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# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

**“To Be More like Christ”**

*The Background and Implications  
of “Three Kinds of Humility”*

**BRIAN E. DALEY, S.J.**

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A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

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of “Three Kinds of Humility”

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*Brian E. Daley, S.J.*

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STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

27/1: January 1995

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## *For your information . . .*

As I hope you, our readers, have noticed, STUDIES, within its mission of publishing on the "spiritual teaching and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits," tries to present a variety of serious and contemporary topics in a variety of forms. Issues that appeared in the recent past, as well as this present issue and the one to follow, illustrate that attempt. Our September 1994 issue was in the form of a personal reflection on the vows. In November we highlighted Jesuit institutions and Jesuit beliefs about them, indeed myths about them. This present January 1995 issue approaches one of the central themes of the Spiritual Exercises, the "Three Kinds of Humility," from a historical point of view in a survey of the role of humility in the Christian spiritual tradition, in the Ignatian Exercises, and then in its implications for us today. In March we shall present a first in STUDIES, several short stories, or, as the author puts it, "some scenes from common life," and in May an essay on Jesuits and leisure!

During the preparation of the January and March issues, I shall be in Rome at the Thirty-fourth General Congregation. But that preparation of STUDIES will go on, as it has for some years now, with the talent and patience of John McCarthy, S.J., a member of the Wisconsin Province and one of the associate editors at the Institute of Jesuit Sources. He it is who is responsible for the intelligent editing, the careful proofreading, and, finally, for the computer-generated preparation of the camera-ready pages that go to the printer. To him all of us—and I especially—owe a debt of gratitude. (I shall have to order him not to delete this paragraph as he does that final preparation of this issue.)

Sometimes I suggest here books that you might find useful and interesting.

*Virtuous Passions: The Formation of Christian Character* is surely one of them. The author is G. Simon Harak, S.J., and the publisher is Paulist Press, New York (viii + 180 pages, \$11.95 paperback). As one of the reviews of the book says, virtue involves not only right acting but also right feelings, and one of our tasks is so to transform our passion that we "feel the right way about the right things at the right time" and for the right reasons. Of special interest to Jesuits is the discussion of the place of passion in the Spiritual Exercises. The book "shows why Christian morality really is a matter of a transformed heart." Fr. Harak, of the New England Province, during this last year held the John Early Chair in Religious Studies at Loyola College in Baltimore.

A few months ago the Institute of Jesuit Sources published a history of the first thirty Jesuit general congregations and an English translation of all their decrees, *For Matters of Greater Moment*. It is a big book (xii + 788 pp., \$47.95). Quite a bit shorter is



another book on the last three (the Thirty-first through the Thirty-third) general congregations. In *Together as a Companionship* (153 pages, \$14.95), the author whose lines you are here reading presents a history of those three congregations, meetings momentous in the documents they produced and much more so in the influence they have exerted on the Society of Jesus over the last thirty years. Now that author will be a participant (as he was at the Thirty-second Congregation) in the upcoming Thirty-fourth Congregation. Pray for him, please, and for the congregation and for the Society of Jesus.

*John W. Padberg, S.J.*  
*Editor*



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“TO BE MORE LIKE CHRIST”  
*THE BACKGROUND AND IMPLICATIONS*  
OF “THREE KINDS OF HUMILITY”

Introduction

In 1965, shortly after I arrived at Shrub Oak, the philosophate of the New York Province of the Society of Jesus, to begin studying philosophy as a Jesuit scholastic, I had my first interview with the man who was to be my spiritual father. He is a quiet, gentle, kindly person, with extremely bright and penetrating eyes and a low, somewhat irregular voice; he smiled a good deal but didn't say very much, letting me try—with my usual intolerance of silence—to fill the gaps in the conversation. I had just come from the novitiate, and we talked for a while about how that experience had gone, and about what I expected, positively and negatively, from philosophy. Then suddenly he skewered me with a direct question: “What do you think is the heart of Ignatian spirituality?” I rummaged furiously in my mind, trying to think of what might be the least stupid thing to say, on the basis of my very limited experience, and finally answered, “The third degree of humility, I suppose.” He nodded, and didn't seem to disagree.

I am sure I identified Ignatius's famous “consideration” on Three Kinds of Humility, from the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* (§§165–68),<sup>1</sup> as a central expression of his spirituality largely because our novice master had

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<sup>1</sup> Here and elsewhere I am citing from and using, with minor modernizations, the English translation of the *Spiritual Exercises* by Louis J. Puhl, S.J. (Newman Press: Westminster, Md., 1959). The section symbol (§) refers to the paragraph numbering used in that edition.

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suggested as much when explaining its contents to us in the Long Retreat. I probably suspected it was crucially important, too, because I found it the most difficult part of the Exercises to understand and make my own, the most puzzling and even threatening aspect of what I had assimilated of the Ignatian vision. If there was an Ignatian mountaintop to be climbed laboriously, or gazed on from afar, it must be here!

But I was surely not alone in thinking this passage central to Ignatius's thought. Joseph de Guibert, for instance, whose *Spirituality of the Society of Jesus* was regarded by many in the years before Vatican II as the most balanced and comprehensive synthesis of the Ignatian approach to the life of faith, states quite simply that "the most faithful interpreters of the saint's thought" all point to the consideration of Three Kinds of Humility as containing "the quintessence of that thought": the fusion of a "total supernatural logic," set out with such cool lucidity in the First Principle and Foundation of the *Exercises* (§23), with a passionate love of Christ that moves beyond logic and "raises the soul to participate fully in what is the crowning moment of redemptive life, the stripping and abuse of [Jesus on] the Cross."<sup>2</sup> For de Guibert the secret of what made Ignatian spirituality fruitful lay in this synthesis of logic and passion, of hardheaded practicality in living out the Christian Gospel fused with the enthusiastic, even mystical, commitment to embrace Jesus' whole way of life and death, "in order to conquer the world with him, for the service and the glory of the Father."<sup>3</sup> The consideration of Three Kinds of Humility, especially in its invitation to move from the state of indifference, which constitutes the second kind, to a real personal preference for "poverty with Christ poor, rather than riches, insults with Christ loaded with them, rather than honors," which constitutes the third, seemed to de Guibert and many other authorities to sum up that mysterious and fruitful Ignatian synthesis.

Today perceptions seem to be different. Despite the enormous amount of study and publication that has accompanied the renewal of our practice in making and directing the Exercises since 1965, little or nothing has been written specifically about the place of this text in the rhythm of the larger process. Ignatian bibliographies list some twenty-three articles on the Three Kinds of Humility written between 1919 and 1959, some of them substantial pieces by major authors,<sup>4</sup> but I know of nothing written specifically on the subject since

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph de Guibert, S.J., *La spiritualité de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1953), 164; English translation: *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* (Chicago, 1964; reprint, St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources: 1994).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> See J.-F. Gilmont, S.J., and P. Daman, S.J., *Bibliographie Ignatienne, 1894-1957* (Paris-Louvain: Desclée de Brouwer, 1958), 131f.; Paul Begheyn, S.J., and Kenneth Bogart, S.J., "A Bibliography on St. Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 23, no. 3 (May 1991).



Vatican II. To some degree, no doubt, this has been part of a general tendency to emphasize the apostolic aspects of Ignatian spirituality rather than the ascetical, the ecclesial and communitarian rather than the interior and incommunicably personal, the world-affirming rather than the world-denying. We want to bring good news of freedom and justice to the world and find it difficult, perhaps, to see how the humility Ignatius presents to us here fits into such a message.

Partly, too, our reticence may be due, within the Society of Jesus at least, to a certain sense of paradox, even oxymoron, in the notion of "Jesuit humility." We tend to have a strongly positive image of ourselves as a group, an almost mystical reverence towards our spiritual and corporate traditions; we stress success, communicate (perhaps not fully intentionally) a strongly competitive spirit to our younger members, and expect our institutions and works to strive for excellence in every possible way; we identify generosity, perhaps, or resourceful adaptability or the quest for the *magis* as central characteristics of our spirituality—so much so that a real indifference to success or failure, a deeply felt desire for obscurity, poverty, and a negative reputation in order to be more closely associated with Jesus, such as this part of the Exercises apparently recommends, may seem to many Jesuits a hypocritical pose, even a contradiction of our central spiritual identity.

More important still, perhaps, the culture we live in today tends to regard humility as an ambivalent or even a negative human quality. Preachers of the Gospel today are consciously concerned with liberation, with proclaiming equality, with building up the human in every individual or group constituting society, whatever their gender, race, or social background; we want no one to think of himself or herself as "lower" than anyone else, any more than we want them to be regarded as such by others. Contemporary popular psychology—and the popular spirituality it draws in its wake—stresses the importance of "feeling good about yourself," "knowing who you are," affirming your identity confidently before the world. Perhaps because of the high expectations we place on ourselves and each other in our more socially open world, egos today seem peculiarly vulnerable, self-confidence and a secure sense of identity harder to come by than in ages past; as a result, any brand of spirituality that accepts failure or values insignificance—that invites us even to *seek* insignificance as something positive and perfecting—appears unhealthy to many. In the Christian tradition, we identify humility with a perversely cultivated lack of self-esteem, and the tradition that has identified it as a virtue we regard as simply expressing neurotic negativity, unfounded guilt, or a piously cloaked ideology of male domination. And we tend, correspondingly, to suspect the sincerity of openly self-effacing action, to wonder if another person's apparent willingness to



sacrifice his or her best interests is really a way of controlling others by inducing guilt for doing what *they* are most inclined to do.<sup>5</sup>

Many of us, undoubtedly, have experienced some of this ambivalence in the course of exercising our own ministries. "I enjoyed your homily," a female student told me earnestly one day last year, after I had celebrated a school liturgy; "but I really disagree with your statement that Christian discipleship means 'self-emptying service.' That's just another name for subjugation!" Mentioning sacrifice, self-effacement or humility in a sermon will almost always touch someone's sensitive nerve, I have discovered, and often results in critical remarks from an angry worshipper on the way out of church. Contemporary practice in directing the Spiritual Exercises, too, tends to stress almost exclusively the need to encourage the retreatant to experience God's unconditional, unquestioning, all-accepting love; the sense of confrontation and judgment also aimed at in the meditations of the First Week or the invitation to be drawn into the diminishment of Jesus' way that plays such an important part in the Second presents many directors today with an apparently insoluble puzzle; it seems to many to be a part of the Exercises' sixteenth-century cultural baggage that can best be left at the door. As a result, the consideration of Three Kinds of Humility that Ignatius offers as an immediate prelude to the election is today, I suspect, often simply omitted from the program of the Exercises as misleading or even potentially harmful.

Hence it seems useful to look once again, if only briefly, at the meaning of humility in this famous text: to ask what the notion might have meant in the context of the long tradition of Christian spirituality Ignatius had inherited, and what role the consideration of Three Kinds of Humility plays in the structure of the Second Week and of the Exercises as a whole. Against this background, it will be easier and more fruitful to consider what importance

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<sup>5</sup> In her perceptive little book of reflections on early "desert spirituality," *To Love As God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), Roberta C. Bondi points out that the presentation of humility by classic Christian spiritual writers seems to many people today both negative and "repulsive." "Across the many centuries of the Christian era up to the modern world when women have been exhorted to be humble, humility included as one of its components being obedient to their husbands, fathers, brothers, and/or priests. Humility has been a shorthand word for recognizing and accepting an inferior position in the world. . . . The real difficulty is not so much that women have been taught to serve but that service seems to demand loss of self. The very phrase 'selfless love' raises a specter of a woman without any needs, desires, or even personality of her own" (43f.). For many, too, she argues, "humility" is associated with "manipulative self-sacrifice"—the "you take the only good chair" attitude—or with the cultivation of unjustified feelings of guilt: with "deliberately taking on ourselves a low self-esteem" (45). Bondi rightly argues that humility, in the Christian spiritual tradition, actually "has nothing to do with a low self-image" (44) and is really a necessary part of the road to realism, freedom, and a love mirroring "the humility of God" (see pp. 46–56, 104f.).



humility has for those today who are trying to live out their commitment to the Gospel of Christ with an Ignatian charism, and more specifically what "Jesuit humility" might mean in the light of our recent general congregations and in the shifting limits and opportunities of contemporary Jesuit life. We owe it to our own spiritual heritage to try.

## Humility before Ignatius

### The Greek Philosophical Ideal

In ancient Mediterranean culture, humility was not, in itself, prized as a human virtue. In the Greek tradition, the key to moral and spiritual excellence was a reasonable confidence in one's own powers and goodness, based on realistic self-knowledge and leading, in the long term, to self-sufficiency, freedom, and contentment. Balance, as an ideal for human goodness, found expression in the poets' maxim "Nothing in excess" and in Aristotle's teaching that human excellence or virtue is always some kind of "moderation," a middle position between dangerous extremes of ambition or behavior.<sup>6</sup> The Delphic motto "Know yourself" seems to have been an invitation not to introspection—as Cicero and Augustine later took it—but to recognition of one's limits as a human being, in both a positive and a negative sense: Know your gifts and powers; but know, too, that you are not a god, know where human intelligence and resources must meet their end.<sup>7</sup> The hybris that led to the downfall of a Croesus or an Oedipus was not an excess of self-esteem, but a self-confidence that went beyond the bounds of human knowledge and legitimate enterprise, leading to a blind and self-destructive independence of the larger cosmic order. Although the gods themselves were subject to fate, their role as executors of the ultimate order of things led them at times to act, in the view of poets and

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<sup>6</sup> "Nothing in excess" (μηδὲν ἄγαν): see, e.g., Theognis 335; Pindar Frag. 216; cf. Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1389b4. For "moderation" (μετριότης) as a norm of virtue, see especially Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 2.6 (1106b8–1107a6); 6.1 (1138b18). For the history of the notions of humility and magnanimity I am especially indebted to R.-A. Gauthier, O.P., *Magnanimité: L'Idéal de la grandeur dans la philosophie païenne et dans la théologie chrétienne*, Bibliothèque Thomiste, no. 28 (Paris; Vrin, 1951) and P. Adnès, "Humilité," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 7 (1969): 1136–87.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Pindar *Nem.* 6.1.1–11 (on the difference in power and knowledge between humans and the gods); Herodotus *Hist.* 7.10.55. For an introspective rereading of the phrase, see Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 1.22,52; Augustine *De Trinitate* X.12. Pierre Courcelle has written a remarkable history of the understanding of this maxim in Greek and Christian thought: *"Connais-toi toi-même" de Socrate à saint Bernard*, 3 vols., *Etudes augustinienes* (Paris, 1974–75).



popular philosophers, in ways reminiscent of the God of Israel, “putting down the proud and exalting the humble.”<sup>8</sup>

For all this sobriety and caution, however, the Greeks respected people who had a realistic appreciation of their own worth. Aristotle’s famous description of the qualities that reveal the virtue of *magnanimity* (μεγαλοψυχία) depicts a natural aristocrat, who “lays claim to great things when he is worthy of them.”<sup>9</sup> The foundation of magnanimity, for Aristotle, is the whole range of other virtues, of which it is the “crowning ornament.”<sup>10</sup> The magnanimous person knows he is genuinely good, able to perform well in most human respects, and is willing to make use of his gifts, and accept the rewards they bring, in a realistic way. Since the greatest reward of all, offered even to the gods, is *honor*, the magnanimous person is ready to claim his just share of that, as well; but he does so with moderation, just as he accepts wealth, power, social status, even good luck in a moderate way “and will not be over-joyful at good fortune or over-sorrowful at bad fortune”<sup>11</sup> He is, in fact, a man of indifference as far as earthly rewards are concerned, single-mindedly pursuing intrinsic human excellence, of whose realization he alone is the final judge. Aristotle’s magnanimous person is also courageous when need arises, likes to confer benefits on others more than he likes receiving them, stands on his mettle when dealing with important people but is easy and unpretentious in dealing with those less important than he, and only bestirs himself to compete for external prizes that are truly distinguished.<sup>12</sup> He is straightforward in speech, “cares more for the Truth than for what people think,” avoids gossip and slander, and shows his independence of need by liking to own beautiful rather than useful things. Even his body language suggests quality, Aristotle observes with almost comic precision: he cultivates a dignified, confident bearing, walking slowly and speaking in a deep voice.<sup>13</sup> Magnanimity is a virtue particularly found in young people, Aristotle remarks in the *Rhetoric*: they tend to think themselves worthy of great things because they are still “full of hope” and “have not yet been humbled by life.” Aging makes us more realistic, perhaps, but also makes us “small-minded.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Hesiod *Works and Days* 5ff.; Xenophon *Hellenica* 6.4.23; *Anabasis* 3.2.10; Diogenes Laertius *Vita philosophorum* 1.69.

<sup>9</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.3 (1123b1f; for the whole description of the magnanimous person, see 1123a34–1125a36); see also *Eudemian Ethics* 3.5 (1233a1–25); *Posterior Analytics* 213 (97b15–25).

<sup>10</sup> *Nic. Eth.* 1124a2f.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 1124a15f.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 1124b9–28.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 1124b27–1125a15.

<sup>14</sup> *Rhet.* 2.12.11 (1389a30–32).



Concrete as Aristotle's portrait is, his main point is to emphasize the "fit" between the magnanimous person's self-esteem and his or her real worth. To claim great honor when one is worthy of little is to be *vain* (a vice), to claim little when one is worthy of great honor is to be *small-souled* (a worse vice!), while to deserve little and claim little is simply to be *temperate* (a virtue of a different kind).<sup>15</sup> Magnanimity itself is a mean between arrogance and timidity, rooted both in real human excellence and in an accurate and objective self-awareness.

Later schools of ancient philosophy continued to include magnanimity among the virtues, but defined it in a variety of ways. The Stoics, for instance, who did not share Aristotle's confidence in the possibility of finding happiness and security in the everyday world of the political community, conceived of it in more internal, moral terms: as a combination of the *courage* to exercise well whatever control one can over one's affairs, and the *patience* to undergo well what must simply be endured.<sup>16</sup> But while most ancient moral writers agreed in their contempt for all forms of vanity and pretension,<sup>17</sup> the word "humble" or "lowly" (Greek: *ταπεινός*) usually bears a pejorative connotation in pre-Christian authors. For Aristotle, "flatterers are lowly people and lowly people are flatterers";<sup>18</sup> "the mark of small-mindedness and lowliness" was to accept benefits readily from others and then to criticize those who have bestowed them.<sup>19</sup> To be "humble" was simply to lack what modern Americans would call "class": a sense of how free, honorable, and self-sufficient people naturally behave. Although some earlier philosophers composed prayers that expressed abject dependence on the gods,<sup>20</sup> the Stoic Epictetus saw even the prayer of petition as unworthy of the human ideal, and considered that the only kind of prayer suitable to human dignity is thanks for the power to make ourselves what we want to be.<sup>21</sup> The fruits of Christian Pelagianism were sown in the Greek philosophical ideal of great-souled self-sufficiency.

<sup>15</sup> *Nic. Eth.* 1123b2-13.

<sup>16</sup> See Gauthier, *Magnanimité*, 119-64, for references and details. A good contemporary expression of Stoic sentiment would be the familiar maxim, popularized by Alcoholics Anonymous, "God grant me the courage to change what can be changed, the patience to accept what cannot be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference."

<sup>17</sup> See the revealing descriptions of Theophrastus *Characters* 21, 23-24; Philodemus *On Vices* 10.15.22f.; Seneca *De ira* 1.20.1, 3; *Ep. ad Lucilium* 14.90.28.

<sup>18</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 4.3 (1125a1).

<sup>19</sup> *Rhet.* 2.6.10 (1384a4).

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Plato *Phaedrus* 279bc; Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.3.2ff.; Cleanthes *Hymn to Zeus*.

<sup>21</sup> See Epictetus *Discourses* 1.6.28-32; 1.16.15-21; 2.16.11-15.



## The Old Testament

In the Old Testament, on the other hand, humility came gradually to be seen as the condition of those for whom Israel's God takes special care and who are, because of their lack of internal and external resources, particularly ready to love God in return and keep his law. The word most generally translated "humble person," *'ani* or *'anaw*, originally refers to someone materially poor and therefore socially insignificant and vulnerable. While Greek and Roman society generally seem to have regarded poverty, with all its attendant ills, as something inevitable, the work of fate, Israel believed that it was either the result of human laziness or guilt (Prov. 6:10f., 10:4) or due to the aggressive injustice of others (Job 24:1-12). But God rewarded his faithful ones with prosperity (for example, Deut. 28:1-14; Ps. 112:1-3, 128:2), and intervened to defend them from the oppressors who robbed them of what should have been theirs (Amos 2:6-16, 8:4-8; Isa. 3:10-15, 10:1-4).

So the "little people" who stand in special need of God's protection tended to be identified, in Israel's view, with the truly virtuous and even the wise. The prophet Zephaniah, writing during the reign of Josiah towards the end of the seventh century before Christ, spoke of "the humble of the earth" as the ones who obey the Lord's commands, who "do no wrong and tell no lies" (Zeph. 2:3, 3:12f.). And in post-exilic wisdom literature, it is the poor and humble who are assured of God's coming justice (Ps. 9-10, 12-18) and who are often simply equated with the just (Ps. 34, 37:11-20). To be humble in one's estimate of oneself, not concerned with "lofty things" but content to depend on the Lord, was for some later Jewish writers a central part of recognizing the power and mystery of God (Ps. 131; Sir. 3:17-24, 10:26-31); like Moses, "the humblest man on earth" (Num. 12:3, Sir. 45:4), lowly people might know God as he is.

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus' mission was seen as the fulfillment of God's prophetic promise to "bring good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18, citing Isa. 61:1), the proclamation that God "looks on" the humble with favor and changes their place with the mighty (Luke 1:48, 51f.). Jesus calls the "little ones" of the earth blessed, because God has chosen to reveal his power especially to them (Matt. 5:3f., 11:25). So Jesus speaks of himself, in a key Synoptic portrait, as "gentle and humble in heart" and therefore able both to reveal God's Wisdom to other "little ones" and to give them "rest" (Matt. 11:28-30). In Mark 10:35-45 he speaks of his coming passion as a sign of his deliberate renunciation of power and prestige, and gives powerful expression to this interpretation, in John's account of the Last Supper, by washing the disciples' feet (John 13:1-16). Paul, too, in several passages, urges his readers to cultivate a "lowliness of mind" (*ταπεινοφροσύνη*) based on a realistic awareness of each one's limited place in the body of Christ and a desire to serve one's brothers and sisters (Rom. 12:3-8, 16; Phil. 2:1-3; see also Col. 3:12, Eph. 4:2). The model of this active, communi-



tarian humility is "Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6-8). It is only through a similar readiness to humble oneself, to submit lovingly to those in authority in the community and even to one's equals, that the disciple of Jesus can himself hope to come to glory (1 Pet. 5:5f., Phil. 2:3f., Eph. 5:21-6:9, Mark 10:43-45).

## Early Christian Writers

The value of humility as a willing dependence on and obedience to the saving, mysterious God, taught by Jesus and embodied in the "way" that led to his death on the cross, was so deeply ingrained in the Scriptures that early Christian writers could not help but see it as close to the heart of the Church's spirituality. Identifying it as a virtue, however, took some rethinking for those steeped in the culture of the ancient Greek city. So Clement and Origen of Alexandria, for instance, with their habitual tendency to integrate the Gospel with the best moral and philosophical traditions of Hellenism, tried to identify the humility modeled by Jesus with the Stoic ideal of "unstiffness" (*ἀτυφία*) or Aristotle's norm of moderation.<sup>22</sup> In his grand contempt for success and his courageous endurance of suffering, the early Alexandrian Jesus unifies both humility and magnanimity in a way that redefines both virtues for his disciples and makes them practically the same thing.<sup>23</sup>

By the late fourth century, Christian writers had become more conscious of the distinctiveness of the Christian understanding of humility as a means of following Christ. For Basil, Augustine, John Chrysostom, and other classical Fathers, pride is the root and archetype of all sin, the perverse desire to make ourselves masters of the world in place of God our creator, and leads only to the destruction of our identity as creatures.<sup>24</sup> According to the Christian story, the one remedy for the disease of pride, on the cosmic scale, is the humility of a God who has "come down" out of love to be one with us and to draw us, in humility, to himself.

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<sup>22</sup> So Origen *Hom. in Luc.* 8.4f., commenting on the *Magnificat*: Mary is "praised by all generations" ultimately because she is an example of classic *virtue*! See also Clement *Strom.* 2.22.132f.; 4.5.19; Origen *Ctr. Cels.* 6.15.

<sup>23</sup> See Clement *Paed.* 3.6; *Strom.* 3.7; 3.16; 4.6; Origen *In Gen. Hom.* 8; *Ctr. Cels.* 1.29; 2.24; 4.46; 6.75; 7.53, 55; *In Lev. Hom.* 12. See Gauthier, *Magnanimité*, 225-33; Adnès, "Humilité," 1153f.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., Basil *Hom* 20.1; Augustine *De Civ. Dei* 14.13.1; *Tract. 25 in Joan.* 15f.; John Chrysostom *In Joan.* 9.2.



At the end of the seventh book of the *Confessions*, Augustine acknowledges to his God that, by the time of his arrival in Milan in 386, although he had solved most of the intellectual difficulties that kept him from being a Christian, after carefully studying Neoplatonist philosophy, he was still “too weak” to enjoy God.

For I was talking on and on as if I were an expert, yet unless I were to seek out your way in Christ, our savior, I would not be an expert but a fool on the way to perdition.<sup>25</sup> For now I had begun to want to appear wise; I was full of the effects of my own sin, yet I did not weep for it, but rather was bloated by my own knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Where, after all, was that love that builds on the foundation of humility, which is Christ Jesus?<sup>27</sup>

Christian love, that central manifestation of redemption which is the Holy Spirit poured forth in our hearts, can only be realized in the humble; so the Church, which for Augustine is the embodiment of love, is brought into existence by the humble concreteness of water, bread, and wine, and realized in the mutual ministrations of humble, ordinary people.<sup>28</sup> Divine humility, in fact, is, in Augustine’s view, the heart of the “way” of Christ: the supreme paradox that acknowledges both the gulf and the union between creation and God and separates the order of nature even, at its best, from the order of grace. So he offers this explanation in one of his later homilies on John:

How is it that wickedness is so abundant? Through pride. Heal pride and there will be no wickedness. That the cause of all our illness—our pride—might be healed, the Son of God came down and was made humble. Why, my fellow human, are you proud? God was made humble for your sake. You might, perhaps, be ashamed to imitate a humble human being, but imitate at least a humble God! . . . He who is God has been made human; you, who are human, recognize that you are human: all your humility means is that you should know yourself. So it is because God is teaching us humility that he says, “I did not come to do my own will, but the will of the one who sent me” [John 6:38]. For this is his way of recommending humility; pride, in fact, does its own will, humility does the will of God.<sup>29</sup>

For the Fathers of the fifth century, then, humility had been transformed by the incarnation of God from being simply a negative human characteristic, or a sign of weakness in which God might be able to show his

<sup>25</sup> The pun is difficult to capture in English: “Non peritus sed periturus essem.”

<sup>26</sup> Another pun: “Non flebam, insuper et inflabar scientia.”

<sup>27</sup> *Conf.* 7.20.26.

<sup>28</sup> The story of the baptism of the philosopher Victorinus, with which Augustine begins book 8 of the *Confessions*, seems intended to illustrate this point.

<sup>29</sup> *Tractatus 25 in Johannis Evangelium* 16 (written after 418). Augustine’s theme here appears in many of his writings. Cf. the lapidary phrase of *De catechizandis rudibus* 8: “A proud humanity is a great misery, but an even greater mercy is a humble God.”



power, to being the heart of a new *disciplina*, a specifically Christian method of religious observance. So Leo the Great insists, in a sermon preached on Epiphany in 452, that

the Savior's entire victory over the devil and the world began in humility and was brought to its completion in humility. . . . Therefore, dear friends, the whole method of attaining Christian wisdom consists not in abundance of speech, not in sharpness of argument, not in a hunger for praise and glory, but in true and voluntary humility, which the Lord Jesus Christ chose and taught, with all imaginable courage, from the womb of his mother to the pains of the cross.<sup>30</sup>

Half a century earlier, John Chrysostom had presented this new Christian wisdom of voluntary self-emptying in still more dramatic terms, as freely chosen union with the humiliated and suffering Christ. In his eighth homily on Ephesians, he reflects passionately on the figure of Paul, "a prisoner in the Lord":

Nothing else is glorious, but chains for the sake of Christ, and bonds tied up with those holy hands. More than being an apostle, more than being a teacher, more than being an evangelist, *this* is glorious: to be a prisoner for Christ. . . . Even if the situation had no reward of its own, this alone is a great reward, this is sufficient recompense: to suffer these terrible things for the sake of my Beloved. . . . If anyone were to offer me a choice of all heaven and these chains, I would choose the chains; if he offered to place me either on high with the angels or with Paul in chains, I would choose prison. . . . And rightly—for nothing is more blessed than those bonds, . . . nothing is better than to suffer ills for Christ.<sup>31</sup>

Humility here has been transformed into a desire for union with Christ in his passion, and has become part of a new mysticism of the cross.

## Religious Life in Its Beginnings

Against this background, it is understandable that from the start humility was considered a central and necessary virtue of the religious life. For Abba Poimen of the Egyptian desert, at the start of the fifth century, "humility and fear of God are like the breath that comes out of the nose";<sup>32</sup> for Dorotheus of Gaza, a spiritual master writing almost a century later, humility was the most fundamental of all the virtues, simply because "neither the fear of God itself, nor generosity to the poor, nor faith, nor self-control, nor any other of the

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<sup>30</sup> Sermon 37.2f.

<sup>31</sup> *Hom. 8 in Eph.* (on Eph. 4:1): PG 62.55ff.

<sup>32</sup> *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Poimen 49, trans. Benedicta Ward, SLG (Cistercian Press: Kalamazoo, 1975), 173.



virtues can be brought to full realization apart from humility.”<sup>33</sup> If monasticism was, at root, simply a structured way of living out Christian discipleship in community with total commitment, it soon came to be conceived, as one modern scholar has put it, as “an objective state of humility, which formed the most suitable framework for becoming truly humble of heart.”<sup>34</sup>

So John Cassian, the first great propagator of the Egyptian monastic ideal in the fifth-century Latin West, speaks of humility as a kind of extended middle stage of spiritual growth, by which a person’s fear of the Lord, which has motivated his first conversion and brought him to embrace the monastic life, is gradually transformed into the “love, which has no fear,” and in which he keeps the commandments *velut naturaliter*, out of love for the good.<sup>35</sup> In a fictive homily delivered by the experienced Egyptian ascetic, Abba Pinufius, to a young beginner, Cassian lists ten “signs” (*indicia*) by which this monastic humility can be recognized as it grows: mortifying one’s desires; manifesting all one’s thoughts to the elders of the community; relying completely on their judgment; observing “the gentleness of obedience and the constancy of patience”; refraining both from injuring others and from complaining about how they injure us; doing nothing not urged by the rule or the elders; being content with the worst things in the community and considering oneself unworthy even of them; truly believing oneself the inferior of all in the community; restraining one’s voice and tongue; not being “ready or eager to laugh.”<sup>36</sup> All of these, in Cassian’s context, are seen as corporate virtues: expressions of an intense desire to be integrated into a community of disciples and to be wholly absorbed into its commitment to the way of Christ, as a means of purging one’s ingrained vices and growing towards purity of heart. Yet humility is their common denominator, in Cassian’s mind, and their underlying cause—a humility that is both the presupposition and the long-term effect of single-minded community living.

Like much in his writings on the monastic life, this passage of Cassian’s *Institutes* left a deep mark on later traditions of Western religious life. In the sixth century both the anonymous *Rule of the Master* and the better-known *Rule of St. Benedict*, which seems to incorporate large portions of the *Rule of the Master* into its own text, took Cassian’s ten “signs” of monastic humility and

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<sup>33</sup> *Instructions* 2.26: *Dorothee de Gaza: Oeuvres spirituelles*, Sources chrétiennes, no. 92 (Paris: Cerf, 1963), 186ff. See also the somewhat freer translation of Eric Wheeler, *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Press, 1977), 44f.

<sup>34</sup> Adalbert de Vogüé, *La règle de Saint Benoit: Commentary 1*, Sources chrétiennes, no. 184, p. 345.

<sup>35</sup> *Institutiones* 4.39.3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 4.39.2. Laughter was generally regarded by ancient Mediterranean people, both pagan and Christian, as a sign of coarseness and indiscipline, usually indulged in at someone else’s expense. Virtuous (or well-bred) people simply smiled cheerfully!



rebuilt them into the ten central *steps* of a twelve-step "ladder" by which we can "attain speedily that exaltation in heaven to which we climb by the humility of this present life."<sup>37</sup> The first step, for the "Master" and St. Benedict, is "that a person keep the fear of God always before his eyes and never forget it."<sup>38</sup> This involves remembering the commandments and our last end, guarding against our vices, being conscious that God always sees us and knows our thoughts, and seeking God's will rather than our own desires. Beginning here and climbing through Cassian's ten "signs" as progressive stages of growth, the monk in these two sixth-century rules arrives finally at the complete integration of humility into every aspect of his life: "that a monk always manifests humility in his bearing no less than in his heart, so that it is evident at the Work of God [singing the office, that is], in the oratory, the monastery, or the garden, on a journey or in the field, or anywhere else."<sup>39</sup> This final stage of humility still includes a measure of fear, since the monk remains aware of his sinfulness and of the prospect of judgment, yet now growth in humility has begun to transform fear into love, so that "all that he once performed with dread he will now begin to observe without effort, as though naturally, from habit, no longer out of fear of hell, but out of love for Christ, good habit, and delight in virtue."<sup>40</sup> For both of these sixth-century monastic rules, humility is no longer simply an effect of living in a religious community but has itself become a way of life, a central structural principle of Christian discipleship, a stairway to heaven.<sup>41</sup>

## Medieval Spirituality

These early treatments of humility remained enormously influential on the development of various forms of Christian discipleship in the Western Church. Equally influential on later medieval spirituality was the discussion of humility by St. Bernard of Clairvaux in several of his writings. Following Abelard's identification of the classical virtue of magnanimity as a subspecies of fortitude, which makes a person ready to undertake the most difficult projects

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<sup>37</sup> *Regula Magistri* [= *RM*] 10.5; *Regula Benedicti* [= *RB*] 7.5, trans. and ed. Timothy Fry, O.S.B. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981), 193. The picturesque paradox of "climbing" by "steps of humility" to the "peak of lowliness," in which we draw close to heaven during this present earthly life, is perhaps more striking in the Latin than in English translation.

<sup>38</sup> *RM* 10.10; *RB* 7.10. (Fry 193).

<sup>39</sup> *RM* 10.82f; *RB* 7.62f. (Fry 201).

<sup>40</sup> *RM* 10.88f; *RB* 7.68f. (Fry 201).

<sup>41</sup> So De Vogüé remarks in his *Règle* (370): "Heirs of Cassian, but losing sight of his journey from fear to love, the two authors agree in emphasizing humility to an extraordinary degree, making it the path to eternal joy, the universal attitude to be adopted before God as before mankind, the totality [*somme*] of Christian spirituality. . . . Carried to its ultimate consequences, the Gospel doctrine of exaltation by humility terminates in the exaltation of humility." EDITOR'S TRANSLATION.



for a reasonable motive,<sup>42</sup> Bernard himself recognized our need for a *magnanimitas fidei*, by which we take seriously the “capacity for eternal things” that is our real natural greatness, and boldly reach out—relying all the while on Christ—to “assault” the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>43</sup> Yet humility, in his view, is more than simply another virtue aiding us on our way to God: it is the starting-point of the journey, the first step in a movement of deepening knowledge and love of ourselves, our neighbor, and God that ends in the contemplative union of beatitude. It is both the origin and the overarching theme of Christian growth.

Bernard delights in schematic arrangements, and his lists of the steps by which humility grows into the love of God are not always identical. In some texts he distinguishes between the more fundamental humility of realistic self-knowledge, by which we recognize that we are sinful creatures—made in God’s image, but weakened by sin—and a deeper humility of the will and the affections, by which we freely accept this knowledge of ourselves and let it determine the way we treat others and God.<sup>44</sup> The first kind of humility here, although a presupposition for the effectiveness of grace, is simply the natural work of human reason; but the second, involving a transformation of the will by love, is part of the grace that makes us righteous. So in another famous passage, Bernard speaks of “three degrees of justice” or righteousness, which are in fact three progressive levels of this deeper humility of affect and will: “strict justice” (that is, rendering each his due), which is not to prefer yourself to your equals and not to compare yourself with your superiors; “higher justice,” which is not to compare yourself with your equals and not to prefer yourself to your inferiors; and “the highest justice,” which is to show by action that you consider yourself inferior even to your inferiors.<sup>45</sup> The point here—expressed in paradoxical terms characteristic of feudal society’s preoccupation with shame and honor—seems to be that the God-given righteousness of grace consists in moving from the minimal justice of respecting human relationships and responsibilities as they objectively are, through a gradual loss of interest in our own legitimate status and recompense, to a voluntary attitude of love and

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<sup>42</sup> See Abelard *Dialogue of a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian* [1141–42]: PL 178.1657.

<sup>43</sup> See *Sermo in Dominicam infra octavam Assumptionis BMV* (PL 183.433–437), on the spiritual “magnanimity” and courage of Mary; *Sermo in Canticum Cantorum* 80 (PL 183.1167); Sermon 43 (PL 183.665D). See also Gauthier, *Magnanimité*, 283ff.

<sup>44</sup> E.g., *Sermo 1 de laudibus S. Mariæ* 5; *Sermo 42 in Cantica* 6; *Sermo 4 de Adventu* 4. On this distinction between a “cognitive” and a “conative” humility in Bernard, see G. B. Burch, trans., *Saint Bernard: The Steps of Humility* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1942), 50–55.

<sup>45</sup> *Sermo in Octavam Epiphaniæ* 4 (PL 183.154).



service towards all people. For Bernard, justice, is made perfect in Christlike service.<sup>46</sup>

By the time of Bernard, Christian writers had so come to emphasize the importance of humility in Christian growth to perfection that magnanimity, its classical counterweight, had come to be conceived in derivative, and similarly ascetical, terms: the greatness of soul to undertake the labor of self-conquest, undaunted by its difficulty.<sup>47</sup> St. Bonaventure, lecturing on the biblical account of creation in the spring of 1273, went so far as to identify magnanimity as a subspecies of humility: the ability to recognize what is truly great (God) and what is truly small (the world and its honors) and to focus one's efforts and energies wholly on serving God.<sup>48</sup>

St. Thomas Aquinas made a more serious attempt to integrate Aristotle's portrayal of magnanimity—available since the 1240s in Robert Grosseteste's new and accurate Latin translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*—into his own systematic treatment of the virtues, as a parallel to, rather than a derivative of, Christian humility. In the *Summa Theologiæ* Thomas seems to assume, like Origen and Clement of Alexandria, that the ancient philosophers really *had* regarded humility as a virtue, if in other terms; he begins his own positive treatment of it by suggesting, as Albert the Great had done, that humility and magnanimity work together in the virtuous person to moderate and channel the natural human passion of hope: humility tempering it to keep it from becoming arrogant presumption, magnanimity spurring it on to prevent it from fading into despair.<sup>49</sup> Such a scheme had the advantage of bringing both the Christian and the Aristotelian virtues into the realm of philosophical speculation about human perfection; but it departed from Thomas's normal principle that our passions each need only one virtue to moderate between their

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<sup>46</sup> In his treatise *On the Steps of Humility*, in which he expands on the Rule of Benedict's now classic twelve steps for the benefit of his Cistercian brethren, Bernard develops a parallel scheme in terms of three "steps of truth," which conceive of humility, service, and love in more cognitive terms. The first "step of truth" is to know ourselves as we really are. This is, he suggests, the result of climbing the Benedictine "ladder" of humility, and is both the cure for pride and the experiential basis for compassion towards others (*De gradibus humilitatis* 4.13f.). The second step of truth is to know our neighbor, recognizing—"not angrily or insolently, but mercifully and sympathetically"—that he or she shares our weaknesses and has the same needs that we do, so that we "flee from justice to mercy" (*ibid.* 5.16-18). The third step is to know the truth itself, which is God, in a loving contemplation purified by humility and compassion (*ibid.* 6.19).

<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, William of Auvergne *De virtutibus* 11 and 17 (*Opera omnia* 1.155ff., 176). Gauthier, *Magnanimité*, 234-47.

<sup>48</sup> *Collationes in Hexæmeron* 6.10. See also the anonymous Franciscan tract *Compendium de virtute humilitatis*, among the works of St. Bonaventure (ed. Quaracchi 8, proleg. 3.5, p. cii).

<sup>49</sup> *Summa theologiæ* IIa IIæ, q. 161, a.1.



possible extremes; and, what is more important, it neglected the distinctively Christian character of humility, as it had been understood since the early Church. So in the next article of the same question in the *Summa*, Thomas seems to alter course as he suggests that *both* magnanimity and humility are concerned, in themselves, to find the mean between presumption and despair: magnanimity with reference to our hope for human greatness, humility with reference to our hope for union with God.<sup>50</sup> In making this further refinement, Thomas takes greater cognizance of the real difference between ethical and ascetical discourse and shows a deeper awareness than the early Alexandrians had of the grounding of humility in religious faith. Here and elsewhere in his discussion of humility, Thomas seems to have seen it above all as the submission of the person to God, in full awareness of his status as a creature: a submission that allows us to realize, even as we recognize the genuine greatness of our human endowments, that they are all gifts of the creating God.<sup>51</sup>

Aside from Thomas and the strict Aristotelians of Paris who flourished briefly after his death, most medieval theologians and spiritual writers continued to take a more dramatic and Christ-centered view of the importance of humility as the heart of Christian discipleship. For Francis of Assisi, “holy humility” stood alongside her “sister, holy lady poverty,” as the two basic characteristics of the friars’ way of following Jesus.<sup>52</sup> The medieval *Glossa ordinaria* on the Bible, which served for centuries as the main scholastic handbook of biblical commentary, explained Jesus’ decision to submit to John, his inferior, in baptism and so to “fulfil all justice” (Matt. 3:15) by referring to Bernard’s distinction of “three degrees of justice” as three degrees of “perfect humility, *quae est omnis iustitia*.”<sup>53</sup> Ludolph of Saxony (d. 1370), the Carthusian whose best-selling *Life of Christ* played a major role in Ignatius’s conversion almost two centuries later, took over from the *Glossa* this interpretation of Jesus’ baptism, adding that the truly humble person “does not seek for honors, to attribute them to himself, but refers them to God, and retains for himself only a lowly station [*vilitatem*]. . . . He regards himself as the least of all, choosing and wishing always the last place.”<sup>54</sup> By the late Middle Ages, it was becoming a convention for spiritual writers to interpret the whole ministry of Jesus in

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. q.2, obj. 3 and ad 3.

<sup>51</sup> See *ibid.* q. 129, a. 3, ad 4; q. 161, q. 1, ad 5; q. 2 ad 3; q. 3, obj. 1 and corpus; q. 4 obj. 1; q. 162, a. 5; q. 170, a. 2, obj. 2. For an evaluation of Thomas’s treatment of magnanimity and humility, see especially Gauthier, *Magnanimité*, 318–71, 444–65.

<sup>52</sup> Francis of Assisi *Salutation of the Virtues; Second Rule* 6.2.

<sup>53</sup> *Biblia sacra cum Glossa ordinaria* 5 (Lyons, 1589) 77C; see also the somewhat earlier, less detailed medieval biblical textbook, Peter Comestor’s *Historia scholastica, In Evang.* 33 (PL 198.1555 B10–14).

<sup>54</sup> Ludolph of Saxony *Vita Iesu Christi* I, 21.7, ed. L.-M. Rigollot (Paris and Rome: Palme, 1870) 1.215.



terms of voluntary humiliation and to see the choice of a self-emptying, socially compassionate pattern of life as the quintessence of discipleship.

The revival of an intensely affective, Christ-centered spirituality for lay people in the Low Countries in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, usually called the *devotio moderna*, also laid great stress on humility, as the result both of a realistic knowledge of oneself as a creature of God and a personal, affective knowledge of Christ. The most influential product of this movement was undoubtedly the *Imitation of Christ*, generally attributed to the early-fifteenth-century Dutch Augustinian Thomas à Kempis, which clearly also left its mark on Ignatius, along with countless others of his time.<sup>55</sup> There discipleship—conforming our lives to the pattern laid down by Christ—is presented in terms of humility, a good life, inner compunction, and the love of God.<sup>56</sup> In contrast to the knowledge of scholars, which tends towards pride and self-deception, the *Imitation* argues, humility grows from a recognition, in the light of God-given truth, of what our nature really is:<sup>57</sup> "If you want to learn something that will really help you," the author writes, "aim at being unknown and thought of no account. The highest and most profitable form of study is to understand one's inmost nature and despise it."<sup>58</sup> Yet humility, in the *Imitation*, too, is not simply a negative estimate of oneself: it grows from the experience of grace, of being loved by God in Christ, precisely as a creature with no claim on that love from one's own merits. So the author reflects before God, in a passage rich with echoes of Augustine's *Confessions*:

If I condemn myself, utterly abase myself, abandon all self-esteem, treat myself as the dust that I am, then your grace will favor me, and your light will shine on my heart. Then all self-estimation, however slight, will be swallowed up in the abyss of my nothingness and will perish for ever. . . . If I am left to myself, all is nothingness and weakness; but if you suddenly look my way, at once I

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<sup>55</sup> See Ignatius's own remark in the *Memoriale* of Gonçalves da Câmara (97) that after he discovered the *Imitation* at Manresa, he did not want to read any other devotional book.

<sup>56</sup> See *Imitation of Christ* 1.1; cf. 1.3: "A really great man has great love. A really great man is humble in his own eyes, and considers all distinction and honor worthless. A really wise man treats all earthly things as refuse in order to have Christ to his credit. A man who has really learnt something is one who does the will of God and abandons his own will" (trans. Betty I. Knott [London: Collins 1963], 42).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 1.3. Much of the evangelical activity of the early leaders of the *devotio moderna* seems to have been directed to university students, with the aim of attracting them to a simple life of Christian community; hence the continual contrast in the *Imitation* between the pride of learning and the humility required for discipleship.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 1.2; cf. Thomas à Kempis *Sermons to Novices of the Canons Regular* 17. The phrase "Aim at being unknown and thought of no account" was apparently an oft quoted maxim among the Brethren of the Common Life, the lay confraternity who exercised great influence on Thomas à Kempis and others at the beginning of the fifteenth century.



am made strong, I am filled with new joy. . . . For by sinfully loving myself, I lost myself, but by seeking you alone and loving you wholeheartedly I have found both myself and you, and by that love have been utterly humbled again. . . . Turn us back to yourself, so that we may be thankful, humble and loving; for you are our salvation, our boldness and our strength.<sup>59</sup>

For the writers of the *devotio moderna*, the embodiment of this humility, which is both the highest human self-knowledge and the work of pure grace, is the person of Jesus, whose whole life, from the moment of the Word's incarnation in the womb of the humble Mary to the moment of his death in utter poverty on the cross, reveals the paradoxical love of a God who empties himself into the world for its salvation.<sup>60</sup> Humility, for the Christian—even accepting the contempt and hostility of others—becomes easy when one thinks of the passion of Christ; and humility makes one his disciple. “If you are humble and peaceable, Jesus will be with you.”<sup>61</sup>

One final example of this late-medieval stress on humility as central to the practical following of Christ is the *Treatise on Humility* by Girolamo Savonarola, the reforming Dominican preacher of Florence who was burned at the stake in 1498 for his critical stance towards Church authorities. Written for a group of contemplative nuns in 1492—the year, presumably, of Ignatius's birth—this simple and powerful little tract begins by defining humility in clear-cut Thomistic terms and offers ten simple, concrete practices to help a person grow in the virtue: Reflect on one's experience of depending on God for every virtue, exercise oneself in self-knowledge, contemplate the greatness of God, meditate on the Incarnation and the Passion of Jesus, and so on.<sup>62</sup> Savonarola then discusses the successive *grades* of humility, by which one approaches

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 3.8 (trans. Knott, 123f.).

<sup>60</sup> See Thomas à Kempis *Prayers and Meditations on the Life of Christ* 1.4: “I praise and magnify you [Christ] for voluntarily emptying yourself of your fulness, and for graciously taking upon yourself our weak and degraded nature, capable of suffering and of death; that so you might fill us by emptying yourself, might save us by your sufferings, might raise us by your lowliness, might strengthen us by your weakness, and by your death might bring us to a glorious immortality” (trans. W. Duthoit [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1908], 13 [modernized]).

<sup>61</sup> *Imitation of Christ* 2.8 (trans. Knott, 94); cf. *ibid.* 2.1: “If you resort with devotion to the wounds and precious scars of Jesus, you will find great comfort in trouble. You will not mind so much if people despise you, and you will find it easy to bear when they speak against you. . . . If you had once entered completely into the heart of Jesus and had tasted just a little of his burning love, then you would care nothing about your own convenience or inconvenience. Instead you would rejoice when insult was offered you—for the love of Jesus makes a person unmindful of himself” (trans. Knott, 84f.).

<sup>62</sup> *Trattato dell'umiltà*, in C. Belli, ed., *Savonarola: La scure alle radici: Trattati ascetici* (Padua: Mesaggero, 1983), 126–33. As far as I know, this treatise has not been translated into English.



holiness and perfection. Although he does not distinguish these grades from one another with all the clarity one might wish for, he seems to have five in mind, the first three of which are clearly dependent on Bernard's three "degrees of justice" (see above, p. 16). The first kind of humility, which is necessary for salvation, Savonarola suggests, is to submit ourselves obediently to the commandments of God and to our legitimate superiors, thus avoiding mortal sin.<sup>63</sup> The second, which is more meritorious, is to move beyond the obligation of the commandments and to observe the "counsels" as well; at the same time, a person begins to humble himself not only before superiors but even before one's equals, to reflect deeply on his or her own defects and on God's great gifts, and to make new, concrete efforts to practice the other virtues towards his neighbor.<sup>64</sup> The third degree of humility is to humble oneself even before one's social inferiors and to express this attitude in concrete acts of charity towards them—nursing a sick servant, for example, or occasionally even sharing the servants' work.<sup>65</sup> A fourth degree, more perfect still, is a humility so completely interiorized and so free of self-congratulation that it leads a person to reject any recognition by others of his or her own holiness or humility, and to be utterly amazed—as Mary was—at any sign of favor or recognition by God.<sup>66</sup> This is indeed perfect humility, in human terms. "Nevertheless," writes Savonarola,

it seems to me that the most perfect grade of humility comes *after* a person has acquired all those mentioned above, performs excellent works for the love of God and the welfare of his neighbors, and longs for lowly things: it is to be persecuted, calumniated, abused by wicked persons, or to have no esteem at all shown to oneself. Such humility our Savior demonstrated to the world, when, after doing the most excellent works, he embraced the lowliest things of all—the hatred of the Jews and the indignity of the cross. But this grade is found in few places, and very seldom.<sup>67</sup>

Savonarola then concludes his treatise by summing up Benedict's twelve steps, which he interprets—in the light of Cassian—as "signs of heartfelt humility rather than degrees."<sup>68</sup> But the heart of this humility, in his view, is clearly not simply the perfection of monastic virtue but an assimilation to the self-emptying love of Christ.

By the eve of the Reformation, then, and the beginning of the life of Ignatius, humility had acquired a profile of its own, as one of the distinctive

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 133–35.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 135f.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 137f. He is referring, of course, to Mary's puzzled reaction to the angel's greeting, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you!" in Luke 1:29.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 139f.



characteristics of the Christian disciple's mind and heart. Looking back over the development we have so briefly sketched here, we might sum up its main features in a few broad strokes:

1. Christian thinkers were aware, in varying degrees, of the tension that existed between the Greco-Roman ideal of human autonomy, with its esteem for a noble awareness of one's own greatness, and the Gospels' invitation to join Jesus in "taking the form of a servant"; some, like Origen and Thomas Aquinas, sought to find continuities and resonances between the two, while others emphasized the newness of the Christian way (Augustine, Bonaventure).

2. As various forms of religious life were developed to provide scope for an ever deeper commitment to discipleship by those who felt themselves called beyond "ordinary" Christian observance, Christlike humility came to be seen as one of its central values and principal fruits (Cassian, Benedict, Francis). The monastic community existed, in the eyes of many, as a school of humility.

3. For Christian writers as for the ancient Greeks, the core of humility was seen to be self-knowledge: for Christians, the recognition of our status as unfaithful creatures before a loving and just God and the acceptance of grace in its utter gratuity (Augustine, Bernard, Aquinas, Thomas à Kempis, Savonarola).

4. Humility before God is a relational virtue. It begins in accepting the obligations of creaturehood—in simply keeping God's commandments because we recognize him to be our God; but if allowed to grow, it moves beyond commandments to a deeper commitment and a more earnest quest for God, beyond creaturely obligation to the freedom of self-consuming love (Bernard, Savonarola).

5. Humility is also seen in the ascetical tradition to have direct implications for our relations with our neighbors, whether they are peers or less than peers; it leads to compassion, charity, and the works of mercy—to ministerial engagement (Bernard, Savonarola).

6. Humility is essentially discipleship, following and participating in the "way" of Jesus (Chrysostom, Augustine, Leo, Thomas à Kempis, Savonarola). Its final justification as a religious virtue comes from the distinctive view of God's saving activity in the world that is revealed in the teaching, the style, and ultimately the death of Jesus. Apart from Jesus, it remains as unintelligible for Christians as it was for the Greeks. Apart from humility and from the kind of love humility brings to expression, Jesus remains unintelligible as well.



## Humility in the Spiritual Exercises

**T**his brief survey of the Christian understanding of humility as it grew in the centuries before Ignatius can provide us with at least a broad context in which to understand the place of humility in the Spiritual Exercises—particularly the consideration on Three Kinds of Humility that Ignatius offers, just before describing the process of election in the Second Week. What we have said thus far is not an attempt to identify any sources on which this text in the *Exercises* may be based, although the parallelism in thought between Ignatius's "three kinds" and the five "steps of humility" outlined by Savonarola is particularly striking.<sup>69</sup> But a sense of the earlier Christian spiritual tradition may help us to grasp some of the reasons why humility, poverty, and "insults and contempt" are so closely identified with the "way" of Christ in the Second Week of the Exercises, and may also suggest something of the range of spiritual connotations humility must have had for Ignatius and his contemporaries in their search for that way. Let us turn now to remind ourselves—again, in broad strokes—of the place of this idea within the familiar structure and process of the Exercises themselves.

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<sup>69</sup> For the suggestion of a direct connection, see Henri Watrigant, *La g n se des Exercices de saint Ignace de Loyola* (Amiens, 1897), 124. It is at least possible that Ignatius came to know Savonarola's treatise on humility during the formative period of the text of the *Exercises*, between the mid 1520s and the completion of the first Latin version in 1541. Some of the friar's works, in Spanish translation, seem to have been published as early as 1511 at the behest of Cardinal Cisneros and were dedicated to Doña Guiomar, duchess of N jera, the wife of Ignatius's first patron. A Latin collection, including the tract on humility, was published in 1529 at Alcal  by another friend and patron of Ignatius, Miguel de Egu a, who had also published Spanish translations of Erasmus's *Enchiridion* and the *Imitation of Christ* in 1526. A Spanish translation of Savonarola's tract was certainly available before 1534. See M. Bataillon, "Sur la diffusion des oeuvres de Savonarole en Espagne et en Portugal, 1500-1560," in *M langes de philologie, d'histoire et de litt rature offerts   Joseph Vianey* (Paris: Les presses fran aises, 1934), 94f., 96ff. Like Erasmus, whose influence on the First Principle and Foundation of the Exercises has also been suggested (see J. Calveras and C. de Dalmases, eds., *Sancti Ignatii de Loyola Exercitia Spiritualia*, Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, vol. 100 [Rome, 1969]: 56ff.), Savonarola enjoyed a very positive reputation in Spain during the first few decades of the sixteenth century, but came to be considered dangerous in the 1530s because of his emphasis on internal sanctity and his critical, antipapal positions; his works were placed on the Spanish index in 1559 (Bataillon, "Sur la diffusion," 101ff.). Significantly, perhaps, Polanco recounts that a copy of Savonarola's works was found in the Society's house in Rome in 1553 and burned at Ignatius's orders, "because his spirit, rebellious towards the Apostolic See, seemed to him not deserving of approval, even though he said many good things" (*Chronicon* 3.24). Hereafter the Monumenta Historica series will be abbreviated as MHSI.



## In the Structure and Process of the Exercises

If the First Week of the Exercises is essentially a process of prayerful self-examination leading to conversion and the identification of oneself as a loved sinner, the Second and subsequent Weeks are more a process of contemplating the story of Christ, the mystery of his person and his passage through human life to death and to life again, in order to frame the retreatant's choice of the best possible way to follow him and be identified with him. The goal of the whole movement is suggested by the Contemplation for Obtaining the Love of God, made (perhaps several times) during the Fourth Week, in which a recognition of God's gifts in all their sacred history is meant to lead the retreatant to give himself or herself concretely and totally to God in return, in a mutual exchange of love which at that stage can only be expressed in terms of indwelling, participation and mystical union (§§234-37).

The Second Week, which introduces the retreatant to the actual saving movement or "way" of Christ, with the purpose of drawing him or her by free commitment into that way, focuses thematically from the start on what any sixteenth-century reader familiar with the spiritual tradition would immediately have identified as Christian humility. The meditation on the Kingdom of Christ (§§91-99), which Ignatius apparently proposes for the retreatant's prayer on the day between the First and the Second Weeks, sets the scene in broad and dramatic strokes for the whole sequence to follow. The plan of God to save the world through the "way" of Christ is put in terms calculated to appeal, perhaps, to the idealism—the natural magnanimity, Aristotle would say—of the young, by being compared with the great and noble public campaign of an attractive earthly leader. The point seems to be that anyone who desires to be involved in such a project must move beyond mere assent and approval to personal involvement and costly sacrifice, in imitation of the sacrifices made by the leader himself. Confronted with the plan of God heralded in the Gospels, the coming of God's Kingdom through and in the person of Jesus, the believer can be expected not only to say Amen but to work actively, strenuously for the coming of that Kingdom: "Whoever wishes to join me in this enterprise must be willing to labor with me, that by following me in suffering he may follow me in glory" (§95).

But the real thrust of the meditation is applied in the final point of the second part, where Ignatius distinguishes "ordinary" from "extraordinary" commitment, command from counsel—what "all persons who have judgment and reason" would do, from what "those who wish to give greater proof of their love and to distinguish themselves in whatever concerns the service of the eternal King and Lord of all" will offer. This latter group, which the retreatant is invited at least to aspire to join, show their "greater love" by moving beyond simple involvement in "the work" of spreading the Kingdom and allowing it to "come" in them as it came in the person of Christ, through the self-emptying



love that led to the consummation of the cross. So they "will act against their sensuality and carnal and worldly love"—against their normal human drives of self-interest and self-preservation—to realize the desire they now profess: "to imitate You in bearing all wrongs and all abuse and all poverty, both actual and spiritual, should Your most holy majesty deign to choose and admit me to such a state and way of life" (§98).

No mention is made here of humility, yet the specific reference to sharing the Lord's poverty and abuse, which will be identified as the way of the highest humility later in the Second Week, doubtless will already have suggested it to the minds of those nourished with the late medieval spiritual ideals of *The Imitation of Christ* and the Florentine friar. Nor is an election specifically referred to here as something to be considered in the days that will follow, yet the retreatant is urged to express, in the solemn surroundings of the whole heavenly court, an "earnest desire" and a "deliberate choice" to share in Jesus' humility as "a state and way of life." It is a glimpse of the drama to come, an anticipation of the commitment to a concrete form of consecrated, apostolic discipleship that Ignatius seems to envisage as the goal of the meditations of the Second Week.

Significantly, the early days of the Second Week, before the actual formulation of an election, focus not on the preaching or ministry of Jesus but simply on his infancy and his home life in an obscure Galilean village. Ignatius was apparently more concerned that before coming to make an election of a state in life, the retreatant savor the *cost* of the Incarnation, the humility expressed in God's choice to become a poor, frail, unknown human being, than that he or she consider the actual "work" of Jesus among the people of his time. So the first meditation of the first day of this Week, the contemplation of the Incarnation, stresses not only the violence and ignorance of the human community (§102, §107, §108) but also the humility of Mary (§108) and the compassion of the Triune God (§102, §106, §108). The contemplation that follows, on the Nativity of Christ, as Ignatius proposes it, also focuses attention on the shocking, paradoxical poverty and obscurity of the Lord's birth, in the spirit of chapter 2 of Luke's Gospel, and concludes with a dramatic affirmation of the laborious, saving humility of God: The characters are "making the journey and laboring that our Lord might be born in extreme poverty, and that after many labors, after hunger, thirst, heat and cold, after insults and outrages, He might die on the cross, and all this for me" (§116). Appropriately, the retreatant is invited to become part of the scene by imagining himself or herself "a poor little unworthy slave"—by letting himself or herself be drawn by fantasy not only into the sequence of events Luke narrates but into the spirit of the divine humiliation itself.

On the fourth day of the Second Week, after the retreatant has spent three days contemplating the birth and childhood of Jesus, Ignatius prepares



him or her more immediately for making a choice of a state in life by proposing two key non-scriptural meditations: the Two Standards and the Three “Pairs” or Classes of Persons. The introduction to the whole election process, which precedes these two meditations (§135), suggests that the deepest alternatives between which one is called to choose, as a believer—the alternatives of simply living a good Christian life, giving oneself to the “work” of the Commandments, as anyone of “judgment and reason” would do (see §96), and that of “making offerings of greater value” (§97) by embracing “evangelical perfection”—have already been mirrored in the events of Jesus’ childhood, which have been occupying the retreatant’s prayer. The meditations on the Two Standards and Three Classes are the next step in bringing these alternatives closer to the retreatant’s actual choice, through leading him or her to reflect on the “intention” of Christ and his enemy Satan,<sup>70</sup> and so to “see how we ought to prepare ourselves,” by deepening the purity of our motivation and goals, “to arrive at perfection” in whatever state God moves us to choose.

In the meditation on the Two Standards, pride and humility are openly presented as the clear thematic centers of the strategies followed by the two powers at war for domination of the human heart: the Kingdom of God, realized in Christ, and the anti-Kingdom of Satan. Satan’s goal is to lead all people to “overweening pride,”<sup>71</sup> since this is the source of “all other vices” (§142); the steps to pride are riches and worldly honors, the possessions and social status that lead to the domination of others and to a conviction of our own self-contained security. Jesus, on the other hand, means to attract people to humility as the starting-point for “all other virtues” (§146); and the steps to humility are precisely the absence of secure possessions and social status: “the highest spiritual poverty,” in any case, and if one has a vocation from God for it, also “actual poverty,” plus “a desire for insults and contempt” (*ibid.*). The retreatant is urged to pray earnestly in the “triple colloquy” for the grace of sharing these first two steps towards humility with Christ: a poverty realized according to one’s particular vocation, and the opportunity to “bear insults and wrongs, thereby to imitate him better” (§147). It is in a lack of resources and social status, accepted not simply as deprivations but as a liberating gift of God, that the retreatant becomes a real disciple and discovers the foundation for all genuinely Christian virtue in Christlike humility.

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<sup>70</sup> The Vulgate Latin version of the *Exercises* (1547), corrected by Polanco, speaks of “the mind of Christ” and of the enemy: *ad Christi mentem attendentes, collatam cum opposita inimici*. The Spanish autograph and the two earlier Latin translations use the word “intention” (*intención, intentio*). The idea, presumably, is that of a general purpose or strategy, a policy of both Christ and Satan for involving men and women in their plans.

<sup>71</sup> Autograph: *crescida soberuia*; the earliest Latin translations have *arrogantem superbiam*, the Vulgate *superbiae barathrum* (“the abyss [the pits!] of pride”—a powerful oxymoron not in Ignatius’s original).



The meditation on the Three Classes of Persons, which follows at this point, uses a kind of case study to lead the retreatant to reflect on his or her deepest motives in approaching the choice of a state in life. The goal is clearly to promote indifference, detachment from the self-interest that normally biases all our choices: all three "classes" of people in Ignatius's supposed case want to be free of their obvious attachment to the money they have acquired, but the first two avoid the cost of real inner detachment through the familiar tactics of procrastination and mental manipulation of the issues. Members of the third class, which clearly is held up as the model for the retreatants' own coming decisions, genuinely strive to let the will of God, as it "inspires" them in prayer, and their own desire to serve God above all things, be the sole norm of how they receive and use the goods and positions of this world (§155). And to achieve this state of balance or indifference—the state of mind presented in the First Principle and Foundation of the First Week (§23) as the realization of the very purpose of our existence as creatures—the retreatant is urged actually to pray for poverty as his or her preferred way to serve the Lord: to pray for what we have seen, throughout the Second Week, to be a principal gateway to the humility of discipleship, always in the context of one's paramount desire to work "for the service and praise of the Divine Goodness" (§157).

After a day spent on these two powerful and challenging meditations, the retreatant returns, on the fifth day of the Second Week, to contemplating the story of Jesus. Now, however, the focus is on the beginning of his *public* life, as he leaves home to be baptized at the Jordan and begin his ministry (§§158–63). At the same time, Ignatius instructs (§163), the retreatant is to begin the direct consideration of what state of life he or she will elect to enter, as the outer form for "leaving home" himself or herself and following Jesus publicly on his way. It is a time of transition, a time of decision on how to focus one's efforts and desires to "labor" for the coming of God's Kingdom. And here, on the same fifth day, as a final prelude to the election process itself, Ignatius places his discussion of Three Kinds of Humility (§§165–67).

## In the Three Kinds of Humility

It is important to note that this text is not presented in the Exercises as a formal meditation. Ignatius simply says that before reaching a final choice of a state in life, "in order that we may be filled with love of the true doctrine of Christ our Lord, it will be very useful to consider attentively the following Three Kinds of Humility. These should be thought over from time to time during the whole day, and the three colloquies should also be added" (§164). The passage presents, in other words, a consideration that the retreatant should keep revolving in his or her mind and occasionally allow to spill over into



fervent prayer, as he or she approaches the election.<sup>72</sup> In this way, it serves as the presumed background for a good election, just as the text on the First Principle and Foundation, offered at the start of the First Week of the Exercises, is intended not so much to be material for a distinct meditation as to be the presumed background for the deeper self-understanding and conversion to which the First Week's meditations are meant to lead. The Three Kinds of Humility seems to be, in other words, a kind of *second* principle and foundation, directly intended to support the retreatant's decision on how concretely to be a disciple of Jesus: the principle and foundation of a good election in Christ.

In presenting these ideas to the retreatant, the text leads us to conceive of humility in a much broader sense than we have met before in the Exercises. In the Two Standards, humility is presented as a virtue, acquired through the acceptance of poverty and a lack of social status, and leading to further development of holiness and moral goodness. Here, humility is presented much more comprehensively, as the underlying quality of faith, the basic habit of mind by which a creature recognizes his or her standing before God *as* a creature and allows himself or herself to respond rightly to God's gifts within the concrete history of salvation. The *first* kind of humility, Ignatius suggests, is "necessary for salvation," a basic requirement if a creature is to become freely what he or she has been made to be:

It consists in this, that as far as possible I so subject and humble myself as to obey the law of God our Lord in all things, so that not even were I made lord of all creation, or to save my life here on earth, would I consent to violate a commandment, whether divine or human, that binds me under pain of mortal sin. (§165)

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<sup>72</sup> Some of the early notes on how to give the Exercises, by experienced Jesuits, clearly treat the text on Three Kinds of Humility as a formal meditation. Fr. Eduardo Pereyra, for instance, in his memorandum of 1562, seems to include it among the subjects for prayer in the fourth day of the Second Week, along with the contemplation of the coming of the magi (I. Iparraguirre, *Directoria Exercitiorum Spiritualium, 1540-1599*, in MHSI, vol. 76 [Rome, 1955]: 159). Fr. Paul Hoffaeus, in his notes (1575-80) assigns it as the material for regular meditations on the day before the election is to be made (*ibid.*, 239), and Fr. Gil González Dávila, writing before 1591, seems to consider it as parallel to the meditations on the Standards and the Classes (*ibid.*, 524). Fr. Polánco, in his *Directory* of 1573-75, says that the retreatant should be given the Three Kinds of Humility so that he or she can "turn them over in his or her mind" throughout the whole day prior to the election, and that he or she should also devote two or three full hours of formal prayer to them (*ibid.*, 308f. and n. 146). Fr. Didaco Miró, however, who was commissioned by Fr. Mercurian to draw up an official directory in 1582 and who was concerned to return to the authentic practice of Ignatius, insists that the text is not proposed as a substitute for any of the day's contemplations of the mysteries of the life of Christ, but is simply to be kept in mind all day, "even during meditations, but only at the appropriate moment, with the help of the triple colloquy taken from the Standards" (*ibid.*, 397f.).



It is the humility of accepting fully the fact that I *am* a creature, although intelligent and free: the humility of realizing that I can *never* be the "lord of all creation" in any genuine sense and that I *cannot* ultimately "save my life here on earth" through my own power; the humility of accepting responsibility to a moral order not of my own making and not manipulable in my own interests; the humility that recognizes God alone as God, and that is the only alternative to the pride at the heart of all real human sin. Without this degree of humility, a creature only destroys himself or herself by living out a lie.

The second kind of humility Ignatius describes as "more perfect than the first"; it consists in the same indifference, the same preference of God's service and praise above all other things, that the First Principle and Foundation held up as the standard for the right use of human freedom:

I possess it if my attitude of mind is such that I neither desire nor am I inclined to have riches rather than poverty, to seek honor rather than dishonor, to desire a long life rather than a short life, provided only in either alternative I would promote equally the service of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul. (§166)

Immediately after saying this, Ignatius adds another brief description of his second kind of humility, this time in the negative terms of sin: "Besides this indifference, this second kind of humility supposes that not for all creation, nor to save my life, would I consent to commit a venial sin." Some authors have seen here a distinct step in Ignatius's discussion of the phenomenology of Christian humility, so that he ends by presenting us with *four* rather than three kinds;<sup>73</sup> it seems more likely, however, that he is simply trying to clarify the parallel between the first and second kinds in terms both of obedience to the will of God and of the choice of self that violates that obedience. In this second kind of humility, submission to the will of God, desire for God's service and glory, has become so centrally the focus of the human creature's will that even minor inconsistencies in our choices—expressions of unbalanced desires for our own pleasure, security, or self-advancement—cease to operate. In the humility of affirming God as first of all beings, in setting our own interests consistently below our love of him, we come to the full realization of our identity and vocation.<sup>74</sup>

On the surface, at least, Ignatius's first two kinds of humility seem to have little to do with humility as we ordinarily conceive it—with the humility of the Two Standards meditation, for instance, that is the fruit of self-denial; they express, instead, simply what might be called the full implications of "creaturely realism." But to recognize and accept what it is to be a creature,

<sup>73</sup> So Adnès, "Humilité," 1174.

<sup>74</sup> See F. Prat, "Sur les trois degrés de l'humilité d'après saint Ignace," *Revue de l'ascèse et de la mystique* 2 (1921): 255.



totally dependent on God for both being and happiness but capable of rejecting that dependence in favor of a counterfeit and ultimately destructive self-sufficiency—to recognize fully both what *we* are and what *God* is—is to realize what Christian humility is at its root: not a feeling of unworthiness, not a way of putting oneself down for no apparent reason, but a practical grasp that God alone is ultimately desirable and that we are not, in ourselves, worthy ultimate goals for choice and action. As Erich Przywara observes, following Thomas Aquinas, in his great theological commentary on the *Spiritual Exercises*, humility is not primarily a way of regarding ourselves at all, but is reverence before God as creator and submission to God “in his concrete will to save us.”<sup>75</sup>

It is in Ignatius’s third kind of humility that this reverence and submission take a new and mysterious turn, leaving the realm of ethical norms and creaturely self-understanding to enter with Jesus into the full unfolding of that saving will in human history.

This is the most perfect kind of humility. It consists in this. If we suppose the first and second kind attained, then whenever the praise and glory of the Divine Majesty would be equally served, in order to imitate and be in reality more like Christ our Lord, I desire and choose poverty with Christ poor, rather than riches; insults with Christ loaded with them, rather than honors; I desire to be accounted as worthless and a fool for Christ, rather than to be esteemed as wise and prudent in this world. So Christ was treated before me.”  
(§167)

Several things should be noted about this challenging text. First is its new and striking emphasis on imitating Christ. The first two kinds of humility are described only in terms of our relationship to God, as the creator of our being and as the one ultimately desirable goal of our choosing. Here, with that “creaturely realism” and that ordering of affective priorities presupposed, Christian humility deliberately strives to conform itself to “that mind, which is in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5) by “emptying itself” in a way that reflects and realizes the pattern by which Jesus revealed the self-emptying love of God. All the tendency of the Second Week of the Exercises to see humility as the central characteristic of the saving history of the Incarnation here reaches a kind of climax in the direct appeal to let a desire for this same humility—expressed, as always, primarily in terms of poverty and lack of honor or social status—be the guiding affective element in the retreatant’s decision on how to shape his or her own saving history, how to realize his or her own “incarnation” as Jesus’ disciple and companion.

Second, it is important to note that the third kind of humility, as presented here, is more a question of desires, of preferences, and even prejudices

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<sup>75</sup> Erich Przywara, *Deus Semper Maior: Theologie der Exerzitzen* (Munich, 1961), 352; see also Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* IIa IIæ, q. 161, a. 6.



than it is of behavior. Part of the difficulty in interpretation that the text has posed to modern writers results from their having tried to find here a formula routinely applicable to concrete daily choices, or an abstract and universal principle for perfection in the spiritual life.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, scholastic commentators on the passage since Francisco Suárez have been puzzled by the apparent condition imposed on this Christlike humility, in the phrase "whenever the praise and glory of the Divine Majesty would be equally served." Is it not *always* for God's greater glory that we choose to imitate Christ more closely? Is one then not *always* bound to choose the way of greater humility if one desires to glorify God most fully?<sup>77</sup>

In fact, as other modern commentators have shown in detail, Ignatius is *not* speaking of God's "praise and glory," here or elsewhere in the *Exercises* and *Constitutions*, in abstract scholastic terms; the "glory of God" for him (as for Irenaeus in the second century) normally means that God should be known, loved, and served by his creatures—that God should be revealed in history and that this revelation should be the "life" and "light of men and women" (John 1:4).<sup>78</sup> The question of how the "glory and praise of the Divine Majesty" is "served" is for him normally a practical apostolic one, not a question of the metaphysics of spiritual perfection: How can God be better known and loved, in the present concrete historical context? So the real point of the Third Kind of Humility might be expressed in a paraphrase such as this: If I presuppose fidelity to God's commandments and to the objective demands of my conscience, if I presuppose a desire to serve God as my primary motive and

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<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Charles Boyer, "Le troisième degré d'humilité de S. Ignace de Loyola et la plus grande gloire de Dieu," *RAM* 12 (1931): 162–69. He sees here "la proposition doctrinale d'un état de perfection" (163).

<sup>77</sup> F. Suárez *De religione Societatis Jesu* 9.5, dub. 9, 23 (*Opera omnia* [Paris: Vives, 1877], 1025); cf. C. Boyer, "Le troisième degré"; A. Gaultier, "Le troisième degré d'humilité de S. Ignace: L'hypothèse impossible," *RAM* 12 (1931): 218–29. Suárez's answer is that choosing the way of poverty and humility is always, in itself, more perfect and therefore more conducive to God's glory and praise, but that the text invites the retreatant to prescind from this doctrinal truth in his or her own mind, as a kind of intellectual exercise, in order to allow himself or herself to be motivated simply by the love of Christ (*De religione*, 26 (1027)). In effect, the retreatant would be saying, even if a choice of poverty and obscurity were *not* in itself for God's greater glory—which it is, other things being equal—I would choose it to be like Jesus. See Gaultier, "Le troisième degré," 227ff. Boyer argues that such a mental "abstraction" is impermissible when one is dealing with the basic principles of Christian perfection and that, therefore, the restrictive clause in Ignatius's text is, in fact, nonsensical ("Le troisième degré," 163, 166f). The third degree of humility, in his view, is simply a clumsily written statement of where God's greater glory, in itself, always lies.

<sup>78</sup> For a good discussion of Ignatius's conception of God's glory in the context of his understanding of humility, see Roger Cantin, "Le troisième degré d'humilité et la gloire de Dieu selon saint Ignace de Loyola," *Sciences ecclésiastiques* 8 (1956): 237–66, esp. 253ff. See also, for example, Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 4.20.7.



desire, then in cases where poverty and lack of personal honor seem not to limit the effectiveness of my efforts to make God better known and loved in the world, I will prefer them for myself, simply as a way of being more closely and concretely conformed to the model of Jesus. In fact, it may be important for God's service that I make use of some material possessions, even of considerable wealth; it may make an apostolic difference that I have some position of prominence in public or academic life, that I receive some positive kind of recognition; but as a person focused affectively on the Lord, I will feel a natural—or supernatural—hesitation, a reluctance to accept these things unless their apostolic relevance is clear. The burden of proof, so to speak, will be on the Holy Spirit to show me that the less poor, less obscure, less humble way is in fact the way God is calling me to follow.<sup>79</sup>

The meaning of this whole consideration of humility becomes clearer, then, if we remember that the *Spiritual Exercises* does not offer it as a general principle of the spiritual life, but as a help to prepare for a choice of a state in life that will be as free as possible from our ingrained self-centeredness, as full a realization as possible of Jesus' concrete call to each individual to be a disciple in his image. For Ignatius, it seems, and his early followers, the issue usually at stake in the election of the Exercises, when it was formally undertaken, was to choose between the "way of the precepts" and the "way of the counsels": between living a good Christian life in the secular world, trying there to keep the commandments and do God's will, and giving oneself to the more demanding forms of total dedication to God that normally found expression in the religious life. If a person was not in a state of real indifference with regard to this level of choice, he or she was not considered ready to make an election in freedom and openness to divine guidance and should not be allowed to go forward with it. The consideration on Three Kinds of Humility seems to have been meant both as a help towards such indifference and as a test of the retreatant's readiness for the election. Thus Ignatius himself observes, in the brief notes on giving the Exercises he dictated to Polanco:

First of all one must insist that any who will make the elections enter into them with complete resignation of their will, and, if it is possible, that they reach the third degree of humility, in which, for their part, they are more inclined to what is more conformed to the counsels and to the example of Christ our Lord, if God should be equally served. Any who are not in the indifference of the second degree are not ready to put themselves in the position of making a choice, and it is better to keep them engaged in other exercises before moving on to it.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> See J. Delépière, "Note sur les trois degrés d'humilité," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 70 (1948): 963–75, esp. 972ff.

<sup>80</sup> *Directoria Ignatiana Autographa*, 17, ed. I. Iparraguirre, MHSI, vol. 76 (Rome, 1955): 74ff.



Polanco himself explains this delicate point more fully in his own unfinished *Directory* of 1573–75:

On the evening of the fifth day [of the Second Week], after the director has asked for an account of what has happened that day, he should notice whether the retreatant is disposed, as far as the affect is concerned, to undertake the elections. For the retreatant's disposition should be such that in the matter of following the way of the precepts or the counsels his or her will is placed in the hands of God, as in a kind of balance; or rather, as far as the retreatant is concerned, that he or she be inclined towards the side of the counsels, if such should be understood to be the will of God. But if it is noticed that the will is tending rather towards the [way of the] precepts, and shrinks from the way of the counsels, the retreatant is not well disposed, nor is it to be hoped that he or she will make a good election. For the affect that is turned away from the more perfect way and inclined towards the less perfect will draw the mind to think up reasons that conform to such an affective state. With such persons, then, one should not go on to the three times of making an election [that is, §§175–88], but the exercises of the sixth day could be given to them, to meditate on them the next day; . . . and the person should be urged to dispose himself or herself to begging God for resignation [to his will] by repeating the exercises on the three classes of people and the three kinds of humility, asking, as we have said above, that if it is more or equally pleasing to God, he might incline one's affect towards choosing the counsels rather than the precepts."<sup>81</sup>

The consideration of Three Kinds of Humility in the Exercises, then, in the minds of Ignatius and his early associates, is really the concluding piece of a strategy developed throughout the Second Week, of preparing the retreatant to be involved in the work and lifestyle of Christ as fully as possible, in a way conformed to God's concrete will for his or her personal share in salvation history. Although the original texts of the *Exercises* always speak of three "kinds" (in Spanish, *maneras*; in Latin, *species, modos*) rather than "degrees" or "grades" of humility, the early directories and even Ignatius's own dictated notes often use the more evaluative language of "degrees"; this is implied, too, in the *Exercises'* insistence that the second kind is "more perfect" than the first and the third "more perfect" than the second. Clearly the whole movement of the consideration is to lead the retreatant towards actually wanting the third kind of humility for himself or herself, as far as that is possible; as the official *Directorium* of 1591–99 observes, "These three degrees . . . only contain one principal point, namely, the desire to attain that third degree of humility."<sup>82</sup> It is only in this desire to empty oneself with Christ that the indifference of the

<sup>81</sup> *Directorium P. Joannis Alfonsi de Polanco*, 78, MHSI, 76:309f.

<sup>82</sup> *Directoria conscripta iussu R. P. Claudii Aquaviva* 29.8, MHSI, 76:714f.



second degree—the indifference necessary to make a choice simply in conformity with God’s will—is actually secured.<sup>83</sup>

In its original context within the Exercises, then, this consideration is closely linked to the process of election, which seems to have been designed principally for young people making major vocational decisions. Clearly, however, the Exercises were used for a variety of purposes and given to a variety of people, even in St. Ignatius’s time. Although the early directories make it clear that those whose state in life is already clearly dedicated to God in some way, particularly Jesuits and other religious, should not be induced to go through the election process formally, they were clearly encouraged from the beginning to use the whole of the Exercises, including the main meditations of the Second Week, as a way of growing in self-knowledge and deepening their commitment to the life of discipleship they had undertaken.<sup>84</sup> An Italian note at the end of the “dictated” directory attributed to Ignatius himself makes this point in what are, to anyone living in the Ignatian tradition, familiar terms:

In the Second Week, where the elections are concerned, it is not appropriate to have those who are already settled in their state of life deliberate about that state of life; but in place of this deliberation, one may propose one of two things, which they may want to choose. The first is, when the divine service is the same and without sin on one’s own or one’s neighbor’s part, to desire injuries and insults and to be made low in all things with Christ, to be dressed in his uniform and to imitate him in this aspect of his cross; or rather to be disposed to suffer patiently everything of this kind, when they happen to one, for love of Christ our Lord.<sup>85</sup>

For Ignatius and his contemporaries, speaking of choosing humility with Christ was clearly a way of speaking about love. A tract on the Ignatian approach to making an election, written in the early 1540s by the Spanish theologian and diplomat Dr. Pedro Ortiz (to whom Ignatius himself had given

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<sup>83</sup> See J. Delépierre, “Note sur les trois degrés,” 964: “L’indifférence s’achève normalement . . . dans l’humilité du 3e degré. L’une et l’autre sont plus que des vérités à admettre ou des objectifs passagers à conquérir.” Cf. B. Pottier, “L’Élection,” in A. Chapelle *et al.*, eds., *Les Exercices Spirituels d’Ignace de Loyola: Un commentaire littéral et théologique* (Brussels: Institut d’Etudes Théologiques, 1990), 298. As in the meditation on the Kingdom, the first two kinds of humility are based on the recognition of truths that “everyone who has judgment and reason” would admit, but the retreatant is assumed to be at least open to moving beyond the “ordinary” level of Christian practice.

<sup>84</sup> See the *Directory* of Polanco, no. 92 (MHSI 76:318) and the official *Directorium* of 1591/99, no. 91 (*ibid.*, 628); the *Brevis Instructio* on giving the Exercises, which may be notes by Fr. Everard Mercurian for some conferences he gave in France in 1569–70, even suggests a person already committed to a permanent state in life might use the election process to “choose” between two virtues or between the second and third kinds of humility (no. 52, *ibid.*, 252f.).

<sup>85</sup> MHSI 76:78.



the Exercises at Monte Cassino in 1538) and his brother Francisco, a well-known Franciscan preacher, speaks consistently of the three kinds of humility rather as "three kinds or degrees of the love of God and of the desire to obey and imitate and serve his divine majesty."<sup>86</sup> As the brothers Ortiz paraphrase Ignatius's text, they make it clear that the context of such an election is clearly the desire to use one's talents and resources in an apostolic way, in "pious works" for the "praise and glory of God."<sup>87</sup> But when the merits of two alternative plans of life and work seem equal, as far as the promotion of God's glory is concerned, the most perfect choice is to seek poverty with Christ poor, exclusion and insults with Christ rejected: because this way is more "secure," less worldly, less distracting from God; but above all because

in the lower state one imitates more our Lord Jesus Christ, whose intense love is able to move and incline us towards such a lower state, to resemble and imitate him more; and because in this state the soul holds more present before its eyes the memory of its spouse, who came into this world freely choosing such a state, and taught it to his beloved disciples."<sup>88</sup>

So the desire for this kind of state is "a special and very great mercy of God," "a rich and precious gift";<sup>89</sup> it is, in the end, a desire that can no longer be justified in rational terms, but a mystical blessing, a personal share in "the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:19) and which has been revealed in the cross.

In his illuminating chapter on the Three Kinds of Humility, Przywara points out that the election process is the heart of the Spiritual Exercises simply because choosing to be formed with Christ is really the heart of Christian faith; and since, in the actual working out of God's saving will within history, his love has been revealed in the self-emptying of the Son, our choice of his love, our submission to his will, always is finally expressed not in the "ascent" of achievement so much as in the "descent" of a similar self-emptying, in which we experience the transcendence beyond ourselves into the mystery of God.<sup>90</sup> Przywara sees the First Kind of Humility as what Paul calls the "righteousness of the law": something that can become self-righteousness unless it is tempered by the "divine foolishness" of love expressed in Ignatius's text, in which—even at this stage of identification with Christ—I would not consider breaking God's law "even if I were to be made lord of all creation!"<sup>91</sup> The Second Kind

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<sup>86</sup> *Tractatus de electione* 1–6: J. Calveras and C. de Dalmases, *Sancti Ignatii de Loyola Exercitia Spiritualia*, 635–37.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 (MHSI 100:635).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, MHSI 100:636.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 6, MHSI 100:636, 637).

<sup>90</sup> Przywara, *Deus Semper Major: Theologie der Exerzitzen* 1:352f.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 355f.



expresses this same rash generosity in seeking perfect indifference before the will of God, a habitual inner obedience and reverent “fear of the Lord” that Przywara likens to Old Testament wisdom—an attitude of reverent openness before the divine mystery like that of Job, which avoids Stoic self-sufficiency by recognizing the limitations of our own intuition for what is right.<sup>92</sup> But it is only in the Third Kind of Humility, in the simple desire to share fully in the way of Jesus, that these first two “Old Testament” forms of humility find their fulfillment; “for since there is really only a single order of salvation, and since this is the order realized in the scandal of the cross and in being crucified into this same scandal . . . , so there is only a single genuine humility: the one humility of the emptied and oppressed and humiliated Christ.”<sup>93</sup> The Third Kind of Humility, in a sense, lets go of all the retreatant’s earlier calculations of what is “better” or “more for the praise and service of the Divine Majesty” and simply desires, so far as is possible, to enter into the movement of God’s love for the world, to be drawn by grace, with the incarnate Word, into an “ever-greater descent into the ever-greater God.”<sup>94</sup> It is the final preparation, in terms of desires, for the concrete life choice that is to lead the retreatant himself into the Paschal Mystery, the realization of the Kingdom of God in the crucified and risen Christ: into the Third and Fourth Weeks of the Exercises, and so into the final sealing of the mutual gifts of love, perceived and desired throughout the whole journey, in simple terms of “Take, Lord, and receive . . . all that I have and possess.” In the self-emptying of love, the humility framing a good election can finally be seen for what it is.

## Humility in Jesuit Life Today

**A**t the end of this rather tortuous survey of the role of humility in the Christian spiritual tradition and in the Ignatian Exercises, we might well still ask ourselves, What use can we make of all this today? How does it speak to our own spiritual needs and desires, as men and women of the late twentieth century? Is humility still an intelligible and suggestive category to use in trying to express basic human responses to the mysterious grandeur and goodness of God? Can we still say, as my novice master liked to say thirty and more years ago, that the phrase “humble service” captures the heart of the Ignatian ideal? These are questions each of us must attempt to answer for himself or herself, but we might at least draw a few general, preliminary conclusions from all we have said here.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 358f.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 363.



First, the humility held up as an ideal in the Scriptures and the *Spiritual Exercises* cannot be justified simply in philosophical or psychological terms. It grows directly from the experience of biblical revelation: from the uniquely Judaeo-Christian insight into our status as free, self-determining creatures of a God on whom we utterly depend for our being and who invites but does not force us to accept our dependence in gratitude and to give our being back to him in love. It grows from the uniquely Christian recognition that "God has so loved the world that he sent his only Son," who revealed, in his life of obscurity, service, and fidelity unto death, the love that God is, and who calls us to find our salvation by realizing *his* way of love in ourselves (John 3:16f., 1 John 4:7-12). Because it is so determined by the biblical presentation of the person and acts of Christ, Christian humility seems to be one of those few central categories of faith that biblical religion does not draw from the wider store of human wisdom and that therefore will always appear paradoxical, dangerous, even nonsensical to the secular mind. For this very reason, humility seems to be one of the categories that distinguish Christian love and Christian goodness from a love and goodness not illumined by faith. It is one of our basic ways of responding in faith to the Christian Mystery.<sup>95</sup>

Second, the humility Ignatius describes as the "third" and highest kind is really, as we said above, a question of desires, of preferences, rather than of habitual concrete practices: it is an ideal for our ultimate loving, a sense that, in the most concrete shaping of our lives, union with Christ as he lived is what we want above all things. As such, it does not preempt apostolic decision making or excuse us from governing our daily lives by prudence, charity, and common sense. Nor is it something we normally can expect to *possess* as a result of thought and discipline, a stable stage of spiritual growth in which we may eventually find ourselves; it is a *grace* to be prayed for in the context of free decision (§168), a desire that Ignatius hoped his companions would at least *desire* to experience as they set about following Christ.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ruth Burrows writes as follows: "Natural religion is essentially man's effort to reach God. Christianity demands a death; it brings it about. In some mysterious way man must die to himself in order to receive new life as a pure gift from God. . . . Wrong ideas of this death have led to a distortion of christianity which has rightly won contempt, but we have to note that a true understanding of it, or rather that measure of understanding which we can gain before we ourselves enter into it and know its beatitude, must cause revulsion. . . . It calls for a profound humility, and humility is not an attitude native to man; it is not on the list of virtues which make us human. It enters the scene only with revelation, only with Jesus who is humility personified, the love which empties self in order to give itself to the beloved. And Jesus is the revelation of the Father. Humility has everything to do with love" (*To Believe in Jesus* [London: Sheed and Ward, 1978], 22f.)

<sup>96</sup> See especially *General Examen* [102]: in George E. Ganss, trans., *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), 108f.



Third, understood against the background of the earlier spiritual tradition, humility is not simply an interior gift, but carries a strongly communitarian and apostolic flavor (see especially Phil. 2:1–11). It suggests the service of others (Mark 10:43–45), involvement in the concrete world of limited and sinful people (Augustine), voluntary obedience to teachers and religious leaders (Cassian, Benedict), compassion and charity for fellow creatures (Bernard), the practical attempt to overcome barriers of class, wealth, and status (Savonarola). So it is understandable that Ignatius was deeply concerned that those seeking to determine the shape of their lives as Christians—especially young candidates for the Society—should experience, as far as possible, the grace of a creaturely and Christlike humility. By freeing us from the paralyzing isolation of pride—from being imprisoned within our own views of the world, our own drives and emotions, our own agenda—humility allows us to walk and act with Christ, reaching out with him to others, and ultimately to God.

Fourth, the Christian tradition has generally seen humility as rooted in a realistic knowledge of oneself (see especially Bernard, Thomas à Kempis). For this reason, Christian humility is certainly not opposed to the Aristotelian ideal of magnanimity: an honest appreciation of one's own potential, a balanced sense of one's value before God and in the human community. Although St. Bonaventure's argument that true magnanimity is really courageous Christian humility may strike us today as a bit forced, the paradoxical instinct of Christian writers that these two virtues are in fact complementary should not surprise us, if we understand the terms. Real human greatness of soul, even in the eyes of the classical philosophers, is anything but self-preoccupation and self-advertisement; it is the instinctive and unself-conscious ability simply, publicly, unaffectedly to be what we know we are at our best. And Christian humility is *not*, as we said at the start, a negative self-image or the conviction that we are worthless; it is the realization that we are sinners, potentially and in fact—something that only the greatest of creatures are capable of being—and the deliberate desire, in the face of our sinful reality, to draw closer to God along the same way of self-emptying love by which God has drawn closer to us. From a Christian perspective, humility is the height of human freedom, just as freedom is the greatest of human gifts.

Lastly, the Society of Jesus has always cultivated classical magnanimity as an ideal: it has defended its reputation and just interests from prejudice and slander, striven after quality in its corporate enterprises, associated easily with the influential in the world, encouraged competitiveness in its schools, urged its members and friends to work and to pray for generosity. Yet in Ignatius's eyes, the Society was, and should always seek to remain, "this least congregation."<sup>97</sup> Young people desiring to become part of the Society were to be tested above all

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<sup>97</sup> *General Examen*, [1], in *Constitutions*, p. 75, p. 75 n. 2.



in humiliation, by a series of dramatic "experiences" of poverty and submission to others;<sup>98</sup> and Ignatius continued to deal out humiliating reprimands and penances to senior fathers, even to his closest associates, apparently as a kind of "continuing formation," a way of continually probing and deepening their union with the crucified Christ.<sup>99</sup> The climax of the *General Examen*—the broad description of the Society's ideals and practices written by Ignatius as a kind of vocation pamphlet for prospective candidates—is the famous passage vividly portraying what the *Exercises* call the Third Kind of Humility as the goal of Jesuit asceticism and the spiritual heart of Jesuit life.<sup>100</sup> To be "clothed with the same clothing and uniform of their Lord"—to be exposed to undeserved insults and the hostility of outsiders and even fellow Jesuits—is something that the candidate, talented and idealistic as he is, must be ready to "accept and suffer with patience, through the help of God's grace,"<sup>101</sup> and even to see as beneficial, as something one might at least "desire to desire," as a way "to imitate and follow him."<sup>102</sup> This paradox of Jesuit ideals and behavior should not be written off as simply part of the Baroque rhetoric of the 1540s; it reveals a tension constantly present within the Society's enduring vocation of preaching, in an effective and humanly attractive way, the humiliated Christ as savior of the world.

One finds this same tension today, for instance, in our recent emphasis on the "preferential love of the poor" as a freely chosen principle guiding our choice of ministries and as one of the main criteria for ensuring the honesty and credibility of our work for the Gospel.<sup>103</sup> To conceive of our identification with the materially poor in the way we live and the works we do, not simply as part of a program of social reform, but as the expression of "a love like Christ's own" and a way towards "communion" with him in his Kingdom,<sup>104</sup> is to reemphasize one of Ignatius's own central spiritual and apostolic concerns.<sup>105</sup> Yet the same recent documents of the Society that commit us to identifying ourselves with the poor also sketch out a vision of apostolic action that

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<sup>98</sup> *General Examen*, [80]–[90], in *Constitutions*, pp. 100–103.

<sup>99</sup> See the examples in De Guibert, *The Jesuits*, 78–81, along with De Guibert's own comments.

<sup>100</sup> *General Examen*, [101]–[103], in *Constitutions*, pp. 107–9.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, [102], in *Constitutions*, p. 109.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* [101]–[102], in *Constitutions*, 107f.

<sup>103</sup> See the document of the Thirty-third General Congregation, *Companions of Jesus Sent into Today's World* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1984), ¶52 (p. 63).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> See, for instance, the letter dated August 7, 1547, written by Polanco in Ignatius's name to the Jesuits in the college at Padua (Ep. 186 [Epp. Ign. 1.572–577]; also in William J. Young, S.J., trans., *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola* [Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959], 146–50).



presumes the highest degree of institutional self-confidence and human sophistication, involving long years of education, continuing research, articulate self-expression, and enormous generosity and breadth of spirit.<sup>106</sup> Humility and magnanimity, “thinking little” and “thinking big,” are not only not opposed to each other in the Jesuit scale of virtues but actually require each other if either is to be realized in a corporate way. Without Ignatian humility, our projects simply become expressions of collective triumphalism or ideological crusades, ultimately dehumanizing ourselves and de-Christianizing our work; without Ignatian magnanimity, our “option for the poor” becomes a self-punishing romanticism of protest, ultimately leading to hopelessness and cynical alienation.

On the more personal level, too, the desire to share in the poverty and humiliation of Christ has an essential role to play in keeping our individual and corporate idealism alive, keeping our generosity high. Each of us faces the inevitable process of what Teilhard de Chardin referred to as “diminishment”:<sup>107</sup> the growing weakness and failure of our personal resources and energies, through aging, illness, and disappointment, always ending in death. Together, as a Society, we face a host of threatening uncertainties: smaller numbers and an increasing average age in most of our provinces, economic insecurity, growing hostility or indifference from a world less and less respectful of the Christian ideal, even a less central and less honored role for ourselves in the apostolic activities of the Roman Catholic Church. It seems that poverty, limitations in our work for the Kingdom, misunderstanding, “insults and contempt,” will assuredly be part of our collective future, in new and perhaps dramatic ways, just as weakness and death face each of us as individuals. The question is always whether we are able to accept these things freely and generously as an authenticating context for our work as disciples of Jesus—whether we will be given the grace to welcome and even to desire them in the way God offers them to us and still find the energy, the greatheartedness, and quiet self-confidence to go on proclaiming the Kingdom of God according to our Institute and our individual charisms. We can only hope the answer is yes.

## Conclusion

**I**gnatius, as we have mentioned, clearly thought it important that those thinking of joining the Society be confronted explicitly, even somewhat brutally, with the prospect of self-emptying that is characteristic of the way

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<sup>106</sup> See, for example, GC 32, Decree 4, ¶¶59–61 in *Documents of the Thirty-First and Thirty-Second General Congregations of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977), 431f.; GC 33, “Companions of Jesus,” ¶¶46–49 (pp. 60–62).

<sup>107</sup> *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 80–111, esp. 84–90.



of Jesus and his companions. Could it be that some of the lack of success we have experienced in attracting and retaining vocations to the Society over the past twenty years may be due to our reluctance to challenge young inquirers—or even to challenge ourselves—to desire Ignatius's Third Kind of Humility? Could it be that our desire to be affirming, to preach a positive image of God, to promote freedom and fulfillment and "feeling good about yourself," has ended by emptying the Gospel of so much of its challenge and its reality that few are interested in giving their lives to preaching it to others with us? Could it be that we will only again arouse the natural magnanimity, the greatheartedness or *μεγαλοψυχία* of the spiritually young, by deliberately drawing them—with us—more deeply into "the mind, which was in Christ Jesus, who . . . emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, . . . and humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5-8)? If so, we will have to practice what we preach.

The German poet Hölderlin once quoted as "the epitaph of Loyola" an enigmatic phrase that Hugo Rahner, nearer to our own time, rightly identified as coming from a sumptuous commemorative volume produced by the Flemish Jesuits in 1640 to mark the centenary of the Society's founding:

*Non coerceri maximo, contineri tamen a minimo, divinum est.*<sup>108</sup>

The phrase could, of course, be taken simply as a reference to the Incarnation, a pithy and classic summary of how Christian faith believes God acts in his creation. But it also seems to express with peculiar accuracy the interplay of magnanimity and humility, outward-oriented energy and self-effacing submission to limit and deprivation, that characterizes Ignatian spirituality, as an outgrowth of the love of Jesus and of personal, even mystical identification with him on his way. Not to be daunted or held back by the greatest challenges, personal or corporate, yet to let ourselves willingly become "little people" in the world's eyes and our own, bound up with other "little" people and "little" things, because God has become "little" in Jesus: this is the "divine" paradox that our vocation calls us to proclaim and to live, as companions of Ignatius and of his Lord.

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<sup>108</sup> "Not to be constrained by the greatest thing, but to be contained in the smallest thing, is divine" (Hugo Rahner, "Die Grabschrift des Loyola," *Ignatius von Loyola als Mensch und Theologe* [Freiburg: Herder, 1964], 422-40, esp. 423f). The phrase is not originally part of an "epitaph" at all, but appears in a flowery anonymous memorial inscription to Ignatius in the *Imago Primi Sæculi Societatis Iesu* (Antwerp: Moret, 1640), 280-82.



# SOURCES

## Selected Decrees of the First General Congregation

*The general congregation that will have begun by the time our readers receive this issue of STUDIES is the thirty-fourth in a series that stretches back to 1558, when the first such congregation was held.*

*That first congregation had no precedents to guide it and the directives about it in the Constitutions are comparatively brief. Basically, they comprise six short chapters (¶677–¶718) in Part 8, treating the union of the members of the Society. By far the longest of those chapters lays down the procedures for the election of a general, and the scattered references to such a congregation in other parts of the Constitutions often relate especially to the general. So the First Congregation had both to set down its own detailed procedures and to deal with questions—some of them quite serious, some of them seemingly rather trivial—pertaining to the life of the Society. The written results are the 168 decrees of the First General Congregation, some of them serious and some also seemingly trivial.*

*The history of that congregation is very important, for it determined the way in which for a long time future congregations were organized and conducted. This history still remains to be written in its fullness, as do those of all the general congregations. A brief history can be found in the volume from which is taken the selection of decrees here presented as our Sources excerpt, For Matters of Greater Moment: The First Thirty Jesuit General Congregation: A Brief History and a Translation of the Decrees by John W. Padberg, S.J., Martin D. O'Keefe, S.J., and John L. McCarthy, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1994).*

### BEFORE THE ELECTION OF THE GENERAL

**Decree 1: Absentees ought not be waited for. The Holy Father's blessing should be sought.**

On June 19 the first session was held. Only this was decided in it: Except for the vice-provincial of Aragon, who was in the vicinity, others were not to be awaited; the congregation must convene and it was to be legitimate and integral despite the absence of those who had been summoned in accord with the Constitutions. The blessing of the Supreme Pontiff was to be sought, and to request this Father Vicar Láinez was designated along with Father Master Alonso Salmerón. They obtained that blessing on the following day.

**D. 3: Prior to the election, no business not pertaining to it is to be transacted. Only electors are to be admitted. The method of transacting business.**

The question was proposed: What items require action? All agreed that, until the superior general was elected, no action should be taken other than whatever deals with the election itself. After his election the superior general and the congregation can be reminded about additional items requiring action. Hence electors only, and no others, are to be admitted into the congregation up to the election. It appeared proper to propose on one day an order of items, and on the next to express opinions. If further information is desired on



any matter, appeal should be made to the vicar. But if on the following day there is not full agreement, definitors [*definitores*] and members delegated to make a decision in the name of all [*compromissarii*] should be appointed to prepare a settlement of the matter.

**D. 6: The manner of gathering information.**

The question was proposed whether information and the like [about possible candidates for general] ought to be solicited by the electors exclusively. The preference was that the method of acquiring information and other related procedures should be set forth in written proposals, to be considered and processed in the following meeting of the congregation. In that subsequent meeting what hereafter follows was proposed and eventually decreed.

**AFTER THE ELECTION OF THE GENERAL**

**D. 1: While the congregation is in session, the offices of superiors do not lapse.**

It was decreed that the authority of provincials and other officials does not cease upon the death of a superior general, nor upon the election of a new one, until the dissolution of the general congregation. This is so declared because in the bulls and Constitutions this topic is treated and because it would not be licit for the general to change officials of this kind prior to the end of the congregation, unless it appeared right to the aforesaid congregation that someone should be changed.

**D. 2: Seating is not changed after the election.**

It was decreed that for the purpose of expressing their opinions, the provincial superiors and other officials ought to remain seated in the places assigned before the election.

**D. 6: The "consent of all."**

It is said in the seventh chapter of Part 8 of the Constitutions that "if, after matters have been carefully considered, virtually nothing would be decided with the consent of all . . ." It was explained that the term "consent of all" was to be understood of the majority of the votes, and that this position should be held in other considerations as well.

**D. 9: After a decree is passed, how often a formal appeal is to be allowed.**

It was decreed that, after a decree of the full congregation or also of definitors, along with the general, each member may be allowed one formal appeal for reconsideration, that is, a permission to raise objections in some respect. But if the abrogation of any item of an older constitution or the introduction of a new one is being considered, two formal appeals for reconsideration are allowed. Nevertheless, whether there is one formal appeal or two, the decision of those who possess the right to make that decision must be accepted.

**D. 10: The Constitutions are to be reviewed before the congregation is dissolved.**

To the question of whether the congregation ought to obligate itself to place a final approval (as far as this can be done) upon the Constitutions before it closes, an affirmative reply was given.

**D. 34: The places to be assigned those who have attained the rank of master or doctor.**

As to the fifteenth chapter of Part 4 of the Constitutions, near the end, where the reading is "Let them anticipate one another in showing respect, and the more learned take the last place," the change was made to "Let them anticipate one another in showing respect without making distinctions of place."



**D. 35: The general can dispense from the Constitutions' requirement of a corrector of extern students.**

Since in many places correctors are not to be found and in others cannot be supported, or since the students are unwilling to be corrected by them, the question arose, Should that constitution in the sixteenth chapter of Part 4, pertaining to the correction of extern students, be relaxed by some form of declaration or allowed to remain a constitution as it now reads, even though it may be dispensed from as occasion requires?

The response was that the constitution, as it reads, should be retained and observed; nevertheless, if occasion arises somewhere, the superior general can dispense from it.

**D. 47: The Holy Father proposes that thought should be given to whether Father General's term should be for life or not. The lifetime character of the term is reaffirmed by the congregation. The congregation's memorandum to the Pontiff. It was, however, not given to him.**

On August 24 the proposal was made on behalf of the Supreme Pontiff that we deliberate whether the superior general should be elected for life, as is said in chapter 1 of Part 9 of the Constitutions and in the accompanying declaration. And it seemed fitting, with no one dissenting, that the election certainly should be for an entire lifetime; and when this proposal was made on the following day, the entire congregation felt this same way.

As to the manner of conveying this to the Supreme Pontiff, however, the matter was entrusted to the Superior General himself. So that the judgment of our Society might be conveyed to His Holiness, however, a letter was drawn up (and it is appended below), with the signatures of all except the General himself.

"Most Holy Father:

"Since the Most Reverend Cardinal Pacheco, at the command of Your Holiness, was present at the election of our superior, he had beforehand made known to us Your Holiness's thinking about the qualifications of the person whom we ought to elect, and Your Holiness's inclination that he should be elected for life, rather than for a certain definite period of time. Although Your Holiness, in your kindness, left the entire matter to our congregation, all of us with joyful spirit accepted this clarification of Your Holiness's will as coming from God, who was moving us also to think and choose the same thing.

"Afterwards, when Your Holiness deigned to admit us to pay reverence to you and with such great charity roused and encouraged us in the divine service, Your Holiness, besides other unusual benefits which Your Holiness had most generously conferred on us in the Lord, willingly confirmed the election of a superior whom we had chosen for ourselves for life. Wherefore we offer the utmost thanks to the divine mercy and to Your Holiness.

"But at a more recent date the Most Reverend Cardinal Pacheco has indicated to us that Your Holiness is even now of doubtful mind about the lifelong duration of the superiorship; and he bade us give consideration to this matter. This we did, with prior prayer to God. And when it was brought up in the congregation time and again, all of us with fullest agreement, with no dissent, judged that it would be far more suitable for our Society that our superior not be changed during his lifetime. Even so, we are obedient sons and fully prepared to do anything that Your Holiness will command. But because it may be that Your Holiness may wish to be more certain about our judgment, we have signed it below herewith, humbly



submissive to whatever it is that Your Holiness may judge.

"The third day of the Kalends of September, 1558."

On August 13 all of us professed signed this letter, except Fathers Canisius and Pelletier, who had left the congregation, and except the Superior General himself, for whom it was unseemly to sign. The letter was given to the General, and he took it with him; but he, for good and sufficient reasons, ultimately did not give it to the Pontiff.

**D. 73: Conditions under which colleges are to be accepted.** For a period of ten years no college is to be undertaken where fourteen men cannot be supported, [or] where a suitable residence and church are not provided, [or] where the necessities of fourteen men are not provided for at least one year.

Experience has taught us that in our colleges we need two or three priests who devote themselves to the ministry of the sacraments and the divine word. Four or five teachers are needed to offer youths instruction in letters and good morals. There is need for others to be there as well to assist them and substitute for them, so that the sequence of lectures is not interrupted if they should fall ill. Moreover, the Society must realize some form of income during the education of a number of scholastics in literary studies, especially since so many are occupied in the pursuit and service of the common good. And so we have decided that for the next ten years, beginning in 1553, no college will be allowed in which at least twelve of the Society cannot be sustained, along with two others to assist in temporal matters, so that the total number is fourteen.

Also, we are aware how much of an inconvenience it is and how great a hin-

drance to the divine service when a house and a church suitable to the practices that befit our institute are not at hand. And since Ours find themselves forced to put aside spiritual pursuits in order to devote themselves to searching out subsistence and the temporalities required for study, we have likewise decided that no college-group should be sent to a place where there is not a designated house suitable for our dwelling and our conducting classes, and a church set aside for the offering of spiritual exercises for the welfare of our neighbor—whether its ownership or its free use is given to us.

Likewise, Ours should not be sent to establish a college if the necessities for fourteen men's subsistence are not available for at least one year. If after a year's time the college will not prove to be useful to the community, the people of that community will be able to inform us, and Ours will be able to move on as a group to another place. If on the other hand that community will provide for our needs for another year or even longer, or if it will enter negotiations about permanence or about endowing the college, then a judgment will be made in the matter, as seems to be for the greater glory of God and the benefit of the common good.

This ordinance satisfied the general congregation, so that it was regarded as a temporary edict outside the body of the Constitutions.

**D. 76: The rule about superiors eating by themselves.**

Our Father Ignatius had ordered the following constitution to be drawn up, but had not himself revised it. And if it ought to be inserted in the Constitutions, it seems to belong in Part 9. But still to be seen is whether it belongs among the constitutions or might better be included among the documents of superiors.



For one who has ultimate responsibility for any group, that degree of humanness and affability toward subjects is very suitable which will permit him to retain his authority and will ensure that he will receive the reverence that is necessary for him to rule his subjects for God's greater glory. Also, such a one's subjects should have but slight occasion for conflict with the one to whom they ought to have recourse amid their own trials. And so in a house or college where the number of Ours exceeds thirty, the one who has ultimate charge ought not ordinarily take his meal with the others in the refectory, even though he ought to do that on a monthly basis, for his and their consolation and to observe how matters are progressing. Ordinarily, however, as has been said, he should take his food separately, though it ought to be of the same quality as the rest receive, or more or less frugal, as the consultants or assistants who have authority over him in this matter will judge to be of greater benefit both to the person of the superior and to the common good.

The judgment was that this decree should be among the rules, and not in the Constitutions.

**D. 97: In regard to time for prayer, let the Constitutions be observed. Let the novices pray longer than one hour, but let them ordinarily not be held to two hours. What is to be said of the professed? And what is to be said of [temporal] coadjutors?**

Regarding prayer, the statement was made that some thought more time should be spent therein than the Constitutions prescribe. The answer to this was that the Constitutions are to be observed and nothing else definitely prescribed in them. But as to novices, the rules of the novice master state that they should pray more than an hour, as the Constitutions suggest, and ordinarily are not obliged to pray for

two hours. Nevertheless, in particular cases, the superior can prolong or lessen the time.

As to the professed, if they are not acting according to the intent of the Constitutions, the superiors of the houses might help them and prescribe such time for prayer as shall seem proper.

This was stated about temporal coadjutors: Special care is needed here, but a definite time should not be prescribed for them other than what is stated in chapter 4 of Part 4.

Nevertheless, the *epikeia* wherewith superiors may prolong, lessen, or commute the prayer time for scholastics has a place in all the above cases.

**D. 105: The printing and sale of books is left to Father General's judgment.**

Next, the following questions were brought up: Is it tolerable or even praiseworthy in the Society to print and sell books for the sake of the general good that would ensue? Or rather should it be forbidden, lest we appear to be engaging in business?

It was decreed that nothing should be decided in favor of either side of the question, but rather that it should be left to the discretion of the superior general. It seemed worthy of consideration, however, so that nothing may be done that would damage the poverty or the institute of the Society.

**D. 116: Whether use should be made of prisons.**

The congregation looked into the matter of having places of confinement even within the Society. Indeed, the Society already possesses the right to this in the bulls and Constitutions. However, nothing need be decreed about their use, and this concern is to be left to the superior general.



**D. 125: Longer vacations from studies are to be granted to the college at Évora.**

At our college in Évora, because of the intemperate and unhealthy climate and the overpowering heat of that city, should our teachers receive longer vacations from studies than are usually allowed in other colleges?

The response was that the vacations are to be approved. However, the way to do this and the number of days to leave free from study are to be left to the judgment of the provincial superior.

**D. 135: Whether sanctuary should be allowed in our houses.**

Should we allow into our houses any who commit a crime or have become insolvent, until they have assured their own safety? The answer was that experts should be consulted on this matter; after such con-

sultation, the matter is committed to the Superior General.

**D. 137: When Christian doctrine should be taught in song.**

Would it be better to teach Christian doctrine in song, since experience shows that this method is more attractive to children and brings better results?

The answer was that this is to be referred to the Superior General. He decided that this might be done where it seemed that it would serve for greater edification.

**D. 145: The general, on his own authority, cannot dissolve a congregation.**

It was declared that it does not seem that a congregation should be dissolved upon the decision of the superior general alone without the consent of the congregation itself, which is superior to the general.





## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor:

The piece by John Foley, S.J., entitled "Stepping into the River" was wonderfully refreshing and uniquely insightful. The metaphor of a flowing river, which he used to describe life in general and the vowed life in particular, demonstrates how the use of one's imagination can revitalize a subject that otherwise suffers from the unimaginative treatment in the stultifying prose of academia. One line of poetry from the genius of a Gerard Manley Hopkins says more about spirituality than volumes. Who can not be moved by the one line: "Glory be to God for dappled things"?

And movement is what John Foley's contribution is all about. As one whose river has survived the severe and serpentine curves of life's flow, it is very hopeful to imagine that river as "seeking the sea I was born for." His skillful use of the Contemplation as the culmination not only of the Exercises but of life's flow was most welcome. By our daily and prayerful acknowledgement of the gifts we have received, we are motivated to give them up to the flow and not, as Foley warns, to step out of the river and perch on the banks. By refusing to acknowledge our gifts by not using them to keep the flow of our lives moving, we become dried up riverbeds which will never make it to the ocean. Part 1 of his essay is welcome indeed.

Unfortunately Part 2, where he attempted to apply his metaphor to a discussion of the vows, did not flow. I felt he had stepped out of the river and perched on the banks of academic discussion. While he made a valiant attempt to integrate the river metaphor in his discussion of poverty and obedience, the river all but

disappeared when he waded into the difficult terrain of celibacy. By yielding to the common Jesuitical temptation of defining instead of describing, the result was confusing and less than inspiring, which is what the artist does best. By narrowly defining celibacy as "abstinence from genital sexual relations," he forced this reader to step out of the river and perch on the arid banks of overly familiar academic questions. For example, according to the traditional Catholic teaching on sexuality, all persons who are not married are obligated to "abstain from genital sexual relations." This includes widows and widowers, divorced and single persons of all kinds who do *not* take a vow of celibacy. Confusion between the vow of celibacy and the virtue of chastity which *does* apply to all persons does nothing to keep the river flowing.

If, for example, a religious vowed to celibacy is never allowed by that vow to experience "genital sexual relations," how is he or she able to come to the mature decision that such behavior is inappropriate precisely because he or she has freely giving up having a mate, which is really what the vow of celibacy is all about. A logical consequence is abstinence from genital sexual relations. Such blocking of the flow by academic definitions often results in abstinent but unhealthy celibates, which one too often finds in the dry riverbed of religious communities.

By stepping out of the river in his discussion of celibacy, Foley fails to answer what he calls "the real question, namely, "How can relinquishing genital sexuality even signify anything but sterility and suppression?" His attempt to make an analogy between God, willing to relinquish Jesus to humiliation and death, an



a celibate willing to relinquish genital sexuality, seemed to me to be strained and gratuitous. Would it not have been better to stay with the river metaphor that graced the first part of his essay? Mere academic discussions of celibacy and chastity have become tiresome. Writers like John Foley, who admits that his own "breakthrough came from poetry rather than philosophy," could continue to revitalize a discussion of the vows by flowing in the river of his own poetic metaphor.

J. Ripley Caldwell, S.J.  
Sacred Heart Jesuit Center  
Los Gatos, California



Editor:

I gratefully received Fr. Caldwell's comments on "Stepping into the River." As to whether I "stepped out of the river" in the second half of that article, as Fr. Caldwell thinks, I would gently point to my statement on page 1 of the article. I said there that I would "begin with the metaphor, unpack it, and then in Part 2 draw out some implications for the vows." This I did, having promised no more. My "drawing out" the implications may seem (or be!) too academic for some, especially after the poetry of Part 1. But I do contend strongly that my approach to the

vows in Part 2 is based radically on the metaphor in Part 1.

John B. Foley, S.J.  
Center for Liturgy  
St. Louis University  
St. Louis, Missouri



Editor:

As I was reading Thomas Landy's article in the November 1994 issue of *STUDIES*, "Myths That Shape Us," I came to the realization that "our" schools are no longer ours; that is to say, they are no longer Jesuit or even Catholic. When most of the students and much of the faculty are non-Catholic, it is ridiculous to say that the school itself is Catholic because a sprinkling of the faculty are Jesuits and because an occasional Mass and perhaps a short retreat are offered for the Catholic students. The context of our schools has become overwhelmingly secular. Unless we are willing to admit only Catholic students, we might as well admit defeat and set up Catholic enclaves (Newman Centers and such) in the secular institutions. Otherwise, we are merely diluting our presence and wasting our rapidly diminishing manpower.

James C. McKee, S.J.  
Good Samaritan Center  
Clearfield, Pennsylvania



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