

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 47 *The Spiritual Exercises as Foundation for
Jesuit Higher Education*

Article 12

March 2015

Grace Becomes Us Reflections on the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises from a Buddhist Perspective

Paul W. Humphreys

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

Recommended Citation

Humphreys, Paul W. (2015) "Grace Becomes Us Reflections on the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises from a Buddhist Perspective,"
Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education: Vol. 47, Article 12.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol47/iss1/12>

Grace Becomes Us

Reflections on the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises from a Buddhist Perspective

By Paul W. Humphreys

Not long after the 2005 premiere of an interfaith work that I had composed as a response to the events of September 11, 2001, a colleague-friend and I sought out Randy Roche, S.J., co-director of LMU's Center for Ignatian Spirituality, as a mentor for the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. During the course of study and contemplation that followed, I was never shy (as my co-exercitant and mentor can readily attest) to point out coherences between texts of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and texts that I have come to know through Buddhist study and practice. The "Principle and Foundation" (annotation 23), together with the insightful exegesis of Joseph A. Tetlow, S.J., comes to mind as an early example.

Father Tetlow's exegesis reads: "When we are under no obligation of conscience, we ought to keep ourselves free of any fixed preference." I could not help but be reminded of the *Xinxin Ming (Faith-mind inscription)* of the Third Zen Ancestor, Sengcan (d. ca 600 C.E.): "If you wish to know the truth, then hold to no opinions for or against anything. ... To set up what you like against what you dislike is the disease of the mind." (See: Harada, Shodo. *Sansokanchi Zenji* on believing in mind www.onedropzen.org/uploads/Shinjinnomei_first_part).

Before long, passages of Scripture also had begun to suggest resonance with Buddhist teachings. Compare Hebrews 2:9, in which Christ's vow to "taste death for every man" aligns with the vow of a Bodhisatva to liberate all beings, "however numberless." At a point several months into the Exercises, the prayer attributed to St. Teresa of Ávila came to my attention: "Christ has no body but yours." As a meditation that seemed consonant with Ignatius's "Contemplation of the Incarnation" [102–104], I adapted the text as, "Christ has no body now but mine." The resonance here is with the Sixth Zen Ancestor, Huineng (638–713 C.E.): "Apart from your own Buddha nature, there is no other Buddha."

In January, our consideration of "Matters about which an Election Should be Made" (Sp. Ex. 170–188) pointed to an earlier teaching within the Exercises "to have no desire for...benefice or anything else unless Divine Majesty has put proper order into those desires" (Sp. Ex. 16). Compare with the

"My experience of Buddhism encompasses study with four teachers over a period of forty years as a lay practitioner of Soto and Rinzai Zen; this includes a regimen of daily practice as well as two or more silent retreats (sesshin) each year."

Daodejing (49): "The wise have no minds of their own." Both passages call for ever deeper examination of the unquestioning assumption of a fixed self that claims, and thereby limits (some Buddhist texts say "imprisons"), identity.

In an essay entitled "Finding God in All Things," Michael Himes has suggested that *agape* – which he translates from the Greek as "self-gift" – is the "least wrong" metaphor for God. Fr. Himes goes on to say that grace is the activity of God calling all things into being. In this respect, grace aligns in a very nearly exact way with the activity that Buddhism calls "conditioned co-origination" (Sanskrit: *pratītyasamutpāda*; Japanese: *engi*). My principal teacher, Kyozan Joshu Sasaki, often referred to this as "dharma activity" and was equally content to call it "the embrace of God's love." That metaphor again!

If, as Fr. Teilhard de Chardin has written, "the problem to which all of this leads is love," then we are obliged to ask what precisely is the problem. In my experience of both Ignatian and Buddhist spiritual practices, it is the conundrum of using myself to give myself away, of using will to attain to will-lessness, of "catching on and letting go" to the one moment at hand. And to a faith that in that moment Grace becomes me. ■

Paul W. Humphreys serves as an associate dean, professor of music, and director of world music in the college of communication and fine arts at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.