



## Letters to the Editor

### The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola: an interreligious approach

St. Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises is unknown to Hindus. One hardly hears of the Spiritual Exercises in the context of interreligious dialogue. It is now clichéd that there are similarities between the Yoga of Action in the Bhagavad Gita and the Spiritual Exercises. What are glossed over are two facts: The Spiritual Exercises is one of the best methods to succeed in living out God's will and thus attaining mukti, as is testified by many businessmen who completed the Exercises during St. Ignatius's own lifetime and how Ignatius's methods of spiritual discernment are similar to Tantric praxes. The Tantric mode of worship/liturgy is the main mode of worship/liturgy within Hinduism.

St. Ignatius, in the Spiritual Exercises places us in the presence of His Majesty, Jesus Christ. Then he asks us to use all our faculties in experiencing the power and joy of God and also the horror of being in the company of the father of lies. Finally, the Saint asks us to elect which side we want to be in --- God's or the world's. Having made our election, we are to weigh the pros and cons of our lives' profession/vocation. The choice is never between bad and good. The problem is to choose one good which conforms to the Will of God among many other morally good options but do conform to the Will of God for the retreatant. This is similar to the Aristotelian concept of 'eudaimonia'. It is in the same manner that within Tantric praxes, deify the body through 'nyasa'. We use all our senses to realise our inherent divinity. We do not perform fire-sacrifices. 'Fire-sacrifice' is a misnomer --- for us Tantrics, the fire is the Devi. Not like the Devi. The fire is not a metaphor. We know we are in the presence of the Devi. Like Roman Catholics know, and not merely believe, that they are in the Presence of

Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. Similarly, we inwardly deify our bodies, the microcosm, to reflect the macrocosm through our liturgies. Then we proceed to offer hyperdulia to the Devi who is the havan/homa fire. And we discern. This is the patrimony of our Faith as Hindus.

I, as a practising and initiated Tantric, have incorporated Ignatius's spiritual exercises into my daily life. One cannot be more radically Hindu than a Tantric. I feel that interreligious dialogue has slipped out into the hands of career academics who have little lived experience of the heart of Hinduism. For instance, very few non-Catholics understand that within Hinduism, a Guru goes from family to family who are his or her disciples. A Guru, traditionally, did not give lectures to huge non-discerning, brainwashed audiences. The Guru in Hinduism is a servant-leader in the sense of Vatican II. Unless we today access and do the long retreat of St. Ignatius we are at risk of forgetting that St. Ignatius is not the patrimony of only the Society of Jesus, or, Roman Catholics. He belongs to Hinduism too in so far as becoming a better human being is concerned. This is not to say that St. Ignatius would agree with Tantric spirituality or Tantrics agree with Ignatian methods. This is to be open to the best that each of our religions has to offer and respect each other. This is not ecumenical/interreligious sus. This is what Fr. Jacques Dupuis SJ wrote in his magnum opus, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*.

Similarly, I would strongly urge Roman Catholics to read and practice the methods of the Yoga Sutras of Sage Patanjali. Only then will our pluralistic dialogue be concrete and fruitful.

**Dr. Subhasis Chattopadhyay**