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## Learning to Learn Interreligiously: In Light of the *Spiritual Exercises*

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The *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola: Comparative Perspectives from Asia and the West, sponsored by the University of San Francisco Center for the Pacific Rim, names a symposium and also identifies an excellent theme that appropriately honors the 150th anniversary of the founding of the University—while yet looking to its future in this still young century. I am happy to be able to share some of my own reflections on the *Exercises* in Asia as we begin our day together, and I hope that they will be of some use in framing our conversations. Indeed, I dare to speak on so broad a theme only because my thoughts are meant to serve as conversation-starters, not as conclusions beyond argument. In what follows, I offer hypotheses rather than firm theses, and I know that I leave unanswered various questions related to what I have to say.

### **I. General Dispositions in the *Exercises* Aiding Us in Interreligious Encounter**

If the *Exercises* are accepted as encoding the founding insights and practice/s of Jesuit and Ignatian spirituality, and if they are understood in a broadly positive fashion, we can easily connect them with the trajectory toward interreligious exchange in the 21st century, as we can with almost any other laudable development in Christian and Ignatian spirituality. I begin with a list of some relevant attitudes that can be found in, and fostered by, the *Exercises*.<sup>[1]</sup>

1. Imagination, exercised in contemplation, is a privileged way of encounter with God;
2. Knowledge of God is a matter of affectivity as well as of reason;
3. Discipline, regular practice, patience are intrinsic to how one comes to know God;
4. Conversation is possible, beginning in deference to where the interlocutors are right now; and one can and must always give interlocutors the benefit of the doubt and listen openly to what they say;
5. Jesuit education values ideas and insights, heart and mind, truth and what is right, and hopes for the integral transformation of the whole person;
6. Sin is real and effective; conversion and redemption are all the more important;
7. There is an immediacy to encounter with God, in experience and by way of practice; even with due respect for tradition and Church, no person or entity is allowed to stand between God and the person seeking God;
8. We can find God in all things, for the triune God is present everywhere in our world;
9. The *Exercises* are Christocentric—and Christ revalorizes all human reality, individual and shared by all of us;
10. Enacting the *Exercises* is less thinking about Christ, and more a matter of imitating Christ;

11. Service, not ideology, is the key fruit of the *Exercices*.

All of these features are important and worthy of note—one could stop here, I suppose, and simply spell out the possibilities inscribed in the preceding.

But to clarify what is at stake when we think of ‘the *Spiritual Exercices* in Asia’, it is important to dig deeper into the heritage of the *Exercices* in the context of our increasingly interreligious world; we need to be attentive to history and the written word, but also to the experience of thoughtful and articulate practitioners. While such attention complicates the truths/truisms with which I have started, it is in the face of difficulties and unanswered questions that we do our best learning.

## II. The *Exercices* in the Jesuit Missionary Tradition (in Asia) [2]

It is well for us to think back to the missionary era of interreligious encounters, so as to learn by differences and similarities where we stand today. Particularly in Asia (the focus of my reflections), many of the values I have already stated come to life in particular and interesting ways.

Even before individual Jesuits got to Asia, the *Exercices* of course already had an energizing effect in their lives. By immersion in the world and practice of the *Exercices*, they enflamed their determination to be missionaries, to teach the Gospel to all nations, and to suffer for and with the suffering Christ.[3] It is reasonable to expect that the early Jesuit missionaries ‘brought the *Exercices* with them’, whether as an actual book, or more importantly as a discipline and generative source formative in their spiritual identities and understanding of mission. They were inspired by the text, using it as a matter of course and in a matter of fact and practical fashion. While I cannot say exactly what ‘making’ or ‘giving’ the *Exercices* would have meant in 1580 or 1610, making an annual retreat and giving the *Exercices* seems to have been important in the lives of the Jesuits in the missions. The *Exercices* seem to be mentioned as a regular practice; even in Xavier’s time, European Catholics in Asia made the *Exercices*, and even some ‘native’ Christians did so as well.[4]

As Jonathan Spence suggested already several decades ago, we can safely assert that Matteo Ricci’s attitudes in his mission to China in the late 16th century reflect attitudes that can be found in the *Exercices*; we can generalize by stating that the *Exercices* helped form the worldviews and programs of the great Jesuit innovators.[5] Moreover, the *Exercices* also provided a way to read the sufferings of the missionaries during their ministries. Thus, for Roberto de Nobili in south India in the early 17th century, Christ was a teacher (*guru*)—but more specifically, too, a divine teacher whose life teaches and, when contemplated, enables the life of detachment and poverty.[6] Or, we can also consider the letters of later missionaries such as Jean Venance Bouchet (1700, south India); his letter to a promising young volunteer for the missions is replete with the imagery of sacrifice and heroism that we find in the *Exercices* (and also in the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of St. Paul).[7]

We might assume that the early missionaries at least implicitly found in the *Exercices* a guide for educational work, either in established institutions or simply in their pedagogical conversations with people they met.[8] Educational work too was a matter of strategy, gradual preparation, catechesis, careful complexification over a longer period of time, and always a matter of assessing which ‘students’ were ready for which new ideas and sentiments. Much of this could be counted a sober and prudent generalization of the First Week assessment of the human condition, while only later would direct evangelization follow, in keeping with the explicit turn to the life of Christ in the Second Week. To an extent, this was the point of actual missionary learning and writing: Ricci’s and Nobili’s general method of interreligious conversation; Alexandre de Rhodes’ Vietnamese-language Catechism (structured according to eight ‘days’)—and imitative guiding principles; later on, this would be the practice in Jesuit schools in Asia to adapt the *Exercices* for non-Christian students.

I conclude this second section with the rather safe hypothesis that the early missionary Jesuits in Asia (and elsewhere) were inspired and guided by the *Exercices*, even if they did not tell us much about this or think that emphasizing the *Exercices* was important. This too seems rather certain. Had we more time, we could talk more immediately about the practice of the *Exercices* in Asian countries; I have my own fond memories of school retreats in Kathmandu in the 1970s, where the *Exercices* came alive for me and my Hindu and Buddhist students—and I am sure many of you have similar memories.

## III. The *Exercices* and Ignatian Theologies: Marriages with Mixed Results?

What is more doubtful, however, is whether the *Exercices* afforded the early Jesuits an intellectual openness anything like what today we would be inclined to call ‘openness’, as if their *Exercices*-inspired openness might guide our negotiation of the specific interreligious encounters before us in today’s world of multiple spiritual practices and varied, interreligious theological systems. Things become more complex when we try to articulate what the *Exercices* mean theologically, and to sort out the various kinds of interreligious theology/ies that might arise from them—as opposed to being linked to the *Exercices* as true to its spirit, ‘what Ignatius would want of us’, etc. Were the *Exercices* too definitive and too defined to foster theological openness or – as is more likely – were fixed intellectual theological systems attached to the *Exercices*, thus constraining or even denying more ambitious modes of accommodation, simply because theology could not catch up with practice?

In any case, my impression – based on exploring Jesuit sources and posing inquiries to Jesuit historians – is that the Jesuit missionaries remained nearly silent in their ‘academic’ and ‘theological’ writings, regarding the importance of the *Exercices* as a resource for understanding religious pluralism. Amazingly open in so many ways, they nonetheless did not talk about finding in the *Exercices* practical grounds for what we today we would value as ‘interreligious openness’.[9] They do not show us that they imagined the *Exercices* to provide a basis for a different way of theorizing the spiritual, cultic, supernatural, and ‘divine’ dimensions of the cultures they encountered. All of this leads to another of my hypotheses offered for discussion: the *Exercices* are theologically underdetermined—rich in theological possibilities, never fully articulate as practical theology, and therefore open to multiple theological completions, vulnerable to overlays of theology/ies that are applied

to the *Exercises*, gaining credibility by a link with them.

But lest I move too quickly, let me add several preliminary observations. First, in my (admittedly very limited) survey of pre-1773 missionary letters and essays, I have not found much in the way of a recognition of God's direct intervention in the lives of individual non-Christians—even if, in practice, these Jesuits must have had ample data from the experience of their own encounters with interested Hindus, Buddhists, and others. On the grand scale, they could attest that God is everywhere, and all that is natural is created and imbued with God's design; but there is little mention of God's work in individual persons as conscious agents who have found God in the specificity of their personal religious experience in the religions in which they grew up. In a sense, this is intriguingly opposite to 20th century theology. Then, the Jesuits found God in nature and nature's cultural developments, but said little about God's presence in individual persons; now, God is more easily found in individuals, but less is said, and with more difficulty, about how God is present in the social and cultural configurations we call 'religions'. The problem and possibility that occupy people's attentions have been reversed. In either situation, the experience of practice and theologies about divine action do not happily cohere.

I also suggest that the *Exercises* offer an intense discipline, great scope for imagination—but they also leave underdetermined the theological meaning/s that might arise in relation to articulate practice. Deeply Christocentric, the *Exercises* nevertheless do not inscribe any specific, finished or fully systematized Christology, nor any particular ecclesiology. They can be read in multiple ways, energizing all kinds of innovative action; and yet they remain vulnerable to various theological determinations, conservative or liberal. They may be taken as the basis for a highly imaginative theology, or regularized in terms of Christological certainties and a deeply orthodox Catholic theology and doctrine. As somewhere between theology and practice, the *Exercises* have been agile, and in their agility have proved very fruitful; but it has been hard to generate from within the practice of the *Exercises* the needed theological meanings for this openness.

There are many theologies that can be applied to the *Exercises*, and (in my view) many of these are, as it were, layered onto the *Exercises*. These have become 'Ignatian theologies', but they are not, strictly speaking, required by the *Exercises*. Of course, for the sake of the Church and those not directly engaged in the practice of the *Exercises*, and to nurture the place of Jesuits within the Church, theological development is required, as new questions arise. But which, if any, theology of/from the *Exercises* is vital and specific enough to be useful today and also genuinely generated from the text and its practice/s? We need to avoid a vague openness that genially pairs the *Exercises* with just about any spiritual practice, and we need to avoid merely embracing a settled Christian theology that, while open enough, in fact precludes open exchange and encounter because it is too much 'theolog', and not enough 'theology generated from practice'. We can expect, then, all kinds of theologies, of all kinds of ideological persuasion, claiming the allegiance of the *Exercises*[10]—but few that necessarily arise from them.

Flexibility is wonderful, but being 'chameleon'—non-resistant to adjoined or superimposed theological ideologies—is no virtue: if read as very open, the *Exercises* become blandly receptive; if sanctified as highly orthodox, their imaginative openness is reduced to some specific Christology. Either way, it becomes easy to enlist the *Exercises* for the sake of a particular attitude toward 'Asia' and Asian religions' traditions of practice and theology, but the energies and specificities of practice get lost in the process.

It seems to me that the early Jesuits were pragmatically adventuresome, but also theologically conservative. They tended toward ecclesial Orthodoxy and even Ultra-Orthodoxy—strong ideologies layered seemingly with ease onto the *Exercises*, which did not have a specific enough theology of their own to ward off theologies layered onto them from without. In this context one might then reconsider the Rules for Thinking with the Church,[11] a 'late' addition to the *Exercises* that has often served as a measure for determining the authenticity of experience/s leading up to or resulting from the *Exercises*. Whatever the history of the Rules, we can at least say that there was nothing said in the *Exercises* precluding firm adherence to the Rules, which came to be thought of as defining what it means to be steeped in the *Exercises* in a proper fashion.

All of this applies in the missionary and even contemporary interreligious context, such as here on the Pacific Rim: the *Exercises* can be enlisted for very conservative and very liberal projects. While here too I do not document what therefore must remain merely a hypothesis, I offer by way of hypothesis and for the sake of our discussion some general points that will, I hope, be clarified and corrected throughout our day together.

The early Jesuits—missionaries included—seemed always to be entirely confident of their 'higher' viewpoint: by education, wisdom, detachment, and grace, they understand the situation of the 'natives' better than did the natives themselves. Perhaps the Jesuit tradition encourages a kind of condescending openness? The missionaries were theologically conservative, and the maintenance of a rather definitive orthodoxy made it impossible for them to enter into dialogue with the full, mutual respect that is required today. They manifest an evident and seemingly innate distaste and lack of sympathy for the 'religious' ideas and 'religious' worship of people in the religions they encountered.[12] Whatever might be named 'culture' (as we might put it) could be validated and accommodated in a bold fashion; but the effect of naming something 'religious' (in the vocabulary of the day) was to rule it erroneous and unacceptable. There was no 'permission' in the *Exercises* for honoring the positivities of religious belief and practice; they had intellectual debating partners, but seemed less willing to admit that they also had Hindu and Buddhist companions likewise committed to intelligent spiritual practice.

The missionaries themselves, even while living for long periods amidst the practitioners of other traditions, seem to have been amazingly silent regarding those practices; they were silent about what to us would seem to be obvious parallels, and silent about how such similarities in practice might be received positively and for the sake of attenuating doctrinal differences. The *Exercises* were not explicitly utilized as a resource for interreligious learning, as if they might motivate a thoughtful Christian practitioner to learn from thoughtful Hindu or Buddhist practitioners. We have little evidence (at least in the Indian context, with which I most familiar) that the missionaries thought there were like-minded, like-practicing persons around them, as their religious peers. Perhaps they knew little about the more advanced practices of their religious neighbors; in any case, it would be centuries before Europeans started paying very close attention to yoga practice and the like.

The famous practices of adaptation, language learning, etc., were accompanied by an apologetics not evidently (to us at least) in keeping with the *Exercises*' imaginative dimensions. Take for example the apologetic works of Matteo Ricci (late 16th century, China) and Roberto de Nobili (early 17th, India). Despite their cultural creativity and determination to be open where possible, in the end, whatever they identify as 'pagan', they reject. These are great pioneers in cultural exchange, but they seem not to have said anything positive about the religious dimensions of the cultures they encountered. Or, to mention another, lesser known figure, the letters of Jean Venance Bouchet (early 18th century) from south India show the energy and limits of the Jesuit enterprise: we find learning and curiosity—along with a swift condemnation of the pagan. In pointing this out, I do not intend to demean the memory of these great pioneers, but only to suggest that if we are to draw upon the *Exercises* in living up to the challenges of interreligious dialogue in our era, we must go about learning from their practice and devising our theologies in a different way, ensuring that we do not merely impose a liberal or conservative theology onto the *Exercises*. We must honor our great predecessors, but we must make our own way, now.[13]

We can sum up as follows the problem and possibility of the *Exercises* in relation to interreligious understanding, practice, and theology. The *Exercises* are effective in practice; second, this practice is open to multiple meanings, and always underdetermined, even if it is notably, deeply Christological; third, the practice is also liable to borrowing ideologies from outside, apart from the specific dynamic of the *Exercises*; in fact, for the want of something better, there may be a 'drift' toward a theorization neither rooted in practice nor enriched by it, and we may then be distracted by the fine points of liberal and conservative theories about interreligious communication. The practice-based openness of the *Exercises* does not demand any particular ecclesial theology, even if some such theology is ultimately required, and opens a way for shared reflection among practitioners whose theologies arise always in relation to their practice.

All this implies positive and negative possibilities for interreligious encounter. Working to understand practices and theologies together is surely a good thing. But when any one among various Catholic theological positions is layered onto the *Exercises*, such may or may not be effective vehicles of interreligious learning, since they are not actually generated from the practice that is ostensibly the starting point. But if we become wearied by theologies, we might end up merely theorizing that God validates every kind of religious practice, whatever it might mean—even if our actual practice has generated no such theory either.

So what can be done in this situation—beyond refining or modifying my suggestion, or perhaps contesting it? We can of course simply observe the matter, and recognize that the *Exercises* were not and are not entirely fixed conceptually. But we should be able to go farther, to move forward in reflection upon an effective practice that is deeply theological and ecclesial, but still underdetermined in terms of particular theological meanings, toward an interreligious communication that is practical, efficacious, theological, wherein the practices and theologies of different traditions are brought into a richly varied and changing interaction with one another.

#### IV. The *Exercises* in Light of Indian *Spiritual* Traditions: Learning from Indian Jesuits

I suggest that it is possible to understand and manage better the intellectual-practical balance that characterizes the *Exercises* by paying attention to how this balance has been managed by those attentive to the tradition of the *Exercises*, and how grounding in the *Exercises* makes possible a holistic exchange with other such traditions. The intellectual is not left aside, nor is there postulated some simple new theology that is the theology of the *Exercises*—for the text is and remains always underdetermined with respect to its theological meaning.

But Indian (and other Asian) Jesuits today, and their many colleagues, are making the connections: the *Exercises* have become an explicitly interpreted and repeatedly re-used means for the transit to a new reflective spiritual practice in the Indian context. We in the West do well to listen to Indian Jesuits today, to learn from them how the *Exercises* have been read and are being used in India. Here I simply note a few of the many resources, by way of example.

##### 1. Essays in *Ignis*, the Indian journal of Jesuit spirituality:[14]

- a. George Gispert-Sauch:
  - i. "Indian Spirituality and the 'Contemplatio ad Amorem'" (1980)
  - ii. "Viveka: Discernment in the Indian Tradition" (1987; 2 parts)
- b. Xavier Irudayaraj:
  - i. "Indo-Ignatian Satsang" (1975)
  - ii. "Sin and Conversion: Indo-Ignatian Views and Experiences" (1977)
  - iii. "Ignatian and Indian Methods of Prayer" (1978)
  - iv. "The *Exercises* and Social Change in Indian Today" (1979)
  - v. "Indo-Ignatian Satsang: Socially Oriented Retreats" (1986)
  - vi. "Indo-Ignatian Satsang: Twelve Years on a Quest" (1987)
- c. "*Spiritual* Direction: an Indian perspective," Anand Amaladass (1992)
- d. "Jesuit Indifference and Jain Vision of Anekanta," Vincent Sekhar (1994)
- e. "Zen Discernment," and "Dialogue and Proclamation: Zen and Ignatian," Ama Samy (1997 and 2002)
- f. "Ignatius, God's Steadfast Shisya," Francis Gonzalves (2000)

Of course, if we had to time to move beyond *Ignis*, many more examples could be cited. See also, for instance, Sebastian Painadath, "The Integrated Spirituality of the *Bhagavad Gita*—An Insight for Christians: A Contribution to the Hindu-Christian Dialogue." [15] These articles, just a few examples out of many, are rich in insights into the tradition of the *Exercises* read and practiced in light of the spiritualities and theologies of India (and Asia more broadly), and cumulatively map a multidimensional configuration of how the *Exercises* are to be understood and practiced with richer awareness in the Indian context. Less important than any grand theological claims that a comparativist

might draw are the specific small connections that these authors steeped in Ignatian practice and insight have established.

On a larger scale, there are also interesting book-length studies that show us how to begin generating an interreligious practical theology from new reflection on the *Exercises*.<sup>[16]</sup> Here I can mention just a few. For instance, in his *Comparative Study of the Bhagavad-Gita and the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, Varghese Malpan offers a detailed comparative study of the two texts, seeking to demonstrate in detail how ‘seeds of the Word’ can be found in a classic non-Christian text, particularly with respect to world-views, the discipline of action (*karma yoga*), intuitive perceptions of reality (*jnana yoga*), and the mysticism of the love of God (*bhakti yoga*).<sup>[17]</sup> In a different mode altogether, we can also think here of Anthony de Mello’s many popular books, which are in a sense reconstructive enterprises that re-envision the Ignatian charism in light of other charisms, in the Indian context.<sup>[18]</sup> Far less known but of enduring value is Ignatius Hirudayam’s *Jnanavalvu* (in Tamil, “Life of Wisdom,” first edition, 1982), a mature and insightful study of the Hindu and Christian spiritual traditions together in a Jesuit synthesis of the spiritualities by a Tamil Jesuit deeply immersed in the study of south Indian Saiva traditions. His work, though little known in the English-reading world, aptly illustrates the possibilities of an interreligious learning rooted in practice and in years of interreligious conversation.

Michael Amaladoss’s *Inigo in India* is a subtle reflection on the heritage of Ignatius in India; while it still draws on texts such as the *Gita* as a primary source, it also looks to the wider context of the complexities of modern Indian life.<sup>[19]</sup> In his preface, Amaladoss clearly enunciates what he is and is not doing in ‘reading’ the *Exercises* alongside the texts, ideas, and practices of the Indian spiritual traditions:

*“My approach is hermeneutical. I am not engaging in a study either of the past or of the systems or of historical development. Starting from where I am and what I am doing, I am looking for guidance from both traditions, but searching to integrate their inspiration in a unified spiritual orientation for myself. This is not a comparative study; I am not comparing two traditions, taken in themselves, with each other...”*

Rather, a moment of insight occurs:

*“What is happening is a process through which words acquire new meanings in new contexts. This is a process of development, not comparison. A comparison may have been useful at a certain stage. But now that stage is being transcended. What I am trying to do is make the two traditions enter into a dialogue. Even this dialogue is not a formal exchange between two people who represent the two traditions. It is an interior dialogue through which I am seeking to integrate in myself two traditions to which I am heir...”*

He also admits candidly, though without further explanation, “this is a hermeneutical process—as opposed to a faithful re-reading of history. From this point of view, writing this book in a non-Indian language is a disadvantage.”<sup>[20]</sup>

Had we time, I could give more examples of how Indian Jesuits have been learning anew to discern the *Exercises* in practice and in context, but these must suffice. These Indian Jesuits—in collaboration with lay colleagues, of course—are interpreting the *Exercises*, and also, little by little, investing the practice of the *Exercises* with new meanings, appropriate to new contexts and new emphases. They are stressing the practical wisdom of discovering God in the meditation, yoga, and service, and thus identifying the common ground wherein Hindu and Christian spiritual practices can meet.

It seems to me that this Indian Jesuit reflection on the *Exercises* has not of itself generated any new theological position that can stand on its own, as theory and apart from practice. And this is good. The writings mentioned above point rather to a slow, meticulously careful increment of wisdom that for now falls short of—or eludes—doctrinal determination. This learning from practice can be interpreted as non-ideological in a way that promises a fresh start for interreligious cooperation, provided overlays of theology and ideology generated apart from the spiritual practice do not stand in the way.<sup>[21]</sup>

Of course, in a truly adequate study, we would now have to listen also to Jesuits and their colleagues elsewhere in Asia, Ignatian experts with similar but not identical ways of inscribing the *Exercises* into their religious and cultural contexts, and we could find a great deal to say about the understanding and practice of the *Exercises* in various countries.<sup>[22]</sup>

## **V. Beyond Monologue: Theological Conversations—from Spiritual Practice**

But before rushing to any conclusions about the *Exercises* and interreligious exchange in theory and in practice, I need also to admit that no matter how strong or deep or interesting a spiritual theology generated from the practice of the *Exercises* might be, it will never suffice as a basis on which to determine the nature and practice of interreligious exchange. Perhaps the *Exercises* can make us leaders and initiators in interreligious exchange; but they can never justify our endlessly talking to ourselves. We no longer live in a world where ‘we’ can decide what is good for ‘them’ and expect anything actually good to come from such a decision. ‘We’ (disciplined in the Ignatian spiritual tradition) are not the only practitioners attentive to theological possibilities, and we do not get to determine effective spiritual exchange on our own: there is a need for further collaboration in practice and theology with practitioners attentive to theological possibilities in other traditions. We must, right away, resist the Jesuit temptation to assume that we understand others better than they understand themselves, and we must hear from people disciplined in other traditions that are both spiritual and theological. Hence the value of this Symposium!

So then: how do we rethink our intellectual and spiritual practice in light of the spiritual and intellectual traditions of Asia, and in light of what Asian religious practitioners and intellectuals have to say to us? In the previous section I used the work of Jesuits in India to illustrate my hypothesis; here, I sketch a response using my own work as an example.<sup>[23]</sup>

In my study of India I have often drawn upon the *Exercises*, sometimes explicitly, but also in terms of an attitude toward the study of the Hindu traditions of India, with dispositions such as were articulated in the first sections of this essay, particularly a respect for practice, respect for the imagination, an expectation of direct encounter with God, and a respect for using the mind and one’s reasoning as much as is possible

or needed. In my current research, I am studying the *Srimad Rahasya Traya Sara* of Vedanta Desika (14th century, south Indian, Tamil, Srivaisnava Hindu, with strong parallel roots also in the Sanskrit tradition), and particularly that 28th chapter of that work, which expounds the correct meaning of what is called “the Dvaya (‘double’) Mantra.” One of the three holy mantras of the Srivaisnava tradition of South India, in two clauses this Dvaya mantra invokes both Narayana and Sri, praising the divine couple while at the same time articulating surrender to them, and with a realization that even to surrender is already a gift of grace.

In studying the Dvaya mantra, I have noted the pains to which Desika goes in arguing that each syllable of the mantra has rich theological meaning, and that the devout person reciting the mantra is better off for knowing the meaning intrinsic to the mantra that is uttered. Here too, prayer, practice, and theology are properly inseparable. The Dvaya mantra is the prayer of taking-refuge that intelligently illumines the goal, the means, and the fruit; to recite it is informative, and it also at the same time ‘makes’ happen all that it is talking about. While the mantra, once announced in public—uttered, printed, translated, explained—is vulnerable to a host of readings more or less faithful to its unwritten, teaching tradition, in ideal terms it is still everywhere uttered with clarity as to its meaning, purpose, and how the accomplishment of its goal requires active divine participation. The theology is always present—the recitation does not occur apart from it, and the theology subsists in the mantra and its recitation; it is theology, but it does not have a distinct ‘life’ apart from the text.

As I have studied this Chapter 28, it has not been hard to notice striking parallels between surrender to the Divine Couple, as evoked in the Dvaya mantra, and the climactic self-giving in the *Exercises*. The similarity has to do with practice and passion, and it also includes sensitivity to the importance of the theology inextricably connected to the utterance: God is like this; God makes it possible for me to surrender in this way and speak these words. The Dvaya mantra has been teaching me about the inseparability of faith and practice and love, and the importance of investing practice with a clear meaning that results in that total self-surrender to God that matters above all else. It has been teaching me to recognize Srivaisnava practitioners as important conversation partners for all of us who would renew Ignatian spirituality today. A kind of recognition occurs, in which the integral theology and practice of the one tradition of surrender are mirrored in the other, and where the passion that makes possible surrender to God is intensified in both.[24]

Of course, the phenomenon I have just introduced – my learning to learn from the complex mix of practice and theology in a Hindu tradition, such that commonalities and differences with respect to my Christian tradition can be noticed—has to be matched by reciprocal interest from Hindu scholars who are likewise practitioners, and of course then too by other thoughtful practitioners in other traditions as well. The goal will be both ‘interior’ dialogues such as I have been undertaking with the Dvaya mantra, and ‘interrelational’ dialogues in which we sit and converse together—as we will be trying to do today!

This complex engagement between traditions should not be idealized as a silent or wordless sharing of practices and experiences, as if ideas and words are less spiritual and therefore finessed by silence; but neither should we imagine that all theologies will be harmonious simply because they have somehow become connected with revered and productive practices. Sometimes the ideas are better than the practices; sometimes the practices outrun the words about them. We have to learn how to make judgments in all this.

It is also true that some such complementary recognition will not merely show a mirror image of the *Exercises*, and were it to seem so, we would have to start worrying. The *Exercises* have their own genius, and other traditions of practice have their own forms of recognition and response; the interreligious exchange will differ as different voices, from different practices, are heard. Nor should we expect that the analogous response will always be positive; if we admit that the Ignatian charism is right now fostering friendly interaction, it has not always done so in the past. We expect that people in other religious traditions will variously have more or less positive attitudes toward learning across religious boundaries. For instance, we might imagine that some Srivaisnava would not welcome a comparison of the *Gita* and a Gospel, or my study of the Dvaya mantra, and that some Srivaisnavas would not be interested in learning from Ignatian spirituality, were they equipped to do so.

A way forward then is to highlight an interreligious conversation based in reflection that is both practical and theological, with neither dimension allowed to function apart from the other, neither privileging words nor becoming lazy in our use of them. This dialogue has to be among practitioners who are theologically aware, and theologians whose theologies are generated from and in the enduring context of their practice. Fortunately, we will be hearing much more about this in the hours to come.

This kind of encounter of spiritual practitioners exercising and thinking together privileges the set of practitioners who care about the theological consequence of their practice and of theologians who keep tracing their theologies back to their actual practices. This is an openness that is never reducible to any conservative or liberal ideology that retains its force apart from practice, nor to some idealized set of practices that validates whatever ideologies are layered upon them. To convene this ongoing conversation is, needless to say, a large interreligious task—and one that we should be able to undertake together even as we keep thinking about what it might mean.[25]

The unfolding of the *Exercises* into some consonant theology-rooted-in-practice is necessary, if the harmony of practice and theology—the *Exercises* exercised along with Asian practices-and-theologies not of the Christian tradition—is to do justice to the Ignatian tradition and to each other tradition. The *Exercises*, underdetermined theologically and never possessed of a single, final theology, need to be brought into cooperation with the practices and theologies – also underdetermined—of other traditions, and by procedures such as those experimented with by Indian Jesuits and myself in the India-related examples I have given. In this way we can at least hope for dialogues that are both spiritual and intellectual, and thus of use to the individuals and communities involved.

This one-day symposium on “The *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola: Comparative Perspectives from Asia and the West” is timely because the Ignatian tradition does give us resources for thinking about how practice opens into theology and the theology informs practice,

and how integrating the practical, spiritual, and theological provides a much-needed foundation for interreligious exchange. The problems are real, but so is the hopeful possibility that we will also become more wise and compassionate in our practice and our words about our practice if we learn from one another.

To gather today to discuss this topic, and to carry forward the reflection in the months and years to come, is a work most appropriate to a Jesuit university in the 21st century; in collaboration with like-minded persons from the various religious traditions of Asia, our day of reflection will be a rich experience, and one that will bear fruit for a long time to come.

## ENDNOTES

1. I offer this list, and the other reflections that follow, while admitting but leaving unexplored historical complexities such as the following: what constituted 'the *Exercices*' in various centuries and generations? how were the *Exercices* transmitted? when and where were the *Exercices* carried about in book form? I must leave this important primary work to historians and specialists in Ignatian spirituality. [[Return to Text](#)]
2. For a broader overview, see also my essay "A Charism for Dialogue?" *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* (2000). [[Return to Text](#)]
3. We might here consider the letters petitioning to go to the missions (the "Indipetae," petitions to go to the Indies) and how the Jesuits imagined the meaning of their work in light of Ignatius' vision as practiced in the *Exercices*. See for instance *Un désir antérieur: les premiers jésuites des Philippines et leurs Indipetae* (1580-1605), edited by P.-A. Fabre and B. Vincent (Rome: Bibliothèque de l'École Française, 2003). [[Return to Text](#)]
4. For example, in a letter to Ignatius Loyola dated January 12, 1549, Xavier mentions a young Japanese convert named Paul who is currently in Goa making the *Exercices* over a nearly full month period, with Fr. Cosme de Torres; or, in a letter to Ignatius, dated January 14, 1549, he mentions in passing the need for additional Jesuits to come, some to "preach and undertake the conversion of infidels," while others are needed to "hear confessions and give the *Spiritual Exercices*." Both references may be found in M. Joseph Costelloe, SJ, *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), respectively on pages 219 (and see note 18) and 225. Costelloe's index points us to a number of other references to the *Exercices* in Xavier's letters. See also references to the *Exercices* in the lives of Xavier's earliest companions in India, in *The Call of the Orient: A Response by Jesuits in the Sixteenth Century*, by Anthony D'Costa, SJ (Mumbai: Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, 1999). We can only imagine that if the *Exercices* were being given so very early in the life of the Society in Asia, they were given all the more frequently in the several centuries to follow. [[Return to Text](#)]
5. In *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York, NY: Viking, 1984), Jonathan Spence offers numerous suggestions regarding Ricci's deep roots in Ignatian spirituality. [[Return to Text](#)]
6. See "Christ as the Divine Guru in the Theology of Roberto de Nobili," *One Faith, Many Cultures*, Vol. II of the Boston Theological Society Series, ed. by Ruy Costa (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988) 25-40. [[Return to Text](#)]
7. See *Fr. Bouchet's India: An 18th Century Jesuit's Encounter with Hinduism* (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2006), in which I discuss this particular letter from the *Lettres Curieuses et Édifiantes*, the reports from the field that were so popular and influential in 18th century Europe. [[Return to Text](#)]
8. Here again I must caution that it is nearly impossible to determine some pattern of behavior that would be due only or solely to the *Exercices*, as opposed to other cultural sources. [[Return to Text](#)]
9. I say all this with an awareness of the dangers of anachronism, imposing 21st century views of 'openness' on people of a previous age. By their own lights and within the constraint of the choices available to them, the Jesuits of previous centuries were indeed open to new ideas, and this fact should be taken as framing and moderating the comments to follow. My effort, however, is to ponder how deeply intellectual and theological openness is rooted in the *Exercices*, and whether Ignatian practice creates a specific kind of openness that survives its tension with the conservative and liberal orthodoxies that appeal to the *Exercices*. All of this, of course, aims at accentuating the possibilities underlying today's symposium. [[Return to Text](#)]
10. Interesting parallels could be made with the 'fate' of yoga in the Indian traditions, where basic practices were interpreted over and again, at the service of one or another theistic or nondualist, Hindu or Buddhist theory. Mircea Eliade's great *Yoga* is a well-known and ample testimony in this regard. [[Return to Text](#)]
11. See Philippe Lecrivain, Ignace de Loyola, un réformateur? Une lecture historique des 'Regles pour avoir le vrai sense de l'Église,' *Christus 37* (1990), 348-360. [[Return to Text](#)]
12. For my doubts about the scholarship of this Jesuit missionary tradition – which in many ways I must admire greatly – see "Understanding and the Refusal to Understand as Complementary Dynamics in Jesuit Missionary Learning," *Contributions to Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies: Volume in Commemoration of Wilhelm Halbfass*, edited by Karin Preisendanz (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2006). [[Return to Text](#)]

13. In saying all this, I too am aware that these Jesuits were less theologically conservative than their counterparts in other religious orders and congregations and, by any ordinary standard, progressive. This seems a fact to be respected. I am also aware that due to the different organization of religious discourse in their time—and even the lack of ‘religion’ in our sense—the pertinent and heated arguments within the Church tended to be about cultural and ritual adaptation, not doctrines; there was no room, really, for conversations about interreligious spiritual practice. So the point is not to blame them for a lack of modern openness, but rather to problematize the notion that ‘a long Jesuit tradition of interreligious encounter’ will easily inspire interreligious learning today. [[Return to Text](#)]

14. Since the early volumes of *Ignis* were not available to me during the writing of this paper, I am indebted for some of the reference given here to the comprehensive bibliography in Varghese Malpan’s *Comparative Study of the Bhagavad-Gita and the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1992). [[Return to Text](#)]

15. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 39 (2002), 305-324. Painadath writes, “The two worldviews of the *Gita* and of the New Testament can be taken as mutually complementary... A Christian who enters into the world of the *Gita* will be able to rediscover this cosmic dimension of the Christian experience of God...” Interestingly, he goes on to say, “A Christian reading of the *Bhagavad Gita* should in no way force a comparison of the *Gita* with the New Testament. Each book has to be read and understood for what it is and what it says. When a Christian devoutly reads the *Gita* and meditates through it, an inner dialogue within him or her occurs. Certain implicit dimensions of spiritual life are explicated and a deepening of the mystical consciousness happens. One has to be alert to this inner movement of the Spirit. In encounter with the *Gita* the Christian would constantly ask him or herself: What does the Spirit say to me? Listening to this inner voice is the core of spirituality.” (321-323) See also Painadath’s *We Are Co-Pilgrims: Toward a Culture of Inter-religious Harmony* (ISPCK 2006) on the broad issues of interreligious hermeneutics (though without mention of the *Exercises*). [[Return to Text](#)]

16. A rather early work in the post-Vatican II era is George Kandathil’s *Visuddha Ignatiousinte Dhyanakramam* (Ernakulam: Vincentian Publishing Bureau, 1966)—a work that seems interesting, but I do not read Malayalam! For this too I am indebted to Malpan’s bibliography. [[Return to Text](#)]

17. Malpan concludes by proffering a fulfillment theology: “[The author of the *Gita*] is actually seeking and yearning for Christ Who alone can fulfill his aspirations... an Indo-Ignatian search for integration of the teachings of the *Gita* and the *Spiritual Exercises* cannot in any way eclipse the reality and uniqueness of Christ.” (p. 405) Malpan’s book, and Painadath’s mentioned above, are well worth careful reading; comparing their views on what the *Gita* ought to mean for Christians can also nicely highlight the paradox by which the same Ignatian tradition stimulates quite different theologies. [[Return to Text](#)]

18. Fr. de Mello also, in my view, highlights the way theologies can be layered onto the vulnerable *Exercises*. [[Return to Text](#)]

19. *Inigo in India: Reflections on the Ignatian Exercises by an Indian Disciple* (Gujarat Sahitya Prakash 1992). Since the value of Amaladoss’s work lies in its specific detail, an outline is merited: Part I Orientations: 1. Toward a new world: a. the Ignatian worldview; b. the *Gita*, dharma, freedom; 2. Who am I? a. deconditioning; b. Ramana, the *Exercises*; 3. God in All Things: a. God-experience; b. antaryamin, Advaita; c. the feminine; d. karma yoga; 4. A world in Conflict: a. sin; b. conflict in the epics; 5. A Call to be with Christ: a. being-Christonomous; b. devotion, being-with-Krsna (not the same as with-Christ); 6. A Spirituality for Action: a. asceticism and lila; b. discernment and gurus; 7. Towards the Reign of God: a. social transformation, Gandhi. Part II Practices: 8. Means and Ends: a. exercises, sadhana, yoga, zen; 9. Rooted in Experience: a. concentration, awareness, experience/s; 10. Images and Emotions: a. images, rasa, the aesthetic/beautiful; 11. Transformations and Communion: a. social change and group practice; b. Gandhi; 12. Sadhana and Sacraments: a. sacraments and symbolic actions; b. pilgrimage, festivals; 13. Conclusion: a. karma yoga, transformation; b. freedom. [[Return to Text](#)]

20. *Inigo in India*, pp. xiv-xv. [[Return to Text](#)]

21. It is not that the modern Society of Jesus in India lacks strong theological views and voices. There is for instance a particularly strong emphasis on Ignatian solidarity with the poor and work for justice. This emphasis has been woven into the process of renewing the *Exercises*. This commitment is edifying and challenging to us first-world Jesuits—but as such it also confirms my point, since I do not think the justice and solidarity perspectives are necessarily the theological fruit of the *Exercises*, which have also been enlisted to support working within the system or dialoguing with Hindu religious leaders within given caste structures. But my only point here is that the ongoing Ignatian reflection I have been pointing to is richer and deeper than any particular theological and ethical fruits linked to the *Exercises*. [[Return to Text](#)]

22. While space has not permitted me to say more, I am nonetheless indebted to some of my Jesuit brothers in the Boston/Cambridge area, who generously read an earlier draft of this essay: J. Mario Francisco (Philippines, Gasson Professor at Boston College, 2005-6); Hung Pham (a Vietnamese Jesuit, Missouri Province, who has just finished the M. Div. degree at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology); A. Bagus Laksana (Indonesia, Ph. D. student in Theology at Boston College); Pyong-Gwan Pak (Korea, Ph. D. student in Theology at Boston College). In their responses to me, they all offered insights on the work of Jesuits in their home countries with respect to the practice of the *Exercises*; Hung Pham was able to reflect on Jesuit practice in Vietnam and also the work of Vietnamese Jesuits who belong to Provinces here in the United States. [[Return to Text](#)]

23. For prior indications of the use of the *Exercises* in my work, see: *Seeing through Texts*, c. 5. See also “God for Us: Multiple Religious Belonging as Spiritual Practice and Divine Response,” in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, edited by Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 44-60. In this essay, I indicate as clearly as I have been able to do thus far how practice and theology cohere in the *Exercises* and Hindu theologically attuned traditions of practice. See also my more recent “Passionate Comparison:

The Intensification of Affect in Interreligious Reading—A Hindu-Christian Example,” *Harvard Theological Review* 98:4 [Fall 2005], pp. 367-390. For a fuller, book-length study, I am drawing in more depth on the *Treatise on the Love of God* of St. Francis de Sales, a remarkably original classic of spiritual practice and theology with evident Ignatian roots as well. [[Return to Text](#)]

24. Earlier, in Chapter 12 Desika had captured the essence of spiritual surrender by quoting an earlier teacher, Nadadur Ammal: “I have been wandering in this dreary world, age upon age without beginning, doing what is not desired by You. From this day forward, I must do what is conducive to reaching You, and I must cease from what is contrary. I have no resources by which to attain You. I have realized that You alone can be the means to my salvation. So You must be my means! If You are, how could there be, from now on, any burden, either in the removal of what is not desired or in the attainment of what is desired?” The Dvaya mantra, as instantiated in Nadadur Ammal’s own words, clearly resembles the surrender to God and God’s service voiced at the end of the *Exercises*, the “Take and Receive.” See my comments on this parallel with Nadadur Ammal’s surrender, in “Surrender to God, Interreligious Awareness, the Life of the Jesuit University,” *Explore* 8.2 (Spring 2005) 4-11. [[Return to Text](#)]

25. See also: “Rahner Beyond Rahner: A Comparative Theologian’s Reflections on *Theological Investigations* 18” in *Rahner Beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim*, edited by Paul Crowley (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 3-21; “Francis Xavier—and the World/s We (Don’t Quite) Share,” *Jesuit Postmodern: Scholarship, Vocation, and Identity in the 21st Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 157-180. [[Return to Text](#)]

Learning to Learn Interreligiously: In Light of the Spiritual Exercises. by Francis X. Clooney, S.J. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola: Comparative Perspectives from Asia and the West, sponsored by the University of San Francisco Center for the Pacific Rim, names a symposium and also identifies an excellent theme that appropriately honors the 150th anniversary of the founding of the University while yet looking to its future in this still young century. I am happy to be able to share some of my own reflections on the Exercises in Asia as we begin our day together, and I hope that they will be of some use in framing our conversations. Its analysis throws special light on the peculiarities of orthography, grammar and vocabulary in religious English. The style of the King James Bible is very conservative. As the translators say in their Preface, their aim was not to make a new translation, "but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principle good one"™. They aimed for a dignified, not a popular style, and often opted for older forms of the language, when modern alternatives were available. We take a look at neuroscientific studies that may explain spiritual experience. Dr. Andrew Newberg, who is a professor of neuroscience and the director of the Research Marcus Institute of Integrative Health at the Thomas Jefferson University and Hospital in Villanova, PA, explains that different religious practices have different effects on one's™ brain. Share on Pinterest. The front part of the brain (shown here in red) is more active during meditation. Image credit: Dr. Andrew Newberg. Namely, different religions activate brain regions differently. The researcher, who literally "wrote the book" on neurotheology, draws from his numerous studies to show that both meditating