

## The Ignatian Exercises and Contemporary Christology

I begin tonite with some challenging words from Karl Rahner. Writing in an introduction to the published dissertation of one of his students, Rahner declares: "The theology hidden in the simple words of the (Ignatian) Exercises belongs to the most important fundamentals of contemporary western Christianity. In fact, it has yet to be fully assimilated by the Church's academic theology." Rahner goes on to express the "conviction that the real theological (and not only the spiritual) significance of Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises to this day has not been exhausted by their commentators, and much less by the traditional theology, but presents a not-yet-accomplished task to today's theology..." Granted that Rahner may possess a Jesuit's bias toward the importance of the Exercises, Rahner poses a clear challenge to contemporary theologians to mine the rich ore of spiritual experience and theological insight embodied in the Exercises.

Tonite I will offer a modest attempt to reflect on the Christology of the Exercises and its relation to contemporary Christology. There is a rather obvious question of whether a sixteenth-century document formulated in an age of high Christology can offer any help to twentieth century Christological reflection characterized somewhat facetiously as a low or ascending Christology. Add to this the fact that the Spiritual Exercises were never meant to be a theological treatise or a contribution to academic theology and one could predict that the third Yamauchi lecture could move quickly and painlessly to refreshments. But there are a few alternatives to early refreshments. One possibility would be to contrast the Christology of the Exercises with contemporary Christology, highlighting the positive insights of a Christology "from above". Another possibility would be to reflect on how contemporary Christology challenges us to rethink the Exercises and how they are given, a topic of interest to spiritual directors and retreat directors. My own option for this evening, however, is not to contrast the Exercises with contemporary Christology or to rethink the giving of the Exercises. My focus and concern

is rather to discuss the Ignatian Exercises as a theological source that can enrich contemporary Christology, enrich it not just in the sense of offering the balance of a high Christology to a Christology "from below", but also in the sense of offering a source of enrichment for the insights and emphases of an ascending Christology that focuses on the historical Jesus and the Christian praxis of discipleship.

Implied in this discussion is a more broad-ranging question of the relation between spirituality and theology. (As an aside, I can think of no topic that would be dearer to the heart of Yama after whom this ~~lecture series is named~~. He was a man whose theology was rooted in the Ignatian Exercises, a theology that flowed from his own faith experience and love of the Lord.) For too long spirituality has been confined to the more ethereal concerns of ascetical and mystical theology with little impact on the reflection of the systematic theologian. This, of course, raises the question of the sources of theology, in particular the sources for Christology. Theologians readily admit that the Bible, the church Fathers, the Councils and even the classic works of theology are privileged sources of theological reflection. But should we stop with those traditional sources? Gerald O'Collins, in his book Interpreting Jesus, remarks that "It would be an unwarranted diminishment of our source material if we ignored the many other ways in which believers have experienced and then narrated, symbolized and interpreted that experience of Christ... (p.5). O'Collins refers to liturgical experience, devotional practices, music and art, writings of current theologians, sermons, films as well as all experiences and activities of Christian life and the signs of the times as sources for christology. He reminds us that the *lex-orandi* and **the *lex vivendi*** feed into the *lex credendi*. Christology than cannot focus simply on the official teaching and classic theology of the past. "We should draw not only from the teaching Church but also from the praying and living Church of the past. At every level of the Church's past (and present) existence we can expect to uncover at least some hints of the Holy Spirit's presence guiding believers to (and back to) the full truth about Christ." (p.12)

Harvey Egan in his profound study of the Exercises The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon points in particular to the saints as sources for theological reflection. He comments that we fail to recognize and utilize the saints and their writings as theological sources, yet "they live a theology born of prayer, adoration and service, a theology which explains and interprets the Gospels primarily through living and witnessing." (p.3) Egan singles out the Ignatian Exercises as a prime source for theological reflection. The Exercises "belong to that type of pious literature which is more accurately called Christian wisdom than the explicit theology of the learned." (p.4)

What we are dealing with in the Exercises is not, as we have mentioned, a theological treatise or a developed Christology. In fact there is even an absence in the Exercises of the school theology learned by Ignatius at Paris. The Exercises precede theological reflection and stimulate it by fostering an encounter with Christ. "Central to the encounter is the exercitant's growth in a knowledge of Christ that is more than conceptual, that involves a knowing with the heart as well as the head (what Ignatius calls 'interior knowledge')." (Schmitt 219) The Exercises "are a practical method to be used to seek and to find God's will for the individual. They are a method of conversion." (Egan 7) They invite us to a personal experience of Jesus by articulating a paradigmatic experience of Jesus. To make our task still more difficult, the Exercises are not a book for the one making the retreat. They are a handbook, a guidebook for the director of the Exercises. Not a book to be read as a manual or how-to exercise for a retreatant but a tool to be adapted by the director to facilitate the retreatant's experience of God.

Our task then is to try to understand the Exercises as a source for contemporary Christological reflection. To begin this ambitious task, I would like to describe in some detail the Christology of the Exercises. For some I will be describing their experience of the Exercises. For others I will be speaking of familiar themes and topics from a distinctive perspective.

The Exercises flowed out of the spiritual experience of Ignatius, in particular from the experience of his conversion and his time at Manresa. Rather than begin with the text of the exercises it is important that we begin with the experience of Ignatius, an experience narrated in his autobiography and further described by those early Jesuits closest to him-Nadal and Polanco.

Ignatius was a dreamer. He began with a dream of doing great deeds and winning honor and impressing a great lady above his station. His dream drove him to keep fighting against overwhelming odds and then to undergo extreme pain in an effort to reshape his wounded leg. But Ignatius' dream was shattered by that cannon ball at the battle of Pomplona. As he lay recuperating, the only reading available was a life of Christ and a collection of lives of the saints. As he read a new dream formed. A dream to do what Dominic and Francis did, a desire to imitate the saints, a desire to serve the Lord and to do great deeds for the Lord. This new dream inspired him to set out on a pilgrimage - first to Montserrat where he stayed all night at the altar of a lady.- Mary and then to Manresa where he stayed a year and where the Exercises were born.

For our purposes here I want to focus on two key religious experiences of Ignatius, experiences that shaped his vision and shaped the Christology of the Exercises. It was first at Manresa and in particular in his vision at the river Cardoner that Ignatius' dream was purified and shaped. Some fifteen years later at La Storta the vision was confirmed and a final seal was placed on Ignatius' understanding of his relationship to Jesus.

Manresa was a time of great struggle and darkness and a time of incredible light and understanding. While at Manresa Ignatius experienced the great vision at the river Cardoner. Jerome Nadal, one of Ignatius' closest associates among the early Jesuits, relates how this vision gave Ignatius knowledge of the persons of the trinity and the divine essence. Nadal speaks of it as an interior vision of how God created the world and of how the Word became flesh. It was an illumination about two of the Trinity's operations ad extra: creation and the Incarnation.

Ignatius saw the descent of all creatures from God and their reascent toward their ultimate end. From that day on Ignatius could meditate about all the things on the face of the earth only in the light of their proceeding and returning to God. In his description of the theology of Ignatius, Hugo Rahner refers to Ignatian theology as "de arriba", coming from above. "It was only in this movement from above 'that' all things on the circumference of the earth' became transparent to what they really were - creatures existing in God alone and proceeding from God alone" (p. 4-5). In the context of our reflection on the Christology of Ignatius, it is obvious that God descends to earth in the person of Jesus. Ignatius' experience at the Cardoner would be the foundation of a descending Christology. Equally important for understanding Ignatius is the fact that the vision at Cardoner was the source of his apostolic thrust and his gift of discerning spirits. The vision at Cardoner transformed Ignatius from a solitary pilgrim and penitent trying to imitate the example of the saints to a person of the Church concerned about the salvation of souls. It was the origin of his apostolic ideal. At the same time, it was at Cardoner that he learned to discern spirits, to reflect in order to seek and find what most leads to co-operation with the divine plan for leading everything back to the Creator. Cardoner gave Ignatius an understanding of how all things issue from God and return to God and a profound sense of his own involvement in that plan of salvation.

But it was on his journey to Rome fifteen years later that Ignatius received the vision that confirmed what he had learned at the Cardoner. At LaStorta Ignatius saw "Christ with this cross on his shoulder and together with him the Father, who said to the Son "I want you to take this man as your servant." And Jesus said, "I want you to serve us." divine persons accepting him into their service. He saw God the Father placing him with Christ his Son. Ignatius was received under the Standard of Christ, a standard of complete poverty and humility. The intuition of the Cardoner had come to full maturity. Ignatius is to follow Jesus in humility and poverty and self-abnegation. He has been placed at the side of the Son. It was at La Storta that

Ignatius was convinced that the group of companions should be called the Society of Jesus. He would not let any other name be considered.

After Cardoner and La Storta, Christ for Ignatius was no longer a model to be imitated but a king at work in the world to be followed. Ignatius' vision of Jesus was tied to discipleship and service, tied to sharing in Jesus' own ongoing labor to build the Kingdom of God.

Before turning to the text of the Exercises to see how Ignatius' experience of Jesus was articulated in the meditations and considerations and contemplations of the Exercises, it is necessary to reflect on a basic image of Christ that serves as a background and offers us a hermeneutic for interpreting the Exercises. Here I am dependent on a fascinating study of the central Christ image in the Exercises, an image that points to an experience and understanding of Christ and that fosters a certain relationship to Christ. Robert Schmitt, discusses the Christ-experience and relationship to Christ. Robert Schmitt, in an essay that is a condensation of his dissertation on the Exercises, discusses the Christ-experience and relationship fostered in the Spiritual Exercises. He sees the Exercises "as an organic unity that is the fruit of Ignatius' religious experience that is meant to foster an analogous experience in the exercitant." (p. 217) He summarizes the goal of the Exercises as an encounter with Christ that results in an ordering of one's whole self. "Ordering and encounter become two aspects of the same goal. On the one hand, order, both interior and exterior, is the fruit of an encounter with Christ. On the other, attempts at ordering, attempts to "conquer oneself, 'are the necessary preparations for a deeper encounter with Christ." (219) Schmitt reminds us that "the Exercises is not a theological work attempting to present a Christology, but a practical work fostering an encounter with Christ." (219) To understand better the encounter with Christ fostered in the Exercises, it is important to notice the Christ images used by Ignatius. The Christ images point to Christ and reveal something of the significance of Christ that fosters a certain type of experience and relationship. There are a variety of images of Christ in the Exercises, but Schmitt's own research focused on the image of a feudal lord as

central to understanding and interpreting the Exercises. "...the characteristics of that image pervade the entire Exercises and offer a way to appreciate better the Christ-relationship fostered by all the images and exercises within them."

(220) The Exercises are primarily the fruit of Ignatius' experience at Manresa. At that time he was a layman, uneducated and full of feudal imagery.

We cannot here unfold even the condensed version of Schmitt's research. We can, however, summarize some of his description of the Characteristics of the lord-vassal relationship and how these characteristics shed light on the Christ relationship fostered in the Exercises.

In Ignatius' time, feudalism, which had flourished in the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, still was prominent if only as an ideal. The lord-vassal relationship was a highly personal relationship of friendship and love. A man placed himself under the protection and leadership of another that he promised to serve for life. It was a deeper bond than blood or marriage because it was a matter of personal choice. It was freely entered into. It was a covenant to share together in battle and in struggle and joy. A promise of mutual service and concern. It stressed generosity and fidelity and courage and service, even in suffering.

Ignatius understood this relationship of lord and vassal as a model for our relationship with Christ. In particular, the lord was seen as the provider, protector, leader and friend of the vassal. Ignatius then saw Christ relating to us in these ways.

As the Lord provided for his vassal, so Christ is the creator who gives us all we need. We will see how Ignatius speaks of Jesus as Creator and Lord in the Exercises. Christ's creative activity reveals his intimate love and infinite goodness toward us. We are related to the Lord as creature to creator and our response to him is to trust and love totally.

The Lord also protects a vassal by fighting for him against his enemies and by interceding for him in the court of the king. Christ acts as our savior who sets us free from death and slavery and leads us to life. Christ also acts as

mediator for he intercedes for us with the Father.

The Lord relates to the vassal as leader and model. He calls the vassal and inspires deeds of loving service. Christ calls us to service and to a total gift of self. Ignatius asks us to pray for the grace to follow Christ by imitating him and sharing his lot in suffering.

Finally there was the deepest of loves between lord and vassal. They were friends. It is Jesus who calls us to be friends, calls us to a relationship of love based on mutual giving and support. Ignatius in the Exercises asks for the grace to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more ardently and to follow him more closely. It is a call to an encounter with Jesus, a personal sharing of love and life.

The image of feudal lord, then, points to a type of Christ-experience and Christ-relationship. As a lord is provider, protector, leader and friend to the vassal, so Ignatius envisioned Christ as his provider, protector, leader and friend and invites the retreatant to encounter Jesus in this way. Such an encounter leads not to conceptual knowledge alone but to a deep personal knowledge, what Ignatius calls, "interior knowledge", a knowledge of the heart as well as the head.

With this image as a background and hermeneutical key, we can now move to an analysis of the text of the Exercises. Here I will rely heavily on two important studies of the Christology of the Exercises - a lengthy essay by Hugo Rahner on the subject and Harvey Egan's study mentioned earlier, The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon. These studies present a searching analysis and interpretation of the text that will serve us well as a framework for our reflection on the Exercises.

For the casual reader of the text of the Exercises it is easy to miss the central role of Christ at the very beginning of the Exercises. The First Principle and Foundation that Ignatius offers as a preparatory consideration before the



first week of the Exercises makes no explicit mention of Christ. It speaks only of reverence for God our Lord, of the salvation of the soul, and of a basic attitude toward things of this world. (Read the text) It seems no more than a set of intellectual propositions, a philosophical reflection on creaturehood and the role of created things in the life of one searching for God. This interpretation has unfortunately been reinforced by many retreat masters and preachers of the Exercises over the years. The truth of the matter is that the Principle and Foundation can only be understood in terms of the overall structure and dynamic of the Exercises, in particular in terms of the call of Christ the King, the call "to be received under the standard of Christ our Lord" (#147) Hugo Rahner calls it "a highly compressed theological compendium of the whole of the Exercises, and it can only be understood in the terms of the vocatio regis, the 'call of the King'." (p. 62) The full meaning of the Principle and Foundation only becomes clear much later in the Exercises at the time of the election which is made in the conformity with and out of love for Christ crucified.

It is also important to realize, especially in the context of our analysis of the Christology of Ignatius in the Exercises, that whenever Ignatius spoke of God as our 'creator and Lord' he was referring to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is 'eternal Lord of all things' (#98) For Ignatius the eternal Word creates all things and restores them all through his redemptive death.

As you know the exercises of Ignatius are divided into four weeks. These are not weeks of seven days but a division in terms of the movement of the retreatment through the Exercises and the graces desired and prayed for. The first week centers on a consideration and contemplation of sin. The meditations on sin that Ignatius suggests do not seem at first focused on Christ and our relationship to him. There is meditation on the history of sin, first the sin of the angels and then the sin of Adam and Eve. There is a meditation on my own history of sin and finally a meditation on hell. But the key to understanding the goal of this week is not found in the image of the soul as a prisoner in a corruptible body

or in the numerous points for reflection on my sin. The key to understanding the dynamic of the first week is found in the graces prayed for and in particular in the colloquy that Ignatius suggests at the end of the first meditation on sin.

Imagine Christ our Lord present before you  
upon the cross, and begin to speak within him,  
asking how it is that though He is the Creator,  
He has stooped to become man, and to pass  
from eternal life to death here in time, that  
thus he might die for our sins.  
I shall reflect upon myself and ask:  
"What have I done for Christ?"  
"What am I doing for Christ?"  
"What ought I do for Christ?"  
As I behold Christ in this plight, nailed  
to the cross, I shall ponder upon what  
presents itself to my mind. (#53)

Jesus then is the Creator who became man to die for our sins. Sin and forgiveness can only be understood in light of our relationship to Christ. For this reason, Harvey Egan concludes that "Christ crucified specifies the basic horizon and is the hermeneutical key for understanding this week." (p.87) There is a profound Christocentrism in the first week of the Exercises both on the level of the experience of sin and on the level of the experience of being a loved and redeemed sinner.

It is this Christocentric experience of sin and forgiveness that opens the retreatant to the call of Christ the Leader in the second week of the Exercises. The question "What shall I do for Christ?" finds its answer in the call of the king. The Christocentrism of the Exercises becomes more explicit in the classic meditations of the second week of the Exercises - the Kingdom, the two standards and the three degrees of Humility, as well as in the election or choice of a state of life. Here Christ is presented as the Leader who calls the retreatant to follow him in poverty, in sufferings and eventually in glory. (The retreatant prays for the grace of "an intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love him more and follow Him more closely" (#104)) These meditations sum up Ignatius' experience of conversion and his own understanding of his Christ-relationship shaped by his visions at Cardoner and La Storta. In

the Kingdom meditation that forms a horizon or backdrop for the contemplation of the life of Christ in the second week, Ignatius invites the retreatant to consider Christ our Lord, the Eternal King and his call to labor with him, following him in suffering (#95). Ignatius then asks the retreatant to consider offering himself in words such as these: "Eternal Lord of all things... I protest that it is my earnest desire and my deliberate choice, provided only it is for Thy greater service and praise, to imitate thee in bearing all wrongs and all abuse and all poverty, both actual and spiritual, should Thy most holy majesty deign to choose and admit me to such a state and way of life. (#98) The Kingdom meditation is an invitation to follow Christ in the accomplishment of his task, to imitate Christ in his self-emptying poverty, sufferings, and humiliations.

The meditation on the two standards elucidates what is proper to Christ's Kingdom, the way Christ carries out the salvation of the world. The dramatic contrast between Satan and his strategy and Christ and his strategy offers the retreatant an invitation to poverty as opposed to riches, insults as opposed to honor, humility as opposed to pride (#146). It is an invitation to put on the mind and heart of Christ as exemplified in his own life. The grace asked for is "to be received under His standard, first in the highest spiritual poverty, and should the Divine Majesty be pleased thereby, and deign to choose and accept me, even in actual poverty; secondly in bearing insults and wrongs, thereby to imitate Him better..." (#147)

Both Hugo Rahner and Harry Egan see in these two meditations the purpose and climax of the Exercises. As Harvey Egan puts it: "It is that 'Eternal Lord of all things, ' therefore, who calls the exercitant to His service through the imitation of Him poor, suffering and humiliated. It is this Christ, the supreme and true Leader' (Ex 139) with His standard and his way of Life who provides the hermeneutical key for understanding the Exercises." (p.93)

What is most important for understanding the Christology of the Exercises is that Ignatius Christ the King was a living King actively at work in the world who is here and now seeking followers to labor with him. The Christ of the Kingdom and Two Standard Meditations is the exalted Christ active in the world.

With these meditations as a backdrop and constant reference point, the retreatant is invited to contemplate the life of Christ, beginning with the Annunciation and concluding with the resurrection appearances. The retreatant is to enter into these mysteries of the life of Christ and in this way grow in an interior knowledge and love of Christ. The goal of this imaginative contemplation of the life of Christ is not some superficial imitation of the historical Jesus. It is rather a way to encounter the living Christ and to understand the pattern of his redemptive activity. It is a way of inserting oneself in salvation history which is being enacted in our own day. "Thus for Ignatius the life of Christ was more than just an edifying example in the sense understood by the devotio moderna- it was the fundamental theological principle behind Christian spiritual life, which is ultimately nothing more nor less than the conforming of one's whole being through grace with the crucified and risen Lord of glory." (p.99) These contemplations on the life of Christ are "a preparation for the Election, where the exercitant has to order his life in accordance with the lessons they teach him." (p.100) While the retreatant is discerning his/her choice of life, he/she contemplates the life of Christ so that the decision will be made in conformity with Christ and His standard. Hugo Rahner puts it succinctly: "The actual Election is thus a process by which the exercitant makes the life of Christ existentially present in his mind and heart and then, in light of this, sets about ordering his own life." (p.101-104) Again Ignatius is not concerned with pious imitation but with a commitment to labor with Christ in his ongoing work of salvation.

For our purposes we can deal briefly with the third and fourth week of the Exercises. In the third week the retreatant contemplates the passion and death of Jesus. The exercitant is to consider "how the Divinity hides itself...and... leaves the most sacred humanity to suffer so cruelly." (#196) Ignatius invites the retreatant "to consider that Christ suffers all this for my sins, and what I ought to do and suffer for him." (#197) The third week is to be a confirmation of the Election made to follow and model one's life on Christ crucified. The

retreatant asks for confirmation of the decision and the strength to live by that decision. Can one bring one's decision to the cross and face the Lord? Does the decision portray a willingness to suffer with Christ? Once again the retreatant is before the crucified Christ, now asking to be united with Christ in his passion. It is only at the foot of the cross that we fully understand Jesus and his mission, that we fully understand the depth of Jesus' love for us and the depth of our sin. We are reminded of the haunting words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "There are only two ways possible of encountering Jesus: man must die or he must put Jesus to death."

The fourth week is a contemplation of the risen Christ. It is the completion of the Paschal Mystery, a rejoicing with Jesus, a reminder of the call of the King who invites us to follow him in glory. During this week, Ignatius asks us to consider how "the Divinity...now appears and manifests itself so miraculously." (#223)

In this brief overview of the text of the Exercises, we have been highlighting the explicit Christology of the Exercises. Harvey Egan sums it up: "The Eternal Lord of all things, the Creator and Lord, the Christ of Majesty, the eternal King who accomplished his mission through his life, death and resurrection and now calls the exercitant to share in His mission, dominates the Ignatian perspective." (p. 96) For Ignatius Jesus Christ is the creator become creature, "the Eternal Word Incarnate" (#109, 130), the Lord and Savior. Ignatius writes us to a deep personal love and knowledge of Jesus but this Jesus is the cosmic Christ. "The exercitant's intimate, existential knowledge and love of Jesus Christ must contain as a moment of its realization a penetration into the cosmic Christ: the man Jesus is totally the exercitant's Creator, Lord and God." (Egan p. 97).

This idea of the cosmic Christ opens us to an understanding of a more profound Christology of the Exercises - a Christology that sees Christ as the center and core of all reality. Harvey Egan refers to this as the deeper, more implicit Christocentrism of the Exercises. It flows from Ignatius' vision on the banks of the river Cardoner that summed up all things in Christ. As Egan expresses it:

"The person of Jesus Christ became for Ignatius the very way in which and through which he grasped reality, his a priori stance, the very horizon against which and in which everything took its ultimate meaning. Ignatius mystically tasted that all things hold together in Christ." (p.98)

Ignatius presupposes that God wills to communicate himself in love. The two great moments of that communication are creation and the Incarnation. The Incarnation is in fact the goal and climax of creation, the moment of God's definitive self-communication in love. As Egan expresses it: "Jesus Christ is the point where God's active Self-giving and creation's acceptance of Him reach their apex." (p.100)

This says something radical about the retreatant as well. Egan is a student of Karl Rahner and so he articulates his analysis of Ignatius in Rahner's categories of self-transcendence. The human person's active self-transcendence reaches its perfection in Christ's humanity. Jesus Christ is the source, meaning and goal of creation's self-transcendence. The retreatant finds his deepest self-identity as a radically Christ-directed being. Again Egan summarizes it: "In Christ, the exercitant encounters a person to be intimately known, loved and served, but someone who also holds the key to his and the cosmos' origin, meaning and fulfillment. ...The exercitant comes to experience that Christ is the secret core of all reality and the source, meaning and goal of created self-transcendence." (p.106). It is for this reason that the Ignatian Election which is the goal of the Exercises is of necessity Christocentric. Decisions must be made in the experienced totality of the exercitant's life and that totality finds its meaning in the experience of the Mystery of God in Jesus. As Egan states it: "The profoundest criterion which Ignatius offers in the Exercises for coming to a true Election...is how the Election and the resulting consolation harmonize with this primordial experience of Jesus Christ." (p.110) Thus the deepest and most authentic movement of the human person is christocentric.

Egan points to one other central aspect of Ignatius' Christology that we must

mention, if only briefly. Ignatius was extremely sensitive to the role of mediators in the human relationship with God - Mary, angels, apostles and Jesus. Jesus above all is the Ignatian mediator who intercedes with the Father. This role of Jesus is even clearer in Ignatius' Spiritual Journal, but it is also apparent in the Exercises. Jesus is the eternal Word Incarnate who presents Ignatius to the Trinity and draws him to the Trinity. Ignatius experienced Jesus in a radical trinitarian context. He experienced the interpenetration of God and man in Jesus' person, so that through Jesus' humanity Ignatius was led into the Trinity. But that is another lecture.

Those of you more familiar with the Exercises know that our analysis of the text of the Exercises is not complete without reference to Ignatius' final contemplation - the contemplation to attain the love of God. That contemplation is the core of the experiences of the Exercises, its foundation and its summit. Like the Principle and Foundation, the Contemplation to attain the Love of God seems to lack any explicit reference to Jesus, but in the light of the radical Christocentrism of Ignatius' experience and of the Exercises and in the light of Jesus' role as Creator and Lord, it is impossible to make of this final contemplation only a philosophical speculation on the relationship between God and creation. Rather it is a Christological reflection that brings the retreatant full circle from the Principle and Foundation and founds the Ignatian practice of finding God (Christ) in all things. It leads one from the interior knowledge of the giftedness of creation to love God and service of and surrender to God. Michael Buckley in an insightful article on the Contemplation explains how the four points of the contemplation recapitulate the graces of the four weeks of the Exercises. In the first point we consider how all creation and redemption is a gift from God. "I will ponder with great affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much He has given me of what He possesses and finally, how much, as far as He can, the same Lord desires to give Himself to me according to His divine decrees." (#234) But in the context of the Exercises and the Ignatian vision it is obviously Jesus as

creator and redeemer who is the source of all gifts and the fullest expression of God's love. In the second point, we consider how God dwells in his creatures and lives within his gifts. "So He dwells in me and gives me being, life, sensation, intelligence; and makes a temple of me..." (#235). But it is in the Incarnation that God dwells most fully in his creation. Jesus is the Word who dwells among us. In the third point, we consider how God labors in his creation and works in all things. "He gives being, conserves them, confers life and sensation..." (#236). Again the fullest expression of this labor of God is in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Christ is not a static model but a leader who labors to build his Kingdom and invites us to join him. In the final point of the Contemplation; we consider all blessings and gifts as descending from above. We are led from the acts of God to the reality of God as good in Himself. This corresponds to the fourth week of the Exercises, to Christ risen and in glory. To some the Christological interpretation of the Contemplation may seem a bit forced, but Hugo Rahner is insistent that "every word (of the Contemplates) must be interpreted exclusively in terms of the christology of the Exercises as a whole. In full accordance with Ignatian theology, the 'creator and lord' of this contemplation is Christ, the incarnate Word, who in virtue both of what he is and what he does, dwells in all creatures and behaves as one who works." (p.134) The Christocentrism of this contemplation and the Exercises as a whole justifies the interpretation that the great "Suscipe" prayer in this final exercise of the retreat is directed to Christ the Lord.

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me.

This prayer of Total surrender completes the cycle of creation and redemption. All things come from God and all things return to God. As God has gifted the world in creation and in the Incarnation, so the retreatant deserves to share in the work of returning that gift both on the level of a personal surrender.



and on the level of laboring with Christ to return all things to the Father. This final prayer of surrender is addressed to Christ, the Creator and Lord, the "Eternal Lord of all things"

We are at a point where we can summarize the Christ images of the Exercises and describe the explicit and implicit Christology of the text of the Exercises. For Ignatius, Jesus is both Creator and Lord, the source and goal of all things. He is the Eternal Word Incarnate, the Creator who took on human flesh. Jesus is also the mediator who presents, places and unites us with the triune God. For Ignatius, Jesus is always experienced and understood in a trinitarian context. But above all Jesus is the Leader who calls and invites us to serve with him under a standard of poverty and suffering. He is the Savior and Lord who became human for us and suffered and died for the sake of our redemption. Ignatius manifested a profound love for Christ crucified and a desire to imitate him in poverty, insults, and humility. Finally Jesus is the risen and exalted Christ who is still with us and who labors for us and with us in the world. Thus, as we have emphasized before, the Jesus we encounter in the Exercises is the risen and exalted Jesus at work in the world. He is not so much a model to be imitated as a leader to follow in service. Implicit in all of this is a vision of the cosmic Christ who is the center and core of all reality, the horizon and ultimate meaning of creation, the source and goal of the human longing for self-transcendence. The Christology of the Exercises offers a rich and varied understanding of Jesus the Christ.

What then is the relation between the Christology of the Exercises and contemporary Christology? Contemporary Christology is often characterized as a Christology "from below" that emphasizes the historical Jesus. In contrast to classic Christology that begins with God becoming human in time and history, contemporary Christology begins with the assumption that Jesus is a human person and asks: What does it mean to say that this man was and is Savior and god among us? Contemporary Christology attempts to follow the path of the first disciples who experienced the human Jesus and slowly came to acknowledge Jesus as Christ

and Lord. It stresses then the humanity of Jesus, the ministry of Jesus, his death and resurrection. At the same time, contemporary christology emphasizes praxis and discipleship: Christology must flow from and foster a living relationship with Jesus, a creative following. There is a concern for experience and a lived relationship with Jesus.

No doubt the Christology of the Exercises can be quickly labeled as a high, descending Christology. At the heart of Ignatius' experience and vision of the universe is the image of all things descending from God and returning to God. God communicates himself in creation and the Incarnation. The Eternal Word has taken on human flesh. One need only recall the classic image Ignatius gives at the beginning of the contemplation of the Incarnation "...how the Three Divine Persons look down upon the whole expanse or circuit of all of the earth, filled with Human beings. Since they see that all are going down to hell, they decree in their eternity that the Second Person should become man to save the human race." (#102) The Exercises can be presented then as the balance to an exclusively low Christology, recognizing the truth in the Johannine and Chalcedonian emphasis on God taking on human flesh in Jesus.

But our analysis of the Christology of the Exercises has uncovered much more than the expected high Christology of a sixteenth century document. In fact there is a surprising resonance between the approach and themes of the Exercises and contemporary Christology. We find in Ignatius a clear focus on the historical Jesus and on the human experience of Jesus. The greater part of the Exercises is a contemplation of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. The retreatant is invited to enter into the scenes, to relive them, to speak to the persons involved, to hear and touch and smell the Gospel scenes. Ignatian contemplation invites the retreatant to use all of his/her faculties - intellect and will but in a special way the imagination. This is not simply a nostalgic recreation of past events. David Stanley in a seminal article on Ignatian contemplation of the Gospels and the contemporary Christian has established how the mysteries of

Jesus' earthly life are in fact an integral part of his present, glorified existence and so are contemporary. "...all the mysteries of Jesus' earthly history, from the cradle to the grave, have been mysteriously endowed in His glorified humanity with a totally new and enduring actuality. The saving mysteries of the incarnation, birth, childhood, and public life of Jesus Christ, with His temptations, triumphs, frustrations, and disillusionment, retain in Him, as He now exists, a perennial, dynamic reality which remains ever contemporary with the ongoing process of history." (p.430) Certainly Ignatius shared medieval piety's fascination with the historical details of Jesus' earthly life, but the power of the Exercises comes from its focus on the mysteries of Christ's life as actual and contemporary in the exalted Christ and as saving events that shape the mind and heart of the retreatant as he discerns his own concrete call to follow Jesus. The contemplations of the mysteries of the life of Christ focus the retreatant on the person of Jesus and the way he continues to bring the world to salvation. The retreatant relives, enters into Jesus' own path to the Father.

In addition to their emphasis on the historical Jesus, the Exercises place an obvious emphasis on praxis and on the Gospel call to discipleship. The grace that the retreatant is asked to pray for repeatedly is the grace to know him more intimately so I may love him more ardently so that I may follow him more closely. The Kingdom meditation portrays Christ as a leader who invites all people to follow and labor with him in suffering to carry on the task of building the Kingdom. The Two Standards reinforce this call to a practical discipleship in asking for the grace "to be received under his Standard." Discipleship implies poverty, insults, and humility in imitation of Jesus. The whole second week of the Exercises is to lead to an election, a concrete decision of how this individual will follow Christ in generous service. The dream of following Christ the King must become a practical reality in the life of the retreatant.

Jon Sobrino, in an appendix to his Christ at the Crossroads, speaks of the

theology of Ignatius as "centered around a christology of the historical Jesus and the following of that Jesus." He notes that the Exercises are "oriented to discipleship", "to concrete personal adherence to Jesus' historical mission." In summary, Sobrino concludes that "the Christology of the Exercises is a Christology of the historical Jesus that triggers a concrete form of discipleship structured after the activity of Jesus himself." (423)

The Christology of the Exercises can also be described as a functional Christology. The emphasis is on Jesus as the one who calls us and saves us. Jesus is the Leader, the Savior, the Mediator who is at work in the world. Throughout the second week of the Exercises the retreatant prays for "an intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me..." (#104). In the Third Week the retreatant asks for "sorrow, compassion, and shame because the Lord is going to His suffering for my sins." (#193). In the Contemplation to attain the Love of God the retreatant reflects on how Jesus "works and labors for me in all creatures." (#236). Ignatius repeatedly focuses on what Christ has done for us, his active role in our salvation. There is in fact no reference to the Chalcedonian formula of nature and person, no emphasis on the ontological structure of the person to the exclusion of the saving work of Jesus. In the Exercises, Jesus is Creator and Savior who continues to mediate for us and labor for us in the world. There is no emphasis on Jesus' identity with the Father in being but rather on his identity in love and will and work.

Finally, as we have already noted, the Christ of the Exercises is a cosmic Christ, our Creator and Lord who dwells and labors in creation. This emphasis on the cosmic Christ, even if only implicit on many levels, is in harmony with contemporary emphases on Christ in an evolutionary perspective and with the process conception of God as creative love, present and active in everything.

All of these emphases in the Exercises - the historical Jesus, praxis and discipleship, the functions of Jesus, the role of the cosmic Christ - resonate with the emphases of contemporary Christology. In this sense the Exercises are

more than a balance to an excessively low Christology, they are a rich source for the insights and themes of contemporary Christology. This is not to say that Ignatius offers us a thoroughly contemporary Christology that includes all the insights of such a Christology, rather that the Exercises as a means of encountering Christ offer a rich source for contemporary reflection of Jesus.

This reflection on the Exercises as a source for contemporary Christology brings us back to our original discussion of the sources of theology and raises again the question of the relation between spirituality, spiritual experience and theology. Our discussion of the Christology of the Exercises has been for the most part an analysis of the written text of the Exercises. The truth remains that the book of the Exercises was never intended as a textbook to be read. It is a handbook for a director to guide a retreatant to a personal encounter with the Lord, a way to come to a decision in freedom to serve the Lord more effectively. The written text in itself as we have discussed it can be a valuable source for Christological reflection, but the fact remains that the Exercises will only be a truly effective source when they become the guide for an experience of Jesus the Christ, when they enrich theological reflection by leading one to a deeper experience of the Lord.

One can question the value, even the validity of such a theological source. Would not Christology better remain with Scripture and the Councils as exclusively normative material for reflection? But perhaps we can at least raise the question: If theology is faith seeking understanding and if faith involves more than conviction, in fact implies also trust and commitment, if it implies then a response of the whole person to God's personal self-communication in Christ, must not theology flow from an ever deepening faith experience, from prayer and encounter with God? Theology is always in danger of becoming not faith seeking understanding but only understanding seeking more understanding.

The question remains: Can one do Christology if one has not prayed for and to some extent experienced the grace of the second week - to know, love and follow the Lord? That is a question best left for the mystics and theologians to debate.

My point is not to say that every theologian must make the Exercises if he/she is to do Christology. But I am implying that if the Exercises are to be a vital creative source for Christology, it will not be enough to read them as one reads Rahner and Schillebeeckx. I am also implying that contemporary Christology will only be a fruitful enterprise if it flows from a faith experience, an encounter with Jesus that is in fact the goal of the Exercises.

A few years ago Huub Oosterhuis interviewed Edward Schillebeeckx. He asked him "Do you speak to God?" Schillebeeckx replied, "Yes." "As a man speaks to his friend?" "Yes" Schillebeeckx replied. "---and I have never found it difficult to do that. When I was younger, my speaking to God was different from what it is now. It happened much more as a matter of course. I had the confidence and serenity of a young Roman Catholic of the period. Later it became less automatic, but I still went on talking to God in that naive and ordinary way. If you don't talk to God first, you can't talk about him." Since Schillebeeckx has given us a massive study of Jesus the Christ, I'm sure he would not be opposed to our substituting Christ for God in his last sentence. "If you don't talk to Christ first, you can't talk about him."

Well, you have certainly earned your refreshments. Anyway, the only way to do justice to the Exercises is not in a lecture hall, but in solitude for thirty days where we listen not to the paltry words of a theologian but to the movement of Jesus' Spirit within us, to the voice of Jesus, our Creator and Lord. It is there that disciples are born and theologians grow silent.