



# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

# IES

**Expanding the Shrunken Soul**

*False Humility, Ressentiment, and Magnanimity*

**DEAN BRACKLEY, S.J.**

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## THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

The Seminar is composed of a number of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

It concerns itself with topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially United States Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces through its publication, *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*. 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.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, and laity, to both men and women. Hence, the journal, while meant especially for American Jesuits, is not exclusively for them. Others who may find it helpful are cordially welcome to make use of it.

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EXANDING THE SHRUNKEN SOUL

*False Humility, Ressentiment,  
and Magnanimity*

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*Dean Brackley, S.J.*

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STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

34/4 · SEPTEMBER 2002

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## *The first word . .*

Guido "The Lobster" Padomonte drives a \$200,000 customized vintage Lamborghini into Big Al's neighborhood gas station. "The Lobster" is known for putting the squeeze on delinquent clients of the corporation. Big Al, owner, proprietor, resident mechanic and windshield washer, is currently wrestling with a fan belt under the hood of a 1978 Ford pick-up. The Lobster honks. Big Al wipes his hands on the bib of his overalls and whistles through his teeth in admiration of the vision of chrome and steel before him. He approaches his visitor's means of conveyance reverentially.

The Lobster peels away his Gucci sunglasses and fixes Big Al with his dark eyes. Muted trumpet music in the background. "The company wants you should take care of the car," rasps the driver, his voice a hoarse whisper worthy of Eastwood imitating Brando.

"What's the matter with it?" asks Big Al.

"Nothing. I been taking care of it myself, and it works real good just as it is."

"Real good," he says! The twelve-cylinder engine purrs like a kitten in silk pajamas. Big Al feels a mustache of perspiration sprout on his upper lip. He says nothing, but his look reveals some puzzlement, if not apprehension. His shoes suddenly seem several sizes too large for his feet.

"No problems with the car, but we want you should do for it anyway," insists the stranger with an unmistakable tone of insistence in his voice. Big Al recognizes an offer he can't refuse, even if he wants to. But he doesn't want to. Tending to a car like this is every mechanic's dream of NASCAR heaven. It beats 1978 Ford fan belts any day.

Working stiff that he is, Big Al is no fool. He realizes that there is very little he can do to improve this magnificent Lambo; but any slip of the wrench, any scratch on a fender or any innovative spot on the leopard-skin upholstery could bring consequences of the direst sort to his physical well-being. The Lobster and his employers in the corporation are known in the neighborhood for their exacting standards.

STUDIES has just been parked at my place of employment. Like Big Al, I turn from the well-smudged screen of my eight-year-old word processor, wipe my sweaty hands on the front of a coffee-stained T-shirt, and ponder the arrival of this wonder with seriously conflicted emotions. Surely, it's a great privilege to assume responsibility for a twelve-cylinder, teakwood-trimmed journal of legendary reputation; but what if I accidentally back the Ford into it? Consequences: dire.

One might hesitate, if only for an instant, to think of its previous editor, Fr. John W. Padberg, S.J., in the context of dons, wheel men, and Lamborghinis. That said, he has taken loving care of this prized periodical for the past sixteen years, while running up fully eighty issues on the odometer. Both STUDIES and the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality have been operating under his expert maintenance for so long that it is hard to imagine that it takes any oversight or muscular persuasion to ensure that it works at all. These twin enterprises have become such a routine service in the life of American Jesuits that it comes as a surprise to realize that someone actually

works at them, and more importantly, occasionally puts the crustacean crush of a velvet claw on others to keep the project moving along.

Collaboration is the key to John's oversight of this Assistancy project. His achievements as a scholar, author, and editor have been appropriately cataloged elsewhere; but in this transition period of the Seminar, Fr. Padberg's personal leadership skills as director of the project demand some recognition. Each year on average three new people come on board, and after three years they are gone. The chairman keeps the crew in the same canoe and rowing in the same direction, at least most of the time. With this new cast of characters every year, each bringing unique background and talent to the work, John has provided the continuity. He has fostered the quality and variety of these monographs over the years by inspiring, cajoling, and at times squeezing the Seminar members to reach into their own professional backgrounds and experience of life in the Society in order to produce an essay that others will find refreshing and challenging.

Think of it. It's difficult enough to encourage Jesuits living in the same house to take time to discuss the really important issues in their lives at a community meeting. How much more challenging to gather men from different parts of the country, with different backgrounds and engaged in different ministries, and have them thrash out their ideas in a frank discussion. The manuscripts and dialogs feed each other. As a result, members of the Seminar, diverse as they are, come to appreciate their common roots in Ignatian spirituality.

Those who know John Padberg appreciate his vast knowledge of the history of the Society of Jesus, down to the most delicious gossipy detail of "personality conflicts" and fraternal "differences of opinion" throughout the centuries. His scholarship will be missed, surely; but reference libraries and consultation with other scholars, Jesuits and lay colleagues alike, can help us overcome that loss. We'll miss most of all his steady leadership and the occasional pinch of the famed velvet claw that encourages contributors to get manuscripts prepared in due season.

Big Al, as sole mechanic on site, had every reason to be nervous about his future as custodian of the corporation's Lamborghini. Fortunately, the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality is not a one-man operation. This year we welcome two new master mechanics to the shop on Gasoline Alley.

Fr. Thomas Rausch is the T. Marie Chilton Professor of Catholic Theology and chair of the department at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. His astonishing list of publications demonstrates a wide range of interests and expertise; and most recently he has become involved in dialog between Catholics and Evangelical Christians.

Fr. Claudio Burgaleta, also a theologian by trade, is a member of the New York Province currently based at St. Anthony's parish in Oceanside, N.Y. He is executive director of EPNE (Estudios Pastorales para la Nueva Evangelización), a program in Ignatian spirituality serving the needs of various Latino communities in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area. Even before attending his first meeting, Claudio has been exploring ways for the Seminar to take advantage of the Internet to further the effectiveness of the ministry. I'm sure we'll have something online in the near future. Any suggestions? Send them to Claudio.

Finally, this present issue is a healthy reminder that the work of the Seminar is not limited to its current members. Fr. Dean Brackley contributed "Downward Mobility: Social Implications of St. Ignatius's Two Standards" (STUDIES 20, no. 1 [January 1988]) while he was a member. His encore performance in this issue reflects his experience in social ministry in the Bronx, N.Y. and his engagement with theological and social thinking in Central America since that time. Dean has been teaching theology at the Universidad Centroamericana in San Salvador,

where he was assigned in 1990, shortly after the murders of our Jesuit brothers on the scene. This monograph reached its final stage after an exhilarating (and exhausting) discussion with the Seminar last May. I'm sure our readers will find it equally stimulating.

Those unobtrusive three short paragraphs on the inside front cover provide a kind of mission statement for the Seminar and for STUDIES. As the description of our goals suggests, we have an abundance of riches to draw from in our reflections on Jesuit traditions as they continually adapt to changing circumstances. Paradoxically, as our numbers in the United States decrease, we have become even richer as we share this heritage more fully with the men and women who have joined us in our many apostolates. I hope that future issues will continue to reflect this splendid diversity that continues to make Ignatian spirituality an effective animating force in the contemporary Church.

At least Big Al and his buddies will do their best to see that the company doesn't have to send the Lobster back to put the squeeze on us.

*Richard A. Blake, S.J.*

*Editor*

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CHANGING A MODERN PATH  
BACK AND FORWARD

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Dean Brackley, S.J., has been a professor of theology at Universidad Centoamericana in San Salvador, El Salvador, since 1990. After completing his doctorate at the University of Chicago Divinity School, he engaged in social ministries in the Bronx, New York, and taught briefly at Fordham University. In addition to an earlier contribution to *STUDIES*, his published works include *Divine Revolution: Salvation and Liberation in Catholic Thought* (Orbis, 1995), "Moral Theology in Latin America," with Thomas Schubeck, S.J., in *Theological Studies* (March 2002), and "Higher Standards for Higher Education," in *Listening: A Journal of Religion and Culture* (Winter 2002).

# EXPANDING THE SHRUNKEN SOUL

## *Humility, Ressentiment, and Magnanimity*

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*Fostering humility in those who feel themselves already oppressed may in fact shrivel the soul's capacity for creative engagement with the world. A preoccupation with the limitations of one's personal or social situation can even lead to a form of spiritual self-destruction. A more positive approach to humility involves the gracious acceptance of God-given values found not only in one's own life and social class but also in potentially competing individuals and classes as well.*

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### Introduction

*No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.*

—Matt. 5:15

**L**ove is all you need, just as the Beatles said. On the other hand, Dorothy Day liked to remind herself and others that “Love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams.” (She was quoting Dostoyevsky’s Father Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov*.)<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Day knew that we are all fragile vessels of clay. Ignatius, too, understood that love is under permanent siege. The “enemy of our human nature” will stop at nothing to prevent a life of serious commitment from getting under way, and if it does, to see that it stalls out, or better still, reverses direction. Ignatius was a master at diagnosing the strategies of the enemy and helping others cooperate with the countermeasures of the good

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Day, *Selected Writings: By Little and by Little*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992), 264.

spirit. He knew that temptations can be indirect and well disguised as well as straightforward, and that temptations vary greatly depending on both our temperament and our maturity. Today we must add that they depend on our social context, as well.

In the Two Standards meditation of the *Spiritual Exercises*—which is pivotal for Ignatian spirituality—Ignatius teaches that the enemy typically tempts people first to riches and honors, in order to lead them to arrogant pride and from there to all other vices. Christ, for his part, proposes a counter-strategy of poverty, humiliations, and humility, from which he leads his followers to all other virtues.<sup>2</sup> Fourteen years ago I argued in this journal that by “riches” Ignatius means material riches; that by pride he means arrogant self-importance; and that by humility he means not only recognition of our dependence on God but also a sense that we are no more important than other people, especially those whom the world considers unimportant. On this basis I suggested a close affinity between the enemy’s standard and the contemporary gospel of upward social mobility; and I translated the way of Christ as downward mobility and solidarity with the outcast.<sup>3</sup>

Time and further reflection have strengthened my belief in the soundness of this interpretation and the relevance of the Two Standards for today. As I observe my surroundings and read the news, it seems evident to me that riches, honors, and pride do make the world go ’round. And solidarity with the outcast now seems more important than ever for authentic living, for discipleship, and for making the world a more livable place. Since 1988, however, I have also come to appreciate that these two standards are not the whole story either. Like many others, I sense that our contemporaries, including Christians and Jesuits, also frequently face the rather different dangers of false humility, self-negation, and small-mindedness. However much we might need humility—and we surely do—these other maladies cry out for big-mindedness and appreciation of one’s own inner authority—in a word, magnanimity. In its most authentic form, magnanimity is that sense of our own dignity, and of our acceptance by God despite our failings, that produces inner freedom, generosity, and even a healthy sense of humor. Without humility, we elbow others aside. But without magnanimity, we bury our talent in a napkin.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, trans. and ed. with commentary by George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), marginal nos. 142, 146. Hereafter this source will be abbreviated to *SpEx*.

<sup>3</sup> Dean Brackley, S.J., “Downward Mobility: The Social Implications of St. Ignatius’s ‘Two Standards,’” *Studies* 20, no. 1 (January 1988), 1–50.

Like many before him, Ignatius considered humility to be the font of all virtue.<sup>4</sup> He also regarded humiliations as a privileged means both to humility and to the obedience he considered so fundamental to discipleship. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, for example, the ideal of the Third Kind of Humility (*SpEx* 167) echoes the insistent prayer to be received under the standard of Christ in poverty and humiliations. Many more examples from the Constitutions, Ignatius's letters, and what others reported about him demonstrate the central importance he attached to humility and humiliations.

This insistence on humility and, especially, humiliations jars contemporary sensibilities. It is obvious that appeals like this can serve, and have served, to keep underdogs in their place. Shall we recommend poverty, humiliations, and humility to everyone everywhere today—to the humiliated as well as the self-important? More generally, is riches-honors-pride everybody's chief moral nemesis? Or are some people more liable to different patterns of temptation, perhaps more subtle patterns? And if so, where does that leave the Two Standards meditation as Ignatius shaped it?

It is doubtful that riches-honors-pride constitutes the gravest spiritual danger for people whose self-esteem has been pummeled by discrimination. In a now classic article, Valerie Saiving makes the case for women, but I think her central point applies more broadly. Saiving questions the long-standing tradition of identifying sin with self-assertive pride and love with self-sacrifice.<sup>5</sup> She

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<sup>4</sup> Pride is the root of all sin. Humility is its remedy and the root of all virtue. The humility of God-become-flesh and of Christ crucified is the model for our own. The Fathers of the Church codified these theses for subsequent ages. "For Basil, Augustine, John Chrysostom, and other classical Fathers, pride is the root and archetype of all sin. . . . According to the Christian story, the one remedy for the disease of pride . . . 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" (Brian E. Daley, "'To Be More like Christ': The Background and Implications of 'Three Kinds of Humility,'" *Studies* 27, no. 1 [January 1995], 9). In this article Daley traces the history of the tradition.

<sup>5</sup> Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reading in Religion*, ed. Judith P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 25–42. The pioneering work of Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin, Elizabeth Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating*

argues that while pride is the typical problematic response of men to their personal insecurity, women's primary temptation is instead "underdevelopment or negation of the self." Measuring themselves by others' criteria, women frequently fail to develop into the well-defined individuals they could be. Submerging their own agendas in others', many keep the genie of "divine discontent" (Saiving's words) bottled up inside them. This can lead them to "love too much," responding to every immediate need with scant discretion, to the point of living without a clear focus and losing themselves in trivialities.

Exhortations to humility probably won't be the chief need of these women. They probably need instead to learn to honor their inner authority more—loving, by all means, but in wiser and more fruitful ways.

Saiving points out the gender-based forces behind different propensities of men and women: Biology and the different kinds of social interaction experienced by girls and boys tend to intensify men's personal insecurity and the creative drive more than they do women's.<sup>6</sup> While I acknowledge these factors, I am impressed at the same time by the way much of the malaise

Saiving describes also characterizes many of the oppressed and humiliated people—women and men alike—that I have known over the years. A good deal of what she says describes the situation of poor people in general, exploited workers, victims of racism and heterosexism, handicapped people, and others who lack self-esteem because they have interiorized society's preju-

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*Ignatius recognized that people can douse their inner flame.*

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judices. Not everyone in those groups "loves too much" or submerges his or her identity chameleon-like in someone else's agenda. But many let themselves be persuaded that they don't count for much, that they don't have much to say or much of a mission in life. They stifle their inner voice; they fail to speak and act when they should do so. Some yield to the temptation to function as a pilot fish to some strong shark.

Nor is this syndrome restricted to the oppressed. Plenty of the more privileged of this world—straight white males, for example—suffer their own

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*Possibilities for Women* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), develops the same general point, explaining on pp. 163–66 how others have drawn on Saiving's line of thought.

<sup>6</sup> Saiving appeals to the common argument that boys need to struggle to distinguish themselves from their mothers, who are their primary caregivers in infancy, in ways that girls do not; and that boys and men experience the need to perform and to affirm their psychosexual identity in ways that girls and women do not.

versions of this malady. Many of us men who strive to live the Gospel, Jesuits included, confuse humility with self-negation. We clip our own wings, or let others clip them. We remain silent when we should speak out, and inactive when bold action is called for. Over time, like T. S. Eliot's Prufrock, we can wind up measuring out our lives with coffee-spoons.<sup>7</sup>

In community and workplace, do we take a back seat by default, and let dominant members drive us where we don't want to go? Do routine and fear prevent us from undertaking new challenges? Does our weakness sometimes lead us to disparage the values of the strong? Do we carp against authorities rather than engage them constructively? Do we avoid taking reasonable risks for fear of making mistakes? Do we recoil from the messy ambiguity of institutions, especially powerful ones, preferring instead to lob in resentful grenades from outside?

Immense challenges face the Church and the wider human community today: the service of faith in the face of growing cynicism and fundamentalisms; the ever-growing gap between rich and poor; spreading violence and social disintegration; environmental crises and now recovery from the sex-abuse scandals. These challenges should certainly inspire humility in us, but not the false humility that leads us to bury our talents in a napkin. The times call for imagination, creativity, and bold action. What resources does Ignatian spirituality offer against the temptation to think small?

## A Fearful Humility

*Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground."*

—Matt. 25:24 f.

Ignatius recognized that people can douse their inner flame. The enemy *usually* tempts to riches, honors, and then pride, but not always. Writing to Teresa Rejadell in 1536, Ignatius described a different dynamic that committed people undergo, one to which he believed Teresa herself had succumbed: The enemy leads good people into a false humility and such a fixation on their own moral poverty that they come to feel themselves abandoned by

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<sup>7</sup> See T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in his *Complete Poems and Plays, 1909–1950* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1962).

God.<sup>8</sup> Ignatius told Teresa that a person usually experiences this subtle assault after having fought off two more-straightforward temptations: When someone is moving from a life of vice to one of virtue or facing the prospect of a costly sacrifice, the enemy first brings to mind how much privation this will entail; but he never recalls the consolations that accompany such a commitment. (This is a typical situation for the first series of Rules for Discernment, those suited to the First Week of the Exercises, nos. 313–27.) If that tactic fails, the enemy then tempts the person to holier-than-thou vainglory. However, if both these direct temptations fail, the enemy frequently resorts to a more subtle two-step strategy, leading first to false humility and then to a sense of worthlessness and abandonment by God. This last dynamic has affinities with the pattern Valerie Saiving describes.

The two-step temptation works as follows. First, the enemy gets us to deny the good that God works in us—in more secular language, to deny any good in ourselves. For example, when we do something good or when the idea of a worthwhile project occurs to us, we feel it would be arrogant

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to attribute these to God's work in us, that is, to speak of good in ourselves. So, we refuse to credit our good works or take our ideas and desires seriously. This is "a false humility, that is, an extreme and vitiated humility." It is actually "a *fear* with the appearance of humility."<sup>9</sup>

From there, the enemy easily leads a step farther—into the fear that since we are evil, God has abandoned us. Building on our sensitive moral conscience (perhaps a tender post-conversion conscience), the enemy draws us into imagining we have done wrong when we have not, and provokes desolation in us. Focusing "a too-prolonged gaze at such times on our miseries" leads us to believe, writes Ignatius, "that we are quite separated from [God] and that all that we have done and all that we desire to do is

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<sup>8</sup> Letter of June 18, 1536, in *Obras de san Ignacio de Loyola*, ed. Ignacio Iparraguirre, S.I., Cándido de Dalmases, S.I., and Manuel Ruiz Jurado, S.I., 5th ed. (Madrid: B.A.C., 1991), 729–34; also see *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, selected and trans. by William J. Young, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University, 1959), 18–24.

<sup>9</sup> Iparraguirre, *Obras*, 731; emphasis added. Ignatius takes for granted that "we must attribute all the good" in ourselves to God working in us (Young, *Letters*, 18).



entirely worthless.”<sup>10</sup> In this way the enemy undermines our trust in God and our self-esteem.

Fear and discouragement betray the presence of the enemy in this process and the counterfeit nature of this “humility.” While genuine humility is loving rather than fearful, false humility shrinks the soul.<sup>11</sup> We begin to think small and lose ourselves in little things.

How should we respond to such a syndrome once we recognize it? Ignatius’s advice is revealing: Humbling ourselves is the last thing we need in this situation. When tempted to arrogant pride, we should humble ourselves; but when tempted to deny the good in us, we should lift ourselves up, recalling the good that God has placed in us and achieved in us.<sup>12</sup>

These tactics of the enemy keep people from acting on their inner authority, which often coincides with the divine Spirit. Small wonder that, in this same letter to Sor Teresa, Ignatius reviews the principles he laid down in the *Spiritual Exercises* for people prone to scrupulosity, or more accurately, to excessive self-doubt in moral matters (*SpEx* 345–51). He tells Teresa that the enemy tries to make such people see defects where there are none, in order to harass them and even drive them to desperation.

In the *Exercises*, he goes on to elaborate: While some people have lax consciences and are insensitive to evil, others are hypersensitive to evil. And just as the bad spirit tries to make the lax conscience still more lax, it pushes those with a “delicate” conscience into extreme sensitivity and exaggerated fear of doing wrong. This not only causes them anguish; it keeps them from doing all the good they might. For God often inspires good and sensitive people to undertake bold initiatives. However, the hypersensitive are subject to paralyzing self-doubt and second thoughts that keep them from translating sound inspirations into action. They spontaneously ask themselves questions like, “Am I really seeking my own glory?” “Will this cause scandal?” “Would the safer way be to back off, or at least wait?” “Couldn’t x, y,

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<sup>10</sup> Young, *Letters*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> See Ignatius’s reflections on loving humility vs. fearful humility in his *Spiritual Diary* (*Diario Espiritual*), nos. 178 f., 181 f, and 187 (Iparraguirre, *Obras*, 408–11). “During this period of time I kept on thinking that humility, reverence, and affectionate awe ought to be not fearful but loving. . . . I begged over and over again: ‘Give me loving humility, and with it reverence and affectionate awe’” (*Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. George E. Ganss, S.J. [New York: Paulist, 1991], 263 f.).

<sup>12</sup> “Hence we must examine the matter closely; and if the enemy uplifts us, we must abase ourselves by recounting our sins and miseries. If he keeps us down and depresses us, we must raise ourselves up in true faith and hope in our Lord” (Young, *Letters*, 20).

or z go wrong?" A later generation of moralists would say that in this way they fall into the practical heresy of "tutorism," that is, of seeking to avoid moral risk by always following the "safer" (*tutior*) path, or of clinging to the more probable authority (probabiliorism).

Ignatius's solution for the person of delicate conscience, as for the lax person, is to act against the tendency to excess. So, while the lax person should become more sensitive to evil, the scrupulous person should become more "lax," but in a distinctive way. Faced with what appears to be a moral dilemma, such a person should make a reasonable decision and then stay that course, resisting second thoughts and self-doubts in order to remain at peace. More interesting for our present concerns, Ignatius counsels that unless there is a clear reason to question one's original plans, the person should, as a rule, resist doubts and fears and follow through on the first inspiration (see *SpEx* 351). For the hypersensitive person, the original inspiration is innocent until proved otherwise, especially when it arises directly from consolation.

Ignatius wrote to Sor Teresa: "For it frequently happens that our Lord moves and urges the soul to this or that activity. He begins by enlightening the soul; that is to say, by speaking interiorly to it without the din of words, lifting it up wholly to his divine love and ourselves to his meaning." After this original inspiration, says Ignatius, we must be careful, because the enemy can induce us to add to it without warrant. But the opposite error is also common: "At other times, [the enemy] makes us lessen the import of the message we have received and confronts us with obstacles and difficulties, so as to prevent us from carrying out completely what had been made known to us."<sup>13</sup> For some, it is self-doubt and exaggerated fear that keep them from following through. They should rather doubt their doubts and fears, which usually do not proceed from the Good Spirit. Unless they are checked, they undermine peace and quash fruitful action.

The children of this age pursue their goals with greater zeal than the children of light. It is no small matter when false humility prevents people from doing great things for God. That goes fully counter to the spirit of the *magis*. It leads to sins of omission. It frustrates the kind of bold initiatives our times call for. It is hard not to see in this syndrome a failure to live out the Pauline gospel of freedom: People cling to the "safety" of law rather

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<sup>13</sup> See Iparraguirre, *Obras*, 733; Young, *Letters*, 22f. The text suggests that Ignatius may have in mind either consolation without prior cause (see *SpEx* 330, 336) or the "first time" for making an "election" (see *SpEx* 175), or both. In any case, Ignatius's subsequent observations are illuminating for more ordinary cases as well.

than dare to live by the Spirit, who, by means of consolation, inspires people to act.

## Temptations and Their Times

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: . . .  
 a time to kill and a time to heal;  
 a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
 a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
 a time to mourn and a time to dance; . . .*

—Eccles. 3:1-4

Temptation strikes where we are vulnerable, and we are not all vulnerable in the same places (see *SpEx* 327). What constitutes a real temptation for me will depend on my temperament and my maturity. Besides that, the logic of temptation also depends on social conditions—more than people supposed in the past. And, naturally, social conditions vary greatly.

Our personalities are formed in interaction with society. Society's values and antivalues take shape in us as virtues and vices.<sup>14</sup> Since our internal weaknesses—moral and psychological—are partly the product of socialization, the logic of temptation depends in part on social context. Some temptation patterns are surely constant and universal. The Ten Commandments speak to all times and places. But the shape and weight of particular temptations, as well as their pattern and sequence, evolve with social and cultural conditions. For example, Ignatius grew up in a late-feudal society where social status was the key to wealth and security, rather than the other way around. Honor was a supreme value and a primary temptation. "In the Ignatian world, . . . with its conception of the human ideal of medieval knighthood," writes Santiago Arzubialde, "honor was the same as life, and to lose one's honor was to lose one's life."<sup>15</sup> However, conditions were changing in western Europe at the

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 inspires people to act.*

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<sup>14</sup> See Brackley, "A Radical Ethos," *Horizons* 24, no.1 (Spring 1997): 7-36, and Dietmar Mieth and Jacques Pohier, eds., *Changing Values and Virtues, Concilium*, no. 191 (1986), especially the essays by John Coleman and Dietmar Mieth.

<sup>15</sup> Santiago Arzubialde, "Raíces de la teología espiritual en Dos Banderas," *Manresa* 56 (1984): 297.

time and, with them, mores and motivations. The fifteenth-century Spanish classic *La Celestina* records the following observations:

Pleberio does not say that with honor he became rich, but rather that, with his abundant means he acquired honors. . . . Sempronio knows that Celestina's ambition in her business dealings is none other than to "get rich," and he understands that, impelled as he is by the same ambition, he will have to contend with her.<sup>16</sup>

A new society was developing around the port cities that Ignatius frequented (Barcelona, Genoa, Antwerp, Venice). In this mercantile environment, wealth was displacing birthright as the primary key to status and power. Riches were a powerful temptation on the road to "swollen pride," as Ignatius saw (*SpEx* 142). In today's capitalist societies as well, honor does not constitute the kind of moral problem that it did in traditional societies, but covetousness has become more problematic than ever.<sup>17</sup>

Ignatius's contention that riches, then honors, then pride is the typical enemy strategy for our undoing certainly remains valid for today. But it is not the only temptation complex to which we are exposed. Nor are the social forces shaping people today the same as they were in premodern times or in Ignatius's day or even thirty years ago. They are probably more complex than ever. If so, it should not surprise us that the mix of temptation syndromes is correspondingly more complex. I think that one contemporary syndrome, which seems to overlap with false humility and Saiving's "feminine syndrome," deserves close attention. I mean *ressentiment*, meaning, roughly, "resentment."

### *Ressentiment*

*Jesus said, "To what then will I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep.'"*

—Luke 7:31 f.

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<sup>16</sup> The passage is cited in Rogelio García Mateo, S.J., "El 'Rey eternal': Ética política y espiritualidad," *Manresa* 60 (1988): 143 f.

<sup>17</sup> Jorge Centelles believes Ignatius put riches first before honors in the enemy standard for this reason (see Jorge Centelles Vives, "Valor social de 'Dos Banderas,'" *Manresa* 56 [1984]: 71). While this may have contributed to Ignatius's formulation, from the very beginning Christian theology consistently placed avarice for riches first in the logic of temptation (see 1 Tim. 6:1-10). On the apparent contradiction between pride as the beginning of all sin and avarice as the root of all sin, see Brackley, Appendix I: "Thomistic Influence on Ignatius's Two Standards," in "Downward Mobility," 41-48.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), and Max Scheler (1874–1928) after him, borrowed the French word *ressentiment* to label a malady of the human spirit that they believed to be rampant in modern society.<sup>18</sup> Although I think both of them overstated their theses, the *ressentiment* they diagnosed is clearly thriving and spreading in our ultramodern times. *Ressentiment* is the typical temptation of the underdog, the vanquished, and the political left. No one escapes completely, however. Who, after all, is not in some sense an underdog or a victim today?

We have all felt *ressentiment*'s morbid sting. Like most adolescents, you may have walked the corridors of your high school feeling chronically deflated for not being the most charming and popular of students. In reaction, maybe you came to consider good looks and easy charm as irrelevant and "dressing up" for others as stupid. Or maybe the history you were studying seemed such an incoherent swarm of battles and dates that it eventually drove you to conclude that history was just "dumb."

Consider an adult example or two. You might once have accepted an invitation to the opera, even though opera never appealed to you in the least. As the performance progressed, the more the audience grew enthralled, the more you felt uneasy, alone, and alienated. You wondered what they all saw in this. You weren't sure whether to consider yourself hopelessly uncultured or to pronounce opera highly overrated and opera buffs a pack of pretentious snobs. You longed to get home and kick back with a beer and a good film on TV.

If you are an opera buff, you may once have found yourself at a party among rambunctious fans of hunting, twin-carburetor engines, and football stars you'd never heard of. As the party progressed, you began to imagine your fellow partygoers as dressed in animal skins and carrying clubs. You wished you were home cracking open your new best-seller.

*Ressentiment* means "resentment," yes, but with nuances. More precisely, *ressentiment* is the sublimated spirit of revenge, the masked and muted desire to prevail over one's stronger rival. While envy, jealousy, and rivalry can contribute to it, they are not exactly the same. *Ressentiment* is a reaction. In *ressentiment*, literally "re-feeling," one feels the impotence of

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<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, the first essay in "The Genealogy of Morals" (1887), especially secs. 10 and 11, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964); see above all pp. 34–38; also see Max Scheler, *On Ressentiment and Moral Value-judgments* (1912), to which I will refer in more detail below. A good summary of their positions can be found in the early sections of Patrick H. Byrne, "Ressentiment and the Preferential Option for the Poor," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 213–41.

frustrating encounters with one's superior rival(s). According to Scheler, one experiences a morbid attraction to return again and again to painful defeats. As resentment feeds on the revisited feeling, it grows and develops, engendering a painful tension that eventually finds release in the denigration of the rival's values and the exaltation of their opposites. Resentment leads frustrated underdogs to invert all that is valuable to their stronger, more attractive, morally superior, more capable or successful rivals. It leads the weak to denigrate strength, the unlettered to belittle letters, and the poor to disparage wealth and power. Resentment leads sinners to debunk virtue and losers to redefine winning. It doesn't only affect the way people think. Above all, resentment modifies their spontaneous reaction (attraction, repugnance) to people, practices, and institutions that humiliate them.

Sometimes defeat can lead people to react lucidly: to unmask false values and misplaced priorities. Resentment is different; it denigrates genuine values, distorting moral perception and value judgments. The frustrated desire for revenge recoils on the resentful, poisoning their moral life.

Although present in any age, resentment came into its own in modern times, as Nietzsche and Scheler recognized. In traditional society, one's rivals could only be one's peers on a social ladder that was extremely stable. Very few in France could actually envy the king of France in the sense of resenting not being in his place, as though they had a chance to be king. In a socially mobile society, however, everyone has more potential rivals. In principle, paupers can hope to change their fate. An inner-city youth might aspire to become the next NBA legend or the next Bill Gates. In this climate we are all more aware and

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*Ressentiment is the typical temptation of the underdog, the vanquished, and the political left.*

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more resentful of successful rivals, especially since, as Scheler pointed out, resentment is highly contagious. It spreads rapidly through families and communities and can infect entire nations or whole generations of people.

Nietzsche believed that resentment had given birth to Christianity and that Christianity accounted for its dominance. He considered Christianity to be the triumph of a "slave-morality" which celebrates defeat, weakness, failure, and death while disparaging strength, life, creativity, and success. Christianity exalts what Nietzsche considered the false virtues of humility, altruism, pity, self-control, and long-suffering patience.

Scheler recognized the brilliance of Nietzsche's "discovery." He considered resentment to be the wellspring of the value judgments of

bourgeois society.<sup>19</sup> However, he rejected Nietzsche's interpretation of Christianity. Ressentiment cannot account for Christianity, as Nietzsche claimed, even though (for Scheler) it remains perhaps its greatest temptation. Genuine love and humility are not the sham Nietzsche thought them to be. They are the jewels in the Christian moral crown. But the corruption of the best is the worst of all, as the old adage has it. In René Girard's incisive words, "Ressentiment is the manner in which the spirit of vengeance survives the impact of Christianity and turns the Gospels to its use."<sup>20</sup>

Nietzsche's "discovery" of ressentiment threw a pail of cold water on those bourgeois European romantics who believed that by acting on their spontaneous desires they would make their lives a creative work of art. He announced that these desires were neither spontaneous nor authentic but expressions of a frustrated will-to-power. Since his time, ressentiment has continued to prosper, as sometimes silly controversies over political correctness demonstrate. It even thrives in poor countries, as the middle-class ethos spreads through increasingly urbanized populations. While it surely seduces Christians, ressentiment stalks underdogs of all kinds, as well as their allies on the political left who oppose inequality and discrimination.

Of course, unjustified privilege and injustice also call forth justified indignation, not just ressentiment. When political constitutions proclaim that "all men [and women] are created equal," people rightly resent the denial of fundamental rights. During the last 250 years, successive waves of humanity have awakened to their dignity as persons with the right to think, speak, and act for themselves. The *philosophes* of the Enlightenment were followed by laborers, then women, then colonized peoples, poor nations in general, racial minorities, sexual minorities, and lay people in the churches. Now, we even voice moral claims on behalf of the nonhuman environment. Ressentiment was part of all this, but not the biggest part. Like many of their followers today, Nietzsche and Scheler recognized the awakening to

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<sup>19</sup> Max Scheler, *El resentimiento en la moral* (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe Argentina, 1938), 80. Though not as much as Nietzsche, Scheler, too, exaggerated the reach of ressentiment, for example, attributing modern humanitarian liberalism almost entirely to ressentiment (see Byrne, *Ressentiment*, chap. 4). He later retreated from that sweeping diagnosis.

<sup>20</sup> René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 252. Girard believes that mimetic (imitative) rivalry, especially with one's role models, is at the root of ressentiment. "The impassioned admiration and desire to emulate stumble over the unfair obstacle with which the model seems to block the way of his disciple, and then these passions recoil on the disciple in the form of impotent hatred" (40).



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ressentiment, but they failed to appreciate the awakening to dignity. They often confused justified indignation with resentment.

It is sheer cynicism to use the resentment label to silence the prophetic outcry of oppressed people. That is simply resentment on the part of the privileged that the masses have dared to claim a place at the table. While Nietzsche and Scheler overstated the resentment of the weak, they understated, and mostly ignored, the resentment of the strong (including their own: Nietzsche bitterly resented the weak, and sounds more resentful than they do). Nietzsche and Scheler did not place the real, pervasive injustice of their own day at the center of the canvas on which they painted their picture of the world. Each in his own way celebrated the virtues of classical antiquity that accorded powerful and talented men a privileged standing, relegating women and laborers to inferior status. This, too, is will-to-power, and unwillingness to share it.

In the same way, some wave the resentment banner today in order to stifle legitimate protest. The banner wavers themselves are, paradoxically, resentful. They resent handicapped people for getting the better parking places. They resent affirmative action; they resent brown people crossing their borders in search of jobs; they resent strong, outspoken women in the church and public life; they resent the unborn for interrupting their agendas; they resent old people for taking so long to die; they resent gays and lesbians for coming out; they resent the hungry and the homeless for demanding food, work, and housing. Unlike the underdogs, "important" people do not resent the strength of the strong but the dignity of the weak.

We more commonly attribute resentment to the victims themselves, however. Maybe that is why the *V*-word is falling from favor in some circles. Assigning the victim label can be condescending. Appropriating it can nurture resentment and passive self-pity. That does no one any good. But it is far worse to deny the objective reality to which "victim" refers. However much some would deny it, victims abound; and, while we are all victims (and victimizers) to some degree, degrees vary decisively. The rules of the economic and political game are sharply skewed to favor the powerful. That calls for vigorous protest and action, whether some consider it politically correct or not. Neither does being a victim preclude responsible, self-directed action, or vice versa.

At the same time, resentment does shadow the underdog. It latches, like a parasite, onto legitimate protest in the form of reverse prejudice and the denial of real values. Resentment finds strong individuals and institutions intimidating. It erupts in anti-intellectual and anti-technological bias. Resentment believes that there is no hope for "whitey." It operates in the conviction that women are morally superior to men by nature. Ressenti-



ment is present in an option for the poor that denies the humanity of the rich and disallows the possibility of their conversion. Ressentiment is at work when a poor country's government refuses outside assistance in time of natural disaster and in the rejection of every idea that originates in the rich North for reason of that origin alone. Ressentiment prefers carping and permanent protest to positive proposals. It shuns constructive engagement with adversaries. Ressentiment is at work in an anarchistic fear of institutions—businesses, churches, universities, NGOs, and governments—and in the inability to wrestle with their moral ambiguity. Ressentiment would uproot the weeds and risk killing the wheat rather than wade into the field that has been sown with both.

In contrast, commitment can lead, for example, to a responsible decision to disengage or “drop out” of the rat race. It can lead to alternative schooling, communal living, civil disobedience, persecution, clandestine life, and jail. The history of religious life and monasticism, the radical wing of the Protestant Reformation, and many other religious and political movements confirm the value of disengagement. However, dropping out can also mask narcissistic resentment, like the unwillingness to enter playing fields outside one's zone of mastery. The a priori refusal to engage powerful individuals and institutions when that might benefit me or my community disguises a sense of personal inadequacy and the subconscious acceptance of the values overtly scorned.

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Ressentiment is hard at work in the denial of the goodness in ourselves—the goodness of our bodies, the values of rest, sexuality, enjoyment, and celebration of the pleasures of life. More radical still is the resentment present in false humility which denies our inner authority and leads us to bury our talents. Ressentiment smolders below the surface in oppressed and humiliated people who more readily doubt themselves than the smooth-talking professionals. It leads them to stifle the impulse to act when they should, to shake off their chains. Ressentiment overlaps with Valerie Saiving's feminine syndrome: the neglect of rivals' real values (assertiveness, focused pursuit of objectives in the public arena, and so forth).

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## Facing Different Dangers at Once

**H**ow are false humility, self-negation, and resentment related to the enemy's program in the Two Standards?

It seems clear that riches-honors-pride still makes the world go 'round and probably always will this side of paradise. However, that is not the only logic that threatens a life of commitment. It may help to compare the force of evil to water cascading down a hillside. If an individual or group successfully blocks the flow of water in the major downhill channel of riches-honors-pride, the current does not simply stop there. It seeks alternative downhill routes, especially underground channels that are harder to detect. Resentment is a major downhill alternative. Within patriarchal societies shaped by the classic enemy standard of avarice, prestige, and the arrogant scramble to dominate, decent people can be led to strike a half-conscious deal with the social forces at hand. In the name of "humility" and "equality," they bury their talents, stifle their initiatives or limit themselves to carping from the sidelines. Others channel their resentful hostility toward people and institutions. Resentful victims do not eliminate the social pyramid. They turn it upside down, so that power itself, powerful people and all kinds of resented assets now become evil, even when found in oneself.

The different temptation dynamics are not mutually exclusive. They can coexist and interact. Riches and prestige might dominate me, and I may dominate "less important" people; but I can at the same time bitterly resent stronger rivals. Alternatively, women suffering from Saiving's "feminine" complex can yield to greed and arrogant pride as easily as men. And greed and pride can cohabit with false humility precisely because it is counterfeit. Even as someone like Teresa Rejadell succumbs to false humility with "peers" and "superiors," she might turn around and smother the initiative of employees, spouse, and children. False humility and resentment easily cohabit with greed and arrogant pride.

At different stages of their lives, people may fall prey to one dynamic more than others. But who ever entirely escapes the lure of greed? Who is safely vaccinated against arrogant pride in all its camouflaged forms? On the other hand, if riches, honors and pride govern my life, I may perhaps be less susceptible to burying my talent; but will I be invulnerable to resentment?

## Charting a Postmodern Path: Magnanimity

*I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit.*

—Eph. 3:16

The riches-honors-pride strategy has lost none of its capacity to sabotage commitment in contemporary society. The children of this world still divide humanity into “important” and “unimportant” people on the basis of wealth and status symbols. They scramble up the social ladder. Even in our democracies, the few at the top of the social pyramid make the crucial decisions without the consent of the majority. In this context, the evangelical call to renunciation loses none of its validity, provided we avoid preaching poverty to the poor. Genuine humility remains as fundamental as ever. However, the corrosive power of resentment and false humility in contemporary society raises questions: Is the standard of Christ as Ignatius presented it the most appropriate program for everyone today? Besides the fact that he would never promote a uniform program for all, is it fruitful to commend humility to people ensnared by false humility and low self-esteem? What about insults? Ignatius encouraged his contemporaries to welcome them as a privileged means to growth in humility. Are we to recommend humiliations to those who suffer from low self-esteem and have surrendered their agendas to others? Not ordinarily. But then, what kind of counter-strategy suits such people—that is, so many of us?

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*On the other hand, if riches, honors and pride govern my life, I may perhaps be less susceptible to burying my talent; but will I be invulnerable to resentment?*

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As we saw, Ignatius grew up in a culture in which honor was a supreme value and a primary temptation for men and at least for women of distinction. Many of his companions, men and women, belonged to the petty, and not-so-petty, aristocracy and the professional classes. They had been socialized into a sense of self-importance relative to the common folk of the day. Ignatius knew from experience how humiliations could serve as blessings in disguise for such people, as occasions to free them from conceit and contempt for the “little people” and help them, the upper crust, toward a more realistic sense of self and solidarity, that is, to genuine humility.

Our social situation is different; our personalities and temptations are configured in different ways. In modern societies, where people do not

derive their identity from fixed social roles, their personality structure is frequently less stable (or perhaps less rigid) and their sense of dignity more fragile. It is true that middle- and upper-class people today tend to harbor a partly conscious sense of superiority relative to poor people, to those with little formal education, to foreigners; and, if they are white, they harbor such attitudes relative to people of other races and, if they are men, relative to women. At the same time, modern individualism, pluralism, family breakdown, consumerism, and cutthroat competition engender widespread self-doubt and insecurity.<sup>21</sup> The bags under the eyes of the Doonesbury cartoon characters reflect the anxiety of our middle-class tribe. In this cultural context, humiliations generate more problems than solutions.

Not that my own middle-class “tribe” is free from the temptation to honors. They—that is, we—may be less addicted to honors than the hidalgos of Ignatius’s day; but we are more hooked on acceptance. We are afraid to disappoint; we need—too much—to please. Middle-class insecurities induce in members of the lonely crowd an exaggerated fear of rejection that clouds our vision and ties our hands. We recoil at the prospect of a confrontation with a stronger personality. We let what others might think or say define the parameters of our actions. Bohemian hairstyles, outfits, and acting out are the rebellion that confirms the rule. We members of the lonely crowd may not need humiliations; *but we do need to get free from the paralyzing fear of them.*

Sometimes humiliation can foster authentic humility even now. This year the Catholic Church and its members have been publicly and profoundly humiliated. We have reason to hope that this awful experience will help purify the Church and lead to important reforms. The founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill W., liked what Ignatius had to say about humiliations. He knew from experience how humiliation can shake alcoholics from tenaciously held illusions, helping them to “bottom out” and come to their senses. While some addictions may call for such strong medicine, most of our ordinary paralyzes will probably respond to milder stuff. In any case, the liberation in question is a gift, a healing we cannot effect by ourselves. This is why Ignatius had people ask God not only to take away their fears of rejection, but even to send them what they feared most. This

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<sup>21</sup> Our social world, too, is rife with insecurity. In his *Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University, 1990), British sociologist Anthony Giddens claims that the globalization of risk has given the world a “menacing appearance.” “The possibility of nuclear war, ecological calamity, uncontrollable population explosion, the collapse of global economic exchange, and other potential global catastrophes provide an unnerving horizon of dangers for everyone” (125). The globalization of insecurity hit home in the U.S. with a vengeance on Sept. 11, 2001.

prayer (if not humiliations themselves) remains an effective remedy for those fears.

Fragile modern egos need to cultivate what the ancients called “magnanimity” (in Greek, *megalopsychía*). The magnanimous person is, literally, a great-souled individual, an expansive spirit. With appropriate self-esteem and a realistic sense of their talents, great-hearted individuals refuse to bog down in trivia. They think big. Unperturbed by minor grievances, indifferent to the “trinkets” of wealth and status, they are spontaneously generous, even prodigal, the opposite of the stingy, shrunken soul.<sup>22</sup>

Magnanimity is the other side of the coin of humility, the antidote to false humility and resentment. Together, humility and magnanimity lay the foundation of love, with its unavoidable option for the poor. Love for the outcast is not a love of poverty or sickness, masking resentful denigration of health, economic well-being, and those who enjoy them. Scheler wrote that genuine love

has as its internal point of departure and its motivating force a powerful sentiment of the security, firmness, interior wholeness and invincible fullness of one’s own existence and life; and from all this there arises a clear consciousness of *being able* to give something of one’s own being and of one’s own abundance. Here love, sacrifice, assistance, the tendency to seek out the most humble and the weakest, is a spontaneous overflow of the forces that accompany happiness and intimate repose.

Genuine love and social protest do not spring from bitter frustration and masked impotence but from their opposites. Sacrifice is authentic only when it is a “free *bestowal* of one’s own vital riches,” wrote Scheler, “a beautiful and natural overflow of one’s powers” for the sake of others. Jesus lavished his interior wealth in this way. He recommended carefree “indifference” to food, clothing, and shelter (see Luke 12:22–34), not because he denied their value, but because excessive worry about them eclipses the presence of God working to bring us abundant life.<sup>23</sup>

Ignatius was a paragon of magnanimous generosity. The *magis* means magnanimity: One always chooses what is more conducive to God’s reign (*SpEx* 23), what is more universal and more divine (*Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, no. 622). One should enter the Spiritual Exercises with magnanimous generosity (see *SpEx* 5). One ends them with the Contemplation for Attaining Love, which describes God’s expansive love and our

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<sup>22</sup> See Daley, “To Be More like Christ,” 6f., 36–39. I am modifying, even Christianizing, Aristotle’s rather elitist portrait of the magnanimous individual. See *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a32–b5, 1122a18–1125a15.

<sup>23</sup> Scheler, *Resentimiento*, 90–93; emphases in original.

response in terms of the same magnanimous generosity (“Take, Lord, and receive . . .”). According to the exercise on the Call of the King, it would be shameful and unworthy of a good knight to fail to respond wholeheartedly to the call of a high-minded leader. How much more, then, ought we to spend ourselves entirely for Christ and his cause! (see *SpEx* 94–98). Ignatius allowed God to tame the virtues of the warrior and the leader in him and enlist them in generous service to Christ and his neighbor.

The spirit of magnanimity has filled Jesus’ followers and others like them over the centuries. Drawing on her inner strength, Catherine of Siena urged the Pope to return from Avignon to Rome, and made her sentiments public. Closer to our time, Mohandas Gandhi took on the British colonial

government with magnanimous freedom. His self-assurance enabled him to appreciate the humanity of his adversaries as much as he detested the injustice of colonial rule. From prison Nelson Mandela dealt with South Africa’s apartheid regime in a similar spirit. Magnanimity enabled Rosa Parks to hold her ground at the front of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama. In El Salvador, a normally self-effacing Oscar Romero trumpeted the truth each Sunday from the pulpit, fully aware that he was infuriating his violent enemies.

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*We are afraid to disappoint; we need—too much—to please. Middle-class insecurities induce in members of the lonely crowd an exaggerated fear of rejection that clouds our vision and ties our hands.*

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Magnanimity draws us out of inactive complicity to take a stand when that is called for. Martin Luther King said that the decent but silent bystanders, especially the church people, exasperated him more than the racists who threw rocks. Cultivating magnanimity should leave fewer decent people on history’s sidelines in the future.

Like our better-known forebears, we too are summoned to make history in our own way. We are called to find our voices among other voices, some strident and contrary; to take initiatives while taking others’ initiatives into account; to assume our rightful places in the world, neither bullying the weak nor cowering before the strong. We are called to speak and act with boldness (*parrhesia*), as the early Christians did.<sup>24</sup> “God did not give us a spirit of cowardice” (2 Tim. 1:7).

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, 2 Cor. 3:12, 17, and Acts 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27–29; 13:46; 14:3; 18:25 f.; 19:8; 26:26; 28:31.

We need to help each other with this, especially poor and abused people. This will mean taking people seriously when they themselves fail to do so. It will mean listening to them. Their own stories are sometimes all they have to share. People often need help discovering their voice and encouragement to speak and act. Encouragement might take the form of affirming appropriate anger and assertiveness when people repress these unduly in themselves. It might mean challenging fearful silence, inaction, and self-effacement when the circumstances call for their opposites. These ways of "helping souls" can be a challenge when people translate their low self-esteem into resentment.

In the Church we need to redress the historic exaggeration of law at the expense of the Spirit. The Christian vocation to live according to the Spirit requires practicing the virtue of *epikeia*. *Epikeia* is the ability to recognize when keeping the letter of the law would actually violate the values that the precept is meant to uphold. Jesus practiced *epikeia* whenever obeying the precept would violate the spirit of justice and mercy.

We carry out our mission today in a context of spreading violence and war, cynicism in government, corporate corruption, sex-abuse scandals and urban loneliness. These are more than enough to induce the contagious desolation that shrinks the soul. But, as Jesuits especially, we must resist desolation (see *SpEx* 319–26). The signs of the times and our recent documents call us to respond to today's needs by evangelizing, including promoting justice and peace, defending the environment, interreligious dialog and inculturation. This will require opening our institutions (our parish, school, agency) to new initiatives, thinking beyond present commitments and beyond our province, our nation, and our Church. These daunting challenges certainly ought to inspire humility, but the true humility that produces imagination and bold action.

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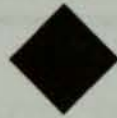


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## Back and Forward

This paper extends some reflections, begun years ago, on what it takes to stay committed in these confusing times and how to avoid the pitfalls that prevent people from doing all the good they might. During those years, I have come to value something else that seems to me indispensable for staying on track over the long haul: an appreciation of the ironies of life. A robust sense of humor can go a long way in unifying the apparent opposites, humility and magnanimity, into a working synthesis. In that case, our service to others will need

- *magnanimity*: a sense of inner fullness and appreciation of our own dignity (and how God can work through us)
- *humility*: a sense (interior knowledge) of our limits and of the dignity of the outcast
- *a sense of humor*: an appreciation of the ironies of life, especially our own





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