

A HUMAN CHRIST

By IRENE DUGAN

AH, THE MYSTERY AND AWE surrounding Person, *per-sonare*: the distilled essence of a being sounding through a physical organism.

The mystery began, we know not when, in the Trinity, Three in One. Amazing qualities of individual functions enhanced by collaborative work that makes unity out of their labours. Hand-crafted, if such a word may be used, specimen of life flowing from their life as generators, development and preservation. The awesomeness of this is so stupendous that humans take all the giftedness for granted and move on to puniness.

Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* attempts to prevent this from happening. Starting off with the Principle and Foundation, creation becomes a pivotal vantage point for viewing life and love. Persons put this into motion and human persons are entrusted with its care, nurturing and development. This not being enough, the words to increase and multiply were added, making human persons important beyond imagining. This importance can be handled only by the achievement of humility. In the Principle and Foundation one is asked to take one's place as a creature before the creator becoming apprised simultaneously of one's smallness and greatness. Such a combination keeps one balanced and confident because one's centre is *the Trinity*. One is forced to view all of creation as Job was forced by Yahweh with an abundance of questions such as, 'Who could design such beauty as a violet?'

The Principle and Foundation could absorb one for eternity but one must move on in the journey of life. Utopia is not for now. Purpose and decision-making is for now. Every part of the Exercises is about 'to see and know the will of God!' Ignatius shows us Jesus with his face set to this purpose.

Major decision-making happened in the Garden aeons ago, causing major changes in the plans of the Trinity. A woman and a man took on their own authority to decide they wanted to know good and evil. It was then that Yahweh's decision on circumventing this initial evil was presented. *The Woman* was promised, showing us that the feminine aspect was and is present always. Ignatius has the retreatant meditate this decision and its consequences for humans in the First Week of the Exercises. The meditation invites the retreatant to reflect on the fact that

read more at www.theway.org.uk

Jesus, the anointed, was promised as the Son of a Woman. He was to be a human as were Adam and Eve. These are powerful moments in the First Week of reflecting on the magnificence of being a human and the strength of the pull to drag this magnificence down into hell. Opposites stare the retreatant in the face. There is the beginning of a pull to fundamental option which is clearly drawn in the Triple Colloquy after the reflection of the retreatant on their personal dark side. Ignatius has us go first to a Woman, Mary, with three requests. That is not sufficient, so he suggests the retreatant ask Mary to companion him or her to a conversation with Jesus, the Christ, presenting the same three requests. Armoured with two allies, the next conference has to be with the Father, making it two humans with one member of the Godhead. The approach is exceedingly diplomatic yet sincere. How could the retreatant (if genuine in desire) not be a winner!

Magic word—*desire*. Everything depends on deep desire of the heart. The desire for cleansing, healing and above all *mercy*. Desire for the fiery love that burns the dross and impels action of a superior intensity. Desire moves the world to wholeness or destruction. The present movement today seems hell-bent on destruction. The retreatant is constantly presented with 'ask for what you desire'. Also with the words of Annotation 6 on spiritual movement. Several of the annotations refer to inner movement. Awareness of inner movement is essential in everyday living but much more so in the life of the Spirit, which activates our whole being towards harmony. The Exercises are packed with information on how to become whole and free.

Purpose in life is underlined in the Principle and Foundation in the First Week of the Exercises. This brings about a smooth entry into meeting in a new way the human Jesus, the Christ. His name is Jesus and he is called to be *the Christ*, the anointed one. As the anointed one, his desire is to anoint every human as brother or sister. His desire is to make each one a companion on the journey of life which he desires to give us in overflowing abundance.

What is more propitious than to present retreatants with Jesus, the anointed leader, inviting all and sundry to wage a spiritual war on all the evils of the day, poverty, disease, war, genocide, hate, greed, lust, power-driven moguls of industry, abuse of women and children. The list is endless. The Exercises have the power of focusing attention on the real, the beautiful, the true. The word is single-mindedness and the real *raison d'être* of our being.

Jesus, the Christ, in this contemplation models for us a catalyst for change. Numbers cannot be counted who have emulated his love and

zeal for God's people and God, only to receive the same reception that Jesus prophesied, 'Blessed are those who are persecuted'. It is the introduction to suffering, to laying down one's life for love of the good. Suffering which had its origin for humans in the garden as well as the promise of salvation through the co-operation of a Woman. Always the opposites: one woman wanting knowledge for herself and the other considering all the options and acquiescing when the reasons and purpose seem from God.

Easy to see why Jesus, the Christ, imaged in this contemplation, is a bone of contention for some humans and a lodestar for others. The love demanded here is for the all of a person which calls for *heroic Christian living* and genuine freedom. One has only to follow the trail of the prophets up to and beyond Jesus to see and grasp the truth of the *all*. The prophets in our own day carry on the command of 'each of us is responsible for our brothers and sisters' all over the world in our present global village. There is Mahatma Gandhi, who loved and admired Jesus, but who was impeded by the lukewarmness of the followers of the Good News; Martin Luther King, murdered because he sought equality for each human person; Bishop Romero transformed from a lukewarm, timorous man catering to the wishes of the modern Pharisees and scribes into the metal of a martyr; Mother Teresa picking up from the gutter the refuse and castaways of humanity. The list is long but not long enough when one considers the prodigality of God against the constant abuse and misuse of God's creation.

Here begins Ignatian use of the phrase *the more*. Most humans want *more* and *more* of everything on the face of the earth. Ignatius espouses *the more* as essential to the journey home. It is part of the twin threads of red for suffering and gold for love that are woven into the tapestry of the life of an heroic Christian.

An heroic Christian is one who lives an everyday life with acute awareness of the essentials required for living in a wholistic and simple manner. Nothing extraordinary except that everything is done in love and with care. It is an awareness of *otherness* so well described by Carol Ochs.

The Way of otherness is the way of joy, where joy is the life force . . . Watering plants is either a task or it is a moment of communion with another aspect of creation, an aspect that is alive and other . . . What is alive is other and independent so it has the capacity to surprise us.¹

Aliveness and attentiveness are characteristics of an heroic Christian. This comes through in the constant reference to inner movements, the

way of our actions, the deep intent which is the grounding of our works. Every least thing done with love and care, even putting out the cat.

That the person of Jesus, the Christ, cannot be taken lightly is obvious. He is the type of leader we all desire. His extra appeal lies in the fact that he shares his power and drive with all humans. He tells us this in many places but especially in Mk 16: 17-18.

These are the signs that will be associated with believers; in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.

Jesus was not avaricious of power. He shared and still does share *the all*. Approachableness and trust are characteristics of this Leader who calls us to be leaders in our own places. It is a calling to networking across the air waves. A calling to be electric and passionate. A magnificent Leader who is ever present invites us to be present to our people in pain.

This serene, caring, healing Leader is skilfully sketched at the beginning of the Second Week as an introduction to the history of how it all came to be. The follow-up is a contemplation of the incarnation, that pivotal mystery in history.

The incarnation! What a work of genius that only a God could conceive of or accomplish! The meeting of the Triune God is outlined with masterly strokes that show the loving care of the Creator for the product of their love. The Triune God discusses what can be done to salvage the wreckage, an example to humans in the face of despair, how to face failure by looking for alternatives. This is the God Jesus taught us to approach with ease; we can talk with this God confidently, sure of acceptance. It is one of the most important lessons taught by Jesus, the loving, waiting, merciful Father depicted so well in the parable of the Prodigal. Gabriel Marcel says well what is being sought presently and what Jesus modelled so well.

We are living today in a world in which the notion of sonship, and the notion of fatherhood too, are tending to be emptied of that richness of meaning which they possessed for other societies. It is important therefore for us to get a firm grasp of the almost completely negative conception of sonship. It seems to define itself basically in terms of a refusal to acknowledge the existence of life, in the fact of being alive, of a value that allows us to think of life as a gift. The old French expression *devoir le jour à*—to owe the light of day to—would never be used today. It

has become rather trite to talk of owing the light of day to one's parents.²

Men and women today are searching for models, for persons of integrity with value orientations. Ignatius picked up this having need for support—so conversation with Mary becomes important in the dynamics of the Exercises. The meeting of the Trinity concludes on the note of the *Word* taking on human flesh. However, this cannot happen until *the Woman* is asked a crucial question. Arrives again the man and woman components. Mary is asked to be the mother of the Messiah. She does not jump up and down with glee but asks pertinent questions. When they are answered to her satisfaction, Mary acquiesces and the Holy Spirit fertilizes the egg in her womb causing the divine and human combination to produce the human Jesus. It is a legitimate union which invites one to reflect deeply on the call to humans to move to deep, intimate union with the Divine. Our divine genes need to be activated.

Ignatius, early in the journey through the Thirty-day experience with Jesus, the Christ, is inviting all men and women to look long and hard at this *Man*. He has us ask 'what have I done for Christ, what am I doing for Christ, what am I going to do for Christ?' Jesus came to show how a human can live. He said: 'And, I when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself.' He spoke with authority and so gave hope to a despairing people. He did what any true leader does, gives authority to his followers to do as he did and even better and greater. Teaching his followers to move inward to have a strong and deep spirit, was and is one of the precious teachings handed on to humans. 'Not on bread alone do humans live.'

A child is conceived, given a name signifying his mission in life. Not only he but his mother teaches us how to live. Her first response to her new position was to set off to the hill country to visit her cousin. In other words, to be of service. Service is one of Ignatius' outstanding words. Jesus himself said: 'I have come to serve, not to be served'. So mother and Son set out to show us how to serve and give us a motive for such service, 'to preach the kingdom'.

The seed is planted. A new phase of history is born. All should have gone smoothly. At least, that is how humans would have it; all engines oiled, move into the future. Not so. The Second Week introduces the Hidden Life with drama. Mary and Joseph were nicely settled at home waiting for the birth of their Son when an edict is proclaimed. Go to your own town to be registered for the census. In our times, it can be the corporate world or job opportunities that make for the migration of families. Wars, coups, famine, take-over by another government are

other causes of flight and fight. The Holy Family is no exception to the human condition. They become part of the scene and will continue to do so for well over thirty years. So mundane and ordinary that no one would guess the yeast hidden in the grain bringing the real purpose to life one day.

Apprenticeship for living and for learning a trade took the necessary time. Humanness in himself and in those around him came tumbling in on Jesus every day. He was a child, a boy, a man with all the experiences that go with human development. No one could spare him the everyday knocks of everyday rubbing elbows in the marketplace, the common occurrences of living on earth with earthly people. Ignatius has retreatants spend a week on such mysteries, always tying them in with their lives and their experiences. An intimate relationship begins to take shape. This Man is like me only more intent perhaps on what he is about. Much dialogue takes place, an exchange Ignatius calls colloquy, a gathering together of all one is, to have this Man give a look-see and a further call, excite and challenge. Once the extraordinary aspect of the Man sets in, the journey can take a turn, abrupt or gradual, depending on readiness.

All apprenticeships come to a close eventually (though learning does not) one day. The time of missioning arrives in every life. Likewise with Jesus. He had to leave home, say goodbye to his Mother and set off. The feel of an empty house for Mary and a new work for Jesus. All families have known this gnawing emptiness and the excitement of a new adventure. What stirring of emotions these two show us. No cover up, no wishing away—just facing what is with faith and knowing ultimately all will make sense. Ignatius encourages this through having retreatants constantly placing their desires before God and reflectively discerning what is going on in them.

Everything dovetails with purpose. 'To know him more clearly, follow him more nearly, love him more dearly.' Ignatius learned, through his own experience, the power of discernment. Jesus exhibited the use of it on his entrance into the public life with the temptations in the desert. The pull of the three concupiscences, so strong in each of us, was felt by him. He was one of us and gave us clues as to how to meet these enemies of our equilibrium. Kierkegaard has insightful points to say about this.

Temptation is best fought by running away, avoiding it. But this does not work with thoughts that try the spirit, for they pursue you. Here the tactic must be: do not get frightened, remain utterly calm, absolutely indifferent.³

The humanness Jesus displayed and experienced is instructive and affirming. Humans can expect inner struggle in order to become whole. We do not have to be vanquished. We become strong as did Jesus the Leader and model for us. What a dream! That is what Ignatius had in mind with the God-given Exercises. He lived during the time of the Inquisition, a travesty of the Good News.

The apprenticeship over, the Man moves out to enter into his assigned work, part of which is to show humans that it is possible to live a truly rich and happy life in this world. One has only to grow daily in self-knowledge, seek God's will and serve one's neighbour with love. This is the perfect antidote prescribed by the Divine Physician. A long look at the Man in action adds astonishing details to his humanness and attractiveness. He exudes the charm Marcel describes so well.

It seems to me that the more constrained a person's behaviour is, the more his/her attention is taken up with precise, specific purposes, the less charm he/she has . . . There is nothing more impossible to acquire by a deliberate exercise of the will, than charm; in fact, there is a kind of willing—the willing that implies constraint—which basically excludes the very notion of charm. The tensed-up person cannot be charming ever. Charm is a kind of margin to personality, it is the presence spreading out beyond what is said and done . . . it is an overplus, a beyond.⁴

What he says and does ripples out, sometimes like gentle waves and sometimes like thundering pounding of the tide coming in. He punctuates his message in homespun stories. He shows us humans how to be who we are.

Ignatius has us see, hear, touch, smell, taste the measure of the Man . . . has us tread the dusty roads with him and sneak up close to him as he prays in simple terms to his Father. This human Christ shows us the rewards flowing from time spent in solitude and the required spilling out of the fruits of this solitude to others. This Jesus is not afraid of crowds. He allows himself to be pushed, touched, heckled, called to for help and healing and he meets it all with love. Most appealing is the way he physically touches those he is healing. A person with AIDS would be one of those he would go out to immediately. The street people, the homeless, the unwanted children would be gathered round him breaking his heart. Parables about workers assure us his concern for the unemployed. What newly married couple would not welcome him to their reception after hearing the episode in Cana? Indeed, here is a Man for all seasons.

Jesus, the Christ, utilized his energy to the full as he set his face to Jerusalem. He was global-minded but stayed with his mission of calling the Israelites to God. He modelled for missionaries, an enormous task, including how to be a celibate if one has promised this, how to be faithful in a marriage and above all how to face the struggles that arise from being a wounded human. Paul says Jesus experienced everything human except sin which means Kazantzakis was not too far off when he has Jesus assaulted by the evil one showing he would do us no good if he were not totally human. Such a stance causes us to take a long look at the sincerity of our commitments. Ignatius offers several places in the Exercises for a look at our side of our covenant. Rules for Discernment of Spirits, Three Kinds of People, How to Make a Wise Decision are very much to the point and help us to name our escape hatches, for example: 'I am human and have to experience everything, vows or no vows'. He, Jesus the Christ, had nothing to give but himself.

At the end of the public life, Jesus gives us his total being in the eucharist. The eucharist is a sacrament, a sacrifice, a love offering of a life which he gave with outstretched arms, bloody and pierced. Our society today seems to have very, very little value of life and consequently of blood. Lev 17:11 says it sufficiently: 'The life of the flesh is in the blood' and 'It is the blood that atones for a life'. This shows us how much Jesus, the Christ, loved and loves humans. He gave his life blood to atone for our sins and further gives us his total self in the eucharist since we are in need of life. All of Jesus is in us. Nothing could be closer or more intimate. In many religious rituals the blood of animals poured out is life but not human life and not redeeming life. This prefigured the redeeming blood of Jesus, the Christ atoning, redeeming and restoring life. Eucharist is this celebration of redeemed life, of thanksgiving for life, the only gift that is forever. The Exercises call us to ponder on and embrace these great mysteries and to *live*.

Rilke has a beautiful story about blood in *Stories of God*.⁵

Women especially can appreciate blood since their bodies are so formed as to use the flow of blood to bring forth other lives and through the blood to nourish their offspring. Women's lives are marked out by blood: menstrual cycle, blood at birthing, and menopause to conclude the physical birthing cycle. Women are all about life-giving. The blood carries all the characteristics of parents and of ancestors. Genes are given and since Jesus gives us his blood, we have human and divine genes. The divine is deeply imbedded in the unconscious waiting for us to listen, hear, discover and develop.

What a gift is the eucharist! By the Last Supper, Jesus proclaims the struggle of good and evil and his willingness to take on this struggle. The

Third Week of the Exercises is all about this contest. One of his own friends betrays him, giving Jesus an opportunity to experience betrayal, meeting it with love. He did all in his power to dissuade Judas but to no avail. Bitterness was not his, only sorrow and compassionate love. Jesus nourishes our whole being with his whole being, physical, psychic and spiritual. Ignatius has us watch this human person carry out his ministry with selfless love and determination emphasizing how this Man yearns for human companionship. All he asks is love and devotion to a call. The desire for companionship is universal.

Betrayal was not enough, he needs to be accused as a criminal because of hate and hubris poured out on him by the élite and powerful. Today the little people are in the same position as Jesus. If they are not filled with hate, they learn with Jesus to hold themselves with dignity and love. They know they should not be treated so shabbily and unjustly, but their courage and strength is infused into them by Jesus and they shine like stars even as did Jesus, the Star of David.

The Anointed, the King, is brought before Pilate, a puppet of Rome. It reminds one of the oration of Mark Antony at the death of Caesar in Shakespeare's play:

I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
 The evil that men do lives after them:
 The good is oft interrèd with their bones;
 So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
 Hath told you Caesar was ambitious.
 If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
 And grievously hath Caesar answered it. . . .
 Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.
 He was my friend, faithful and just to me.
 But Brutus says he was ambitious,
 And Brutus is an honourable man.

And so it goes on depicting hate, ambition, lust for power. The *Man* stands tall and serene through it all for his conscience is clear. He is doing the will of the Father! No one can hurt him in the depth of his being. What a lesson for all humans. As the children sing: 'Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me'. And Jesus was called many names both ugly and beautiful. He, the Saviour, the Christ, the Beloved of the Father. The English Martyrs understood as they prayed the Jesus Prayer while being drawn and quartered. Travelling the Royal Road of the Cross seems to be for the truly mature and

whole. Wholeness is particularly attractive these days with the Jungian School, Buddhism, the Hindu Way. Jesus is a clear and strict teacher of the way to reach inner alignment of head, heart and guts.

There is the Man Christ without whose blood no human can live. Every part of him is given to us. His blood is in our veins nourishing us, making us heirs of heaven. He puts his seal on this promise by dying for us and then rising from the dead. Faithful to the end. As our body blood has its train line dropping off nutrients at every station as it travels through our body, the blood of Jesus drops nutrients to the faculties of our spirit, the intellect, the will, the imagination and the memory. Healing, forgiveness and all other goodies travel the lines. How vital blood is to us! At Communion the priest says: 'May the Body and Blood of Christ bring us to *everlasting life*'. This is our goal.

The Fourth Week of the Exercises concentrates on the resurrection, the risen life and its effects on the followers of Jesus. Forty days of joy, surprise and also struggle. They assure humans about the greatest love that is theirs: that sin is forgiven and death conquered, so shall they live forever. Jesus promised this when he said: 'I am the resurrection and the life. They who believe in me will never die'. Emotional roller-coasters mark this week. The apostles run through the gamut of emotions from fear to doubt, to joy and questioning, which is common to all humans, human barometers. Much solace spills over from contemplation of these mysteries. Is Jesus here and is he a ghost? Will he disappear, will he return, will the High Priest fail us? All the questions humans all over the world ask and Jesus says: 'Peace, I am here'. Peace settles in for a time until the cycle begins all over again until Jesus calms the waters again. He has experienced what it is to be a human. Always the promise is there; 'I am with you', calling to faith, hope and above all love.

Finally comes the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*, sometimes translated: Contemplation to Obtain Love as though it were a one-time effort and achievement. But obtaining something as precious as love is a process. The Spanish has it, '*Contemplación para alcanzar amor*' meaning to catch up with someone who keeps moving ahead. One is attempting always to match love's demands. Jesus lived and preached this. His parables were about nature and people and how they performed. His life was about living in community with nature and each other. Chapter 18 of Matthew is about community, about Church which is meant to be a community of believers and lovers of family. The Acts of the Apostles is full of this reality. The Exercises has the retreatant ponder these truths and Jesus' modelling of love and community. Jesus was an ecologist in his treatment of nature, his care for all living things. Each Week of the

Exercises brings out insights about being human, rising and falling with our ups and downs.

Praised be Jesus, the Christ, the MAN!

NOTES

¹ Ochs, Carol: *Ascent to joy* (Notre Dame, 1986), pp 58 and 59.

² Marcel, Gabriel: *Mystery of being* (Regnery, 1950), p 243.

³ Kierkegaard, Søren: *Spiritual trials, journals & papers* vol 4 (Indiana U. Press, 1975).

⁴ Marcel, Gabriel: *Mystery of being* (Regnery, 1950), pp 253-254.

⁵ Rilke, Rainer Maria: *Stories of God* (Norton & Co.), pp 28-38.