

April 2005

Book Reviews: Ignatian Humanism: A Dynamic Spirituality for the 21st Century, Ronald Modras, Loyola Press, 2004

Patrick Howell, S.J.

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

Recommended Citation

Howell, S.J., Patrick (2005) "Book Reviews: Ignatian Humanism: A Dynamic Spirituality for the 21st Century, Ronald Modras, Loyola Press, 2004," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 27, Article 20.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol27/iss1/20>



and the Catholic Church's campaign against "modernism" and "Americanism." By 1907 popes had condemned both, effectively ruling against adaptation to time and place. So it comes as no surprise that private requests from some American Jesuits for curricular updating and the relaxation of discipline over collegians were rebuffed by Luis Martín García, Jesuit superior general from 1892 to 1906. No friend of liberal Catholics, Martín was a valued confidant of Leo XIII and Pius X and an important figure in the Church's campaign. In short, "Martín was convinced that abominable liberalism had already claimed England and the United States, where Protestants dominated numerically and culturally."

The problem of *persons* was in the form of upwardly mobile Catholics whose aspirations

included attending secular research universities such as Harvard and Yale. For the nascent Catholic middle class, social class became more prominent than religion in the social organization of education and so Jesuit college enrollments showed it.

By the early 1920s, the old model of the *Ratio Studiorum* was largely undone. (The Maryland-New York Province ceased teaching philosophy in Latin in 1915!) The American system was adopted wholesale—separation of high school from college, semester credit hours, majors, electives, and even athletics. "[T]he Jesuits finally fit their colleges to the challenges of time, place, and person that they encountered in the age of the university." Mahoney concedes that the circumstances of modern American education required

adaptation but, in a familiar turn to any Catholic university leader, she queries whether the Jesuits of the twentieth century have ensured that "vital Catholic" institutions remain.

Her answer is reassuring. The spirit of the *Ratio Studiorum* lived on, with Jesuits strongly committed to humanistic undergraduate education rooted in morality and religion. For Mahoney, "the Jesuit and other Catholic educators remained committed to a 'countercultural' vision of education that aimed at the education of the whole student." And what is the future of Jesuit higher education? Jesuit educators and their lay colleagues must continue to secure "a vital place for religion in their academic enterprise." I agree with Mahoney. Let's get to work.

Ronald Modras, *Ignatian Humanism: A Dynamic Spirituality for the 21st Century*.

Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004. Xxi -341. pp. \$16.95.

By Patrick Howell, S.J.

This engaging study, which examines the influence of Renaissance humanism on Ignatian spirituality, begins with a summary of the well-known features of the life of Ignatius, explores the dynamics of the *Spiritual Exercises*, and then creates five vivid portraits of Jesuits who profoundly exemplified Ignatian humanism.

Modras, a professor of theol-

ogy at Saint Louis University, skillfully summarizes familiar material. For instance, he deftly unfolds the daily examination of conscience, which lies at the heart of Ignatian spirituality: 1) a prayer for light to the Holy Spirit for insight into the mystery of God; 2) an attitude of gratitude; 3) a review of the gaffs we have committed; 4) attending to the welter of feelings arising through key events; and 5) and then a

look to the future for guidance from God.

Similarly Modras summarizes six distinctive features of Ignatian Spirituality: 1) Centeredness on a Christ with a Mission; 2) a panoramic Trinitarian view of salvation; 3) the liberality of Grace; 4) Faith as Trust; 5) Service in the world, which is closely interwoven with 6) Discerning God's Will. Modras makes clear that God's will and our deepest desires are

Book Review

not necessarily identical, *pace* much of New Age Spirituality.

After laying this groundwork for his central thesis, Modras portrays how the early Jesuits, steeped in the new humanism emanating from the University of Paris, used it as an instrument to spread the Gospel throughout most of Europe and the New World.

But Modras is hunting bigger game than just the intersection of Renaissance humanism and Ignatian spirituality. He releases humanism from the clutches of the secularist monopoly, which has stripped it of its openness to the transcendent. He demonstrates how Ignatian humanism challenges the narrow constructs of secular humanism and likewise distances itself from “the exclusivist claims of Christian and other fundamentalists.” It is radically open to all truth, whatever its origins, whether human or divine: Truth is One and has one source.

The most fascinating portion of his study is undoubtedly the five portraits of Jesuits who, in their own time and in diverse cultures, embodied this Ignatian spirit.

Matteo Ricci in the 17th century exemplifies Ignatian humanism and its marvelous adaptability to another time and culture. Converts, according to Ricci, should not be required to become strangers to their own people and kin. So Ricci, after years of study and discipline, became a Confucian scholar and eventually wrote a treatise on friendship, a collection of songs, and a book of discourses modeled after a Taoist classic. He put aside the coarse gray robe of the Buddhist monks to don an ankle-length purple silk robe with loose flowing sleeves. Now as Confucian man of letters, he could engage the highest levels of

Chinese thought and its deepest aspirations.

The 17th century German Jesuit **Friedrich Spee** ministered to women accused of witchcraft—at great risk of being accused himself. An early pioneer of social analysis, Spee critiqued the ideology underpinning the accusations of witchcraft. As he grew to know the accused, their bewilderment, anguish, and innocence, he believed in and manifested a God who was merciful and “motherly.”

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a paleontologist who died in 1955, “the most Jesuit of Jesuits,” was born in France, but the world became his laboratory and his chapel for prayer. The Eucharist was for Chardin, “a great flow of whiteness that enveloped and passed beyond him.” He lived at the heart of a “single, unique Element, the Centre of the universe and present in each part of it: personal Love and cosmic Power.” More than any other Jesuit, Chardin spoke to the deepest spiritual longings of the 20th century in a scientific, evolutionary idiom.

Modras completes his portraits with two contemporary Jesuits—**Karl Rahner** and **Pedro Arrupe**, who fast forwarded Ignatian humanism into the 20th century: The brilliant and eminently pastoral Rahner put into play the Thomist tradition with Enlightenment philosophy from Kant to Heidegger. More than any other theologian, Rahner laid the groundwork for a total rethinking of the Church, the sacraments, and Christian life in all their mystery.

Pedro Arrupe, elected General of the Society of Jesus (1965-1991), transformed, many would say re-founded, the Society and animated its commitment to “the service of faith, of

which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.” For Arrupe, the promotion of justice was not an abstraction. It would be done “from the cross.” Arrupe knew in his heart that the Society was responding as best it could to the clarion call of Pope Paul VI to “combat atheism.” The most damning indictment of the Church was its indifference to the poor and the greatest obstacle to faith was the alignment of the Church, including the Society of Jesus, with oppressive social structures.

Modras concludes with a reflection on the transformative nature of the Jesuit documents of General Congregation 34 (1995). He sees these documents as fulfilling Ignatian humanism at its best. All the themes of GC 34 were already adumbrated in the five portraits he had just reviewed: the role of the laity, deep listening to women’s experience, the dynamic interweave of justice, culture and interfaith dialogue—and all these are the culmination of the inspired fusion of Ignatian spirituality with a redeemed humanism.

This treatise provides a great resource for Jesuits and lay colleagues wishing to engage and deepen the lived identity and mission of their institutions. It could also provide a fine textbook for an undergraduate course in Jesuit tradition and spirituality.

Patrick Howell, S.J., is dean of the School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University.