapairelle.be or contact the director, Robert Huet, SJ at robert.huet@lapairelle.be, who can explain all the rest about collaboration.

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES IN ZAMBIA are fairly easy to see but hard to measure. As they are in too many other places, the signs of increasing poverty are everywhere: lowered living standards, declining life expect-

tancy, shrinking farm production, falling levels of income that create a “new poor.” The regular stuff of journalism, cinema, and song, these pervasive “signs” do not of themselves enable or provoke effective action, which has to begin by connecting fact with reflection. Here is where “The JCTR Food Basket Survey” proves its worth. The JCTR—in case this is one too many acronyms—is the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, a research, consultancy, and training project set up by the Zambia-Malawai Province. In its Food Basket Survey, the centre has been making a monthly report since 1996 on how much it costs for a family of six in Lusaka to live (or, as it reports, “indeed, to survive”). The Food Basket gathers just the most basic food and living commodities and sets the average cost for the month. As for *fact*, The Basket is as much a measure of Lusaka’s cost-of-living as of anything else. But as for *reflection*, the Centre points to what the measure really means: The cost of that basket measures how close or far the people are from having just the basic resources for a life of human dignity and freedom. It concludes that Zambians in rural areas have to apply three-quarters of their resources to this basic basket alone, so they have few resources left for education, health, and human development, not to mention leisure for worship and play. Even in urban areas, Zambians typically spend two-thirds of their monthly incomes on this basic basket. And it’s getting worse all the time.

The center, in the person of Muweme K. Muweme, colleague on the JCTR Staff and editor of its bulletin, contends two things. First, The Basket methodology needs to be fine-tuned in several ways (price differentials, definition of basics, and so on). And second, The Basket offers an urgent motivation to re-legislate the economy and the polity for the sake of the poor. He does not seem to be alone in that contention: The Basket is faxed and e-mailed to the media, to government offices, and to NGOs. It is regularly featured on state television. The United States’ embassy featured it recently in its newsletter. The Basket has been used by unions in their wage negotiations and by foreign employers to set salary levels and conditions of employment. Few of the folk who use it for justice’ sake are aware that in, The Basket project, they are finding God working for the poor. None of them are likely to miss the fact that in the JCTR, they are

finding faith doing justice. Contact: Mr Muweme K. Muweme, jctr@zamnet.zm or www.jctr.org.zm on the Internet.

WHAT DO YOU DO AFTER YOU HAVE DONE THE BEGINNING? You are training or teaching or forming people to give *Spiritual Exercises*. After you have accompanied them in a sound experience of the Exercises, helped them with ongoing spiritual direction, and perhaps introduced them to the *Autobiography*—then what?

Fr Anthony Horan created an easily replicable paradigm with a dozen young Jesuits this year in Birmingham. His course helped participants to learn active listening within the ignatian experience and framework. The young Jesuits—all right, this was an all-Jesuit exercise, but don't tune out, it's transferable—the young Jesuits *practiced* spiritual companioning. They worked mainly in threes (in *triads* is current jargon), when one spoke, one listened, and the third observed. As they switched partners around, they told their immediate experiences in prayer, their history in grace, and how their image of God had changed. After a bit of this practice, they gave one another an abbreviated, one-on-one retreat in daily life, two weeks during which they saw each other four times, at the end of which the retreatant reported to the guide what had helped or not helped. At strategic times during these weeks, Fr Horan also did some role-playing, taking the part of a retreatant at important junctures in the Exercises. Fortified with all this, these beyond-the-beginners were invited to guide students at one of the colleges in London through a month of prayer, two sessions a week, with supervision from Fr Horan and a lay colleague (it seemed as though she would never come up, and she was involved right along). One pragmatical evaluation: the administrators of the colleges immediately wanted to schedule the event for next term.

*as they switched partners
around, they told their
immediate experiences
in prayer*

Fr Horan's own assessment of the course will surprise no one who has helped beyond-the-beginners, young or mature: they were enthusiastic about moving right to experience, but were less enthusiastic about the

(necessary) lectures. They quickly came to trust one another and communicated with considerable spiritual candour. This last, in Fr Horan's opinion, was one of the main benefits of the exercise. Overall, he judged the course worthwhile and felt glad to have had the opportunity to do it. This is consolation with a cause, surely an experience to be repeated. Contact: Fr Anthony Horan, S.J. / Manresa House / from abroad, FAX +44-121 428 1833; and at manresa@btinternet.com

LAY PARTNERS TEACH RELIGIOUS PARTNERS SOMETHING. Anyhow, the official documents of just about every Ignatian Congregation consider that an established fact. What lay partners in schools and social centers have taught their religious partners, particularly about justice, we already recognize. Now, it seems, lay partners who work in spirituality, particularly in Exercises in Daily Life—which is just about everywhere on earth—are trying to say something. It seems to go like this.

Half-century ago, the Company of Jesus and the Ignatian Congregations learned to give retreats one-to-one, eliciting the full authentic dynamic of

*an experience that goes
to find them where they
are in the beginnings of
faith and hope*

Spiritual Exercises. Those retreats were for an elite who could take out thirty days together or eight days, repeatedly. Historical and critical scholarship were at hand to help directors [*sic*] give the authentic thirty-day retreat; the scholarship had not done much at all to prepare guides and companions for what came next.

What came next? At the turn of millenniums, great numbers of people are coming to Exercises who are *not* a spiritual elite. They do not even feel themselves deeply established in their religion. They need an experience that goes to find them where they are, honestly, in the beginnings of faith and hope, and then sets them right back into their daily lives in all its concrete particulars, now loving and serving God better. They have no chance to experience the long retreat or even an eight-day retreat, and they ordinarily cannot even imagine themselves trying to. The fact is that many find the silence of a three-day ignatian retreat a bit uninviting (often, but not always, a cultural matter). On top of all of this, the scholarship of the past

century does not offer much direct help to those who want to help these Catholics and other Christians.

Perhaps the skilled practitioners and experts among the religious partners need to listen humbly to the lay partners who are not only working with this great number of people but recognize that they belong among them. What they are saying is this: *groups*. Exercises in groups. A great variety of design, but groups. Lay people in Calcutta and Lusaka (see the entry down below), in Cebu and Lisbon, are giving their witness to Jesus Christ through the Exercises in groups. They are only rarely articulate and even more rarely know that their local experience is pertinent globally. But one particularly articulate lay partner, when asked, wrote this about his local group:

"We feel Spirit led to facilitate the Exercises in the way we received them. We don't have the time or the urging within our hearts to learn to facilitate the Exercises in the traditional one-to-one approach. After facilitating the Exercises in small groups we have experienced the advantages of the small group and recognize its disadvantages. It's like the difference between a custom-made, fitted suit and six ready-made suits taken off the rack. The custom suit will be marvelous. The six suits taken off the rack will be: a wonderful suit for two, a good suit for two more, and will help the last two to be warmer and better clothed. It's the difference between a hothouse plant that is near perfection because of all the personal care given to it and a great field of wheat. Some wheat stalks will be tall, others will be not so tall. And we are seeing that the wheat field is getting larger, fulfilling Ignatius' fond hope that exercitants take the Exercises to others. We neither claim nor seek perfection in facilitating the Exercises. We seek to be vessels carrying the Exercises to others, with trust and love and prayer, and experiencing that the Holy Spirit indeed does the rest."

*what they are saying
is this: groups.*

Exercises in groups.

*A great variety of design,
but groups*

Is this the lesson our partners are trying to teach us? If so, it might make expert guides wonder whether "remaining in a balance" while considering

valuable only one-to-one Exercises, may actually be limiting the Spirit in their time and place.

CARDINAL CARLO MARTINI, still Jesuit and even more ignatian, has as his apostolic mission under obedience to govern the diocese of Milan, once governed by Saint Ambrose. Following leads given by that saint, he has re-established a form of collaboration which he describes as “the oldest rite of consecration of women in the Church, going back to the earliest Christian times.” It is the consecration of single women to God in the local church. Cardinal Martini is also following the Second Vatican Council, which called for a renewal of this beautiful way of “following Christ more closely.”

Collaborating with the interested women of the diocese, he has drawn up a set of norms and a way of proceeding. His document begins with Ephesians’s first chapter, “God has chosen us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and spotless in his sight in love, predestined to be his adopted children.” The language of the document is fragrant with the ignatian mysticism of union with God at work in the world, and speaks candidly and calmly of the women’s spousal union with Jesus Christ. The women live separately but gather regularly for prayer and sharing and planning. The Church recognizes that their service begins in living “an evangelical style of life, thereby becoming wellsprings of living holiness.” They commit themselves to daily prayer in silence with the Word of God and to daily Mass. They develop their own special charisms and gifts and through their ordinary work join ordinary people in their joys and hopes and sorrows. What further service they may give—it includes religious and other professional kinds of work—they discern with their bishop or his delegate.

The Jesuit archbishop of Milan recognizes that women of consecrated life, who are called by God to evangelize and unite the Church, may find their prophetic witness to God acting day-by-day in the world “from time to time unappreciated or hostilely received.” Clearly. So it is correct to say that this spousal union is “counter cultural.” However, it is counter not only to the culture of Italy, but to every human culture on earth. This

profoundly quiet consecration—when will men catch on?—is every bit as prophetic as St Edith Stein’s and perhaps a bit more accessible.

LIKE A REALLY GOOD RUMOR, the Exercises in Daily Life can spread right through a city. This is what Judge Francisco Fermat (see the interview in #90) reports about his city. There was only one guide for a handful of people four years ago; this year, there are ten lay people guiding about sixty exercitants, Catholic and otherwise Christian. In addition, four faculty members and students of an established Protestant seminary, Fuller, having gone through the program themselves, are now guiding more than two dozen of their peers through the Exercises during the academic year. The rumor has moved further: one exercitant from 1997 moved to another city and is now guiding nine men in his new parish. So it goes in many cities on every continent. Like a really juicy rumor.

DR LE XUAN HY AND FR DOMINIC HUNG NGUYEN formed a partnership to promote *ejercicios leves*, genuine Annotation 18 Exercises. They came across some good materials, and “decided to pilot test these simple exercises” in a few groups. The materials Fr Nguyen reports are not so light: God as intimately Creator and Lord; every hour is a gift, and the life of grace is an outright gift; sin spoils the world and the self; and Jesus Christ is the only Redeemer. As he tells it: “In November 2000, we had planned to implement a pilot program with two or three small Dong-Hanh [Vietnamese Christian Life Community] groups.” They were surprised when more groups accepted the invitation right away, and surprised again that by December, eight groups and by January, two more groups had started. Among these, “are seven Vietnamese-American groups, two American groups, and one Vietnamese-Canadian group. They are all over North America, and I am in touch with the group facilitators by phone, mail, and e-mail.” Dr Le, Fr Nguyen, and a colleague, Mrs. Mong-Hang, are translating the materials into Vietnamese, partly because “the results after the first four weeks were outstanding. Praise the Lord.” And ask the Holy Spirit that the remaining weeks are also outstanding. Contact: Fr Dominic Hung Nguyen, S.J. / FAX +1-253 761 3539, and e-mail chungha@aol.com

IF BEING UNREADY IN TAIWAN IS FROWNED ON, so is being wrong. This review's last "At the Frontiers," p. 22, provoked a Taiwanese frown on two scores. First, the Ignatian Spirituality Center (ISC) that Sr Marthe Lai heads was inaccurately reported as a solo operation of her own congregation, Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception. Rather, ISC is a collaborative effort of the Missionaries, the Daughters of Jesus, the Christian Life Community, the Jesuits, and the Christian Service Community (a Chinese lay group of about a hundred members). It is housed in the Tien Educational Center, a tall Jesuit structure not far from the splendid park in the heart of Taiwan. The review's second error was that the ISC's executive committee had already decided to go full bore into formation for giving Exercises. Not yet; seems as though the ISC is still sifting options for collaboration. They are many.

WHY HAS IT TAKEN SO LONG for us to be shown the riches of praying with Scripture?" This was the evaluation of one participant in the first simple, six-day at-home retreat in Kabwata parish in Lusaka. Father David

*we depended even more
heavily than usual on
the Holy Spirit to enable
the members of the
sharing groups to guide
one another*

Cullen, a Missionary of Africa, got off to what he thought was a stuttering start in Advent in 1997. He and five other professionals—religious and priests—were the prayer-guides. All six were astonished at how quickly, and with how little instruction and encouragement, ordinary people took to mental prayer. They were also instructed by these lay people, learning "just how much the cost was for people to keep their trust in the Lord strong, with all the problems they faced," in Fr Cullen's words. And finally, they were somewhat

taken aback that the initiative to train prayer-guides among those laity came from those laity, themselves. The professionals had thought to take that initiative.

It has pretty much gone like from the start. In brief: Those who were interested continued to come on Sunday morning to share their prayer and

have occasional talks by the professionals (Fr Cullen was trained at St Beuno's). Then, Kabwata parish organized a retreat in Advent and Lent most years. When people started coming back more than once, the professionals invited them to make a six-month retreat in daily life according to Annotation 19. Twenty-eight accepted, prayed at least an hour a day, and came every Saturday morning for an hour and a half for group, not individual, guidance. Fr Cullen explains with wonderful directness that "we depended even more heavily than usual on the Holy Spirit to enable the members of the sharing groups to guide one another... so that the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises could be maintained."

Results? The group meets on the last Sunday of every month. Some of them have begun a program to learn how to give spiritual guidance. The members are particularly helpful in the Small Christian Communities of the parish, particularly with sharing on the Scriptures. Two of the men have begun helping prisoners learn to pray. Not bad for a stuttering start. Contact: Fr David Cullen, Missionaries of Africa / Kabwata Parish / P.O. Box 50164 / Lusaka, Zambia.