

# GIVING THE EXERCISES AND TRAINING DIRECTORS IN AN ECUMENICAL CONTEXT

By GRAHAM CHADWICK

FOR SOME PEOPLE FROM TRADITIONS other than Roman Catholic the connotation of Ignatius or Ignatian is manipulation, militarism, schematization. Their ideas have been nurtured by what they have learned of Jesuitical casuistry and the part played by Jesuits in the Counter-Reformation. When they come to know the real Ignatius, they find an attractive man who danced for his depressed fellow-Basque, who, like Francis of Assisi, took delight in God's creation and cared for the sick and poor. His values were of the gospel and his sole aim was to do God's will.

Some assume that certain ways of prayer originated with Ignatius and are therefore disinclined to try them. They don't realize that, although he popularized imaginative contemplation through the Spiritual Exercises, he learned that way of prayer from the writings of a Carthusian, Ludolph of Saxony. The preface of Ludolph's book, *Vita Christi*, describing this way of praying, was copied from the work of an anonymous Franciscan writer. The Cistercian, Aelred of Rievaulx, in the twelfth century and Anselm, the Benedictine Archbishop of Canterbury, in the eleventh, taught this method. It has a long pedigree. The other method associated with Ignatius, *lectio divina*, by which one verse or phrase of scripture is mulled over and prayed, goes back to the Benedictines and further through Cassian to the Desert Fathers.

When, without prejudice, people give these ways of prayer a trial, many find them congenial and helpful and go on to make an individually-guided retreat and, maybe, to do the Spiritual Exercises.

## *First contact with Ignatius*

My first encounter with the Spiritual Exercises was in 1943. As a bell-bottomed sailor taking a course in Japanese at the School of

Oriental and African Studies, I presented myself at 'St Edward's House, Westminster, for a weekend retreat. It was, as we would say now, individually-directed. A Cowley Father of the Anglican Society of St John the Evangelist gave me, among other things for my meditation, the First Principle and Foundation and the Kingdom exercise which, I remember, gave precision and decision to my life, keeping intact my vocation to the priesthood while I served for the next few years in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.

#### *Cowley Fathers and the Exercises*

The Cowley Fathers' formation was influenced greatly by Ignatius. Father Benson, their founder, based on the Spiritual Exercises the annual month-long retreat he gave to members of his Society as well as the shorter retreats he gave to clergy and lay people. In the middle of the nineteenth century, as was usual also in the Roman Catholic Church at that time, retreats were preached, but an interesting instruction he gave on one occasion has a modern ring about it: 'Do not have Conference during a retreat. You meet to converse with your own heart and with God only'.<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to his *Benedictus Dominus* he describes what is 'commonly called composition of place':

It is an act of the imagination, by which we seek to give greater vividness to the words previously recited, by picturing to ourselves the speaker and the circumstances under which they were spoken, or some object selected from the things of sense as a symbol of the abstract truth which we desire to consider.<sup>2</sup>

He lays great emphasis on the colloquy<sup>3</sup> and sees the purpose of the contemplation to 'show forth in our lives more truly the life of God'.<sup>4</sup> All this is thoroughly Ignatian.

The Cowley Father W. H. Longridge brought out his commentary on the Exercises in 1919.<sup>5</sup> The latest edition was published in 1950. It is considered by Roman Catholics as well as others to be one of the most thorough and reliable commentaries. Other publications of his were adaptations of the Exercises and include *Retreats for laymen* (Mowbray, 1926), *Retreats for priests* (SPCK, 1926), *Three retreats for lay people* (Oxford, 1928) and *A month's retreat for religious* (SSJE, Oxford, 1931).

#### *Giving the Exercises ecumenically*

It would have been unthinkable forty and more years ago, when I made that retreat, that I, an Anglican, would not only be making

retreats with Roman Catholics but sharing in the work of giving retreats to them and in training Roman Catholics, Anglicans and people of other denominations as retreat-givers and spiritual directors.

My experience of giving the Exercises has been chiefly according to the 19th Annotation, 'in the stream of life', and mostly to Anglicans and to a few members of other Churches. Except for the Marian element, about which I shall say something later on, most retreatants seem not to find anything alien to them because of their particular Christian tradition.

My experience of ecumenism generally has been that divisions cut across denominations. For example, at the first ecumenical retreat for priests held on Caldey in 1964 the division was primarily between progressives and traditionalists of whichever denomination rather than between those who were Roman Catholic or Anglican.

The Exercises' scriptural base is commonly Christian. Their dynamic with its foundation in the unconditional, limitless love of God, the reality of sin in ourselves and in the world and its forgiveness, acceptance leading to a call to share in Christ's ministry, all deepened and confirmed by his death and resurrection, is universally applicable. The First Principle and Foundation, exercises such as the Kingdom and the Two Standards are as apt for Anglicans and Protestants as for Catholics, all of us being human with the same fundamental needs. The same spirits are operating in all of us and need discernment.

The disposition which Ignatius requires of magnanimity and generosity towards God on the part of the retreatant<sup>6</sup> and his insistence on a non-judgmental attitude in the retreat-giver<sup>7</sup> make for a relationship in which difference of church affiliation matters not at all and in which ecumenism can thrive. The focus in a retreat in which people of various traditions take part is not ecumenical but the development of the relationship between the retreatants and God. When the focus is right, the ecumenical element falls into place. In a recent retreat in Huyton, a Roman Catholic man, strong in the faith, said, 'Isn't it great that an Anglican priest is putting me more in touch with God and confirming me in my faith?' One of the earliest Jesuits, Jerome Nadal, who was reckoned to have the best understanding of the Exercises, was once asked 'For whom are these Exercises suitable?' His answer was 'For Catholics, Protestants and pagans'.

*Mary and the Holy Spirit*

Some Anglican retreatants and those from other churches are unfamiliar with the practice of addressing Mary, the mother of the Lord, in prayer. For example, in the triple colloquy in the meditation on the Two Standards, Ignatius suggests that the first colloquy 'should be addressed to our Lady, asking her to obtain from her Son and Lord the grace . . .'.<sup>8</sup> Most find this, though strange at first, an enrichment and discover, from making the Exercises, the important place Mary has in the scheme of salvation. Some prefer to invoke the Holy Spirit which they see as the feminine element in the Trinity and whose place they feel Mary has sometimes been given in the Roman Catholic tradition. Moreover, they are surprised at what they see as the lack of explicit reference to the Holy Spirit and that the scriptural meditations end with the Ascension of our Lord, stopping short of Pentecost. It has been suggested that the little explicit mention of the Holy Spirit in the Exercises is due to the times in which Ignatius lived. The *Illuminati* were around whose claim to direct inspiration of the Spirit and a hot-line to God brought them into conflict with the institutional Church. For example, Ignatius, soon after his conversion, was asked by the authorities how he, an unlearned man, could teach the difference between mortal and venial sin. To have said that it was through the Holy Spirit would have brought condemnation, his inquisitors assuming that he had something to do with the *Illuminati* sect.<sup>9</sup> Doing the Exercises and further acquaintance with other Ignatian material, for example, the Spiritual Diary of St Ignatius,<sup>10</sup> makes clear to people the sure place that the Holy Spirit has in the Saint's life and writings.

*Biblical criticism*

Anglican clergy of a certain vintage are at a disadvantage when it comes to praying the scriptures whether in the way of *lectio divina* or imaginative contemplation. They have imbibed the assumption of recent but not really modern historians that the most important thing is to peel off all accretions since the events and to get back to the actual facts. They think that this is being scientific. Searching for the supposed original facts, by whom, where, to whom and about whom a book was written prevents them from being able to apply the truth of the passage to themselves. For example, a senior cleric found it impossible to use the familiar passage at the beginning of Isaiah 43 with personal reference because it was

addressed to Israel. He finds it impossible to put his own name in the place of Jacob and Israel and so to know that God is saying to him 'Don't be afraid: I have set you free. I have called you by name, you are mine . . . you are precious in my eyes . . . and I love you.' Many people find it helpful to apply all this not only to themselves but to people to whom they are close and to those whom they find difficult, so getting the God-perspective on their relationships. For this cleric, these ways of using scripture are taboo because of his strictly 'historical' interpretation.<sup>11</sup>

I thought a theologically 'liberal' lady, brought up in the Bultmann school, who did the Exercises with me would find imaginative contemplation difficult. Not a bit of it. She maintained that her imagination was as good as that of the Church in Rome, Antioch, Jerusalem and Ephesus, where the gospels had emerged. During the period between the events and the recording of them in the gospel, the Church had used its imagination and the interpretation of the events had been affected by the problems and circumstances of that Church. The account of the feeding of the five thousand and the Emmaus story, for example, would have been coloured by the celebration of the Eucharist. Similarly, in contemplating a gospel scene people will see it through the lens of their own psyche and circumstances. She said 'however Bultmannized one might have been, one can do the Exercises'.

Ignatius would have inherited the fourfold levels of interpretation of scripture taught to medieval pilgrims to the Holy Land. Of least importance was what really happened. The others were the symbolic, ethical and eschatological.<sup>12</sup>

### *Spirituality workshops*

Since 1985 spirituality workshops have been held ecumenically at Lllys Fasi in North Wales to give initial training in retreat-giving and spiritual direction. The course is designed to help people whoever they are, of whatever personality, to reflect on their own experience of God, to live more by the values of the gospel and to help others on their journey. Those taking part have been lay people, clergy and religious from a wide spectrum of traditions, Roman, Anglican, Quaker, Methodist and Presbyterian. The team has been Roman and Anglican.

The first week of the two-week workshop consists of input, using the Exercises as the model. The input is followed by an hour's personal prayer and sharing about it in a small group, focussing

on listening to one another. That pattern is followed twice each day. An open session is held in the evening. Subjects for the input sessions include an overview of the Exercises within the context of Christian spirituality, how to present the content of First Principle and Foundation, sin and repentance, Rules for Discernment, the Kingdom and 'Second Week' material, the Two Standards, Three Types of People and Three Kinds of Humility exercises and decision-making.

In the second half of the workshop, each participant makes and gives a three-day retreat. During that period, further input and personal supervision are given to the retreat-givers, and again they meet in small groups. The choice of retreat-givers is made irrespective of church affiliation. I understand that when, first, sisters and then lay people began giving retreats at St Beuno's, some retreatants tried to insist that they have a Jesuit or at least a priest to direct them. One woman finding herself with a sister as her retreat-giver told her how disappointed she was. She had paid a lot of money and had come a long way and therefore expected a Jesuit as her director! In our workshops, we find little difficulty in that way. Having lived together in community for the first week, the preference for retreat-givers would have nothing to do with clerical, religious or lay status and certainly not with denomination. Nor is that a consideration in deciding who will supervise whom.

A rather extreme example of the enrichment which can come from doing this work ecumenically is of a Quaker who, during the retreat, experienced for the first time exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. When this was first mooted she said 'You can't expect me to pray in front of a biscuit'. It was explained that Jesus is the heart of the universe and the sacrament is a symbol of that truth. When the time of exposition came, she found herself relating in a very real way to Jesus through focussing on the sacrament.

The last day of the workshop is devoted to looking at the application of what we have been doing to the home situation. People work in groups to plan events such as introduction to prayer, prayer and social issues, retreats in daily life and weeks of guided prayer.

The sense of unity engendered by a workshop in which people of different traditions live, pray and work together, and are involved in the same quest, is so remarkable that, at the end of the fourteen days, some have no idea of who belongs to what.

*Follow-up*

Further workshops for those who are engaged in spirituality work are held in subsequent years. The agenda is determined by the expressed needs of the participants. An attempt is made to link people living in the same area and to involve them in events as members of a team, providing the necessary supervision. For example, twelve took part as prayer guides in a week of guided prayer in Liverpool recently. Eighty-five people from two parishes, one Roman and the other Anglican, in Huyton spent half-an-hour a day praying the scriptures and meeting with their prayer-guide for up to half-an-hour later in the day. Although such exact denominational proportions were not planned, it happened that six prayer guides were Anglican and six Roman. One of the remarkable things about these weeks of guided prayer is the deep sense of unity that they engender among those who take part as well as among the team. When done ecumenically, the whole relationship between the Churches involved is changed.

The Lund dictum encourages us as Churches to do nothing separately that can be done together. The Spiritual Exercises, retreats, spiritual direction and the training of retreat-givers and spiritual directors can be done ecumenically not only without difficulty but to the enrichment of all concerned and as a real contribution to the unity of the Church for which our Lord longs.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Woodgate, M. V.: *Father Benson of Cowley* (Geoffrey Bles, London, 1953), p 44.

<sup>2</sup> Benson, R. M.: *Benedictus Dominus* (Longmans Green, London, 1897), p xii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p xvi. Cf Puhl, Louis J., S.J. (trans): *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius* (Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1952), sections 54 (p 28) and 199 (pp 82f).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p xx.

<sup>5</sup> Longridge, W. H.: *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola translated from the Spanish with a commentary and a translation of the Directorium in Exercitia* (Mowbray, 1919).

<sup>6</sup> Puhl: Annotation 5, p 3.

<sup>7</sup> Puhl: Presupposition, p 11.

<sup>8</sup> Puhl: Section 147, p 62.

<sup>9</sup> Dalmasas, Candido de S.J.: *Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits* (The Institute of Jesuit Sources, St Louis, 1985), p 102.

<sup>10</sup> Decloux, Simon: *Commentaries on the Letters and Spiritual Diary of St Ignatius Loyola* (Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, Roma, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> Cf Chadwick, Owen: *Michael Ramsey: a life* (OUP, 1990), p 30: 'Bethune-Baker and his school supposed that the more you strip the documents of the New Testament the more clarity and simplicity you will find'.

<sup>12</sup> *Vide* Davies, J. G.: *Pilgrimage yesterday and today* (SCM Press, 1988).