

With All Your Strength

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Saint Ignatius of Loyola

Once upon a time, when the Messiah of the Christians was asked which of all the 613 commandments and prohibitions in the Torah was most important, he answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, all thy soul, all thy mind and all thy strength." (Mk. 12:30) The text is well-known.

You have heard it quoted often and perhaps listened to one or more sermons expounding it. In our Unification Church tradition probably most emphasis is placed on love for God with all our hearts. In 24 years of preaching as a Congregationalist, Sunday after Sunday, my personal emphasis was often on the need to love God with all your mind. Today, however, let's push both aside to concentrate on the last part: "Love the Lord with all thy strength."

Once upon a time a man took that commandment seriously. His name was Ignatius Loyola, a soldier, a Spaniard, a Christian, born the year before Columbus set sail for the New World. In rather broad strokes let me draw a word picture of the age and the man.

From one standpoint Loyola was unlucky enough to be born in a time as bad as our own. Do you remember the World War II expression SNAFU? Ignatius lived in a snafu time: "situation normal -- all fouled up." Religiously everything was off-base -- at least from the viewpoint of anyone who still believed in the one, holy, apostolic church. Look at Christendom Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia and England in the hands of the rebels! Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary infected with rationalism, skepticism, Unitarianism. Constantinople in the hands of the infidels. And Rome, poor Rome -- a city of corrupt cardinals and a ridiculous Pope with his hands tied, his head empty. That was the religious situation in Ignatius' day.

Politically, the state of Europe was one of constant war and rumors of war. With western Christendom divided among rival nations, squabbling, jealous, resentful -- who could halt the seemingly irresistible advance of the terrible Turks? Toynbee once compared those victorious Muslims of the past to the Communists of the present, in 1450 or 1500 the Turks did scare as many Europeans as the Russian Communists used to in 1948.

After a thousand years as the center of Christian civilization, Constantinople had fallen. While Ignatius lived, the Turks would push ahead to the gates of Vienna in the heart of Europe. (Of course, the differences between the Turks and the Communists far outnumber the similarities. Islam is not atheistic, is not materialistic, is not totalitarian, and is not barbarous.) But in Ignatius' day, the Europeans more or less shut their eyes to the Turkish menace. "So what if Constantinople fell? Who can get upset over Greece or Albania or Yugoslavia -- out-of-the-way places inhabited by ignorant nobodies!" Loyola lived in an incredibly stupid age. Europeans traded with the Turks, made alliances with them, and often praised them.

In those days there were even people like Shirley MacLaine, a grade-A actress but an F-minus political scientist. When she came back from a tour of Maoist China, she bubbled with enthusiasm because the streets were clean. In Ignatius' time equally foolish tourists returned from a visit to the Ottoman world just delighted by the fact that the Turks took a bath every day! As for the Turks, they smiled and plotted, determined to wipe out European culture and all it stood for.

Now look at Ignatius the man -- a tough, worldly soldier who had been wounded and turned to Christianity when he was in a hospital bed. He decided that the only way to save his Church and his world was to found an order of men who would dedicate themselves without reservation to the Vicar of Christ at Rome. He took for granted the conventional Catholic belief that Christ chose the Pope to represent him, to be the voice of Christ, to serve as the living brain of Christ.

Ignatius' Society of Jesus, literally "the Jesus battalion," was to carry out the orders Christ's representative gave. He was to be their brain; they were to be his hands and feet. The idea was not unusual; in fact, it was quite commonplace. What Ignatius added was will power, absolute commitment, total dedication. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength," not 10 percent, not on Sunday only, not in spare time. All thy strength.

Scientists claim that the average man uses a very small fraction of the intellectual power and psychic energy stored up inside him -- in most cases six to 15 percent. Just think of what men could do if they released all their energy and harnessed it to some noble ideal like bringing God's kingdom to earth!

Ignatius had another rare virtue besides sheer will power: he could tell the difference between the essentials and the extras in the life of faith. The Dominican university professors looked down their long noses and scoffed that the Jesuits were theologically naive and philosophically old-fashioned. Ignatius didn't bother much about whether his men knew all the intricacies of St. Thomas Aquinas' theology. The Franciscans complained that Jesuits were too confident, too self-reliant, simply not humble enough. According to Franciscans you could bring in the kingdom by just never offending anybody, singing hymns about nature's prettiness and setting up manger scenes with a real infant to play the part of Baby Jesus. As the little devil Wormwood told another little demon, Bittersweet, "Don't worry about the Christians in prayer because so long as they stay on their knees they will be too preoccupied to reconquer the world for God!" Probably devils have a defective theology but one thing is clear: Ignatius was more interested in a doing religion than a merely devotional one.

Dominicans criticized the Jesuits and Franciscans complained about them. As for the kings and princes of Europe, they whispered that the Jesuits were a quasi-political party masquerading as a religion. England, Russia, Austria, France and even Spain outlawed the Society of Jesus at one time or another on the pretext of its alleged subversive political activities.

Once Jesus told his disciples to be as innocent as doves and as wise as serpents. Ignatius Loyola took that idea literally and tried it out. The Jesuits were as unafraid and as persistent as the pigeons who gather about when you sit on a bench in the city square. And like the snakes who can move around quite nicely without legs, the Jesuits gave up what they didn't need but used to the fullest what they had.

Let me try to explain the Jesuit spirit, the quality of their determination, the extent of their will power. They were the panzer battalions of the Church, the commandos, the kamikaze pilots, the Green Berets, the urban guerrillas of the day. They were resourceful, innovative, successful, simply because they were totally committed. They knew what they wanted and the gates of hell would be crashed, if need be, to get it.

The Jesuits were especially determined to move into places of power, decision-making spots. Wherever possible they befriended kings, nobles, powerful merchants, rich bankers, influential university professors. If they couldn't get to the men they worked on their wives, girlfriends, and children. When they went to China, they dressed like mandarins, spoke in the language of scholars, became experts on the Confucian classics. In India they wore turbans, praised the virtues of Hinduism, read the sacred Vedas and emphasized the points they held in common with the Brahmin sages. Jesuits wanted to win friends and influence people.

Can you imagine the effect of such a society -- men organized like an army, disciplined like soldiers, totally obedient to their leader, the general superior? Prominent nobles in England were accused of having Jesuits on their staffs. Protestants trembled in fear or rage at the very mention of the name "Jesuit." Jesuits were said to be in the pay of foreign powers, dangerous men plotting to overthrow the government.

Parents were most upset when their sons joined the Society of Jesus. "I didn't raise my boy to live a life of sacrifice! Who knows what really goes on behind those closed doors of Jesuit houses and training schools! They won't even let my son write home, or visit us, or allow us to see him! Save our children from the Jesuit kidnappers!" wailed the parents, even good Catholic fathers and mothers.

Blaise Pascal, famous scientist, great philosopher, devout Christian, wrote a whole book against the Jesuits. Do you know his major complaint? Jesuits practice "heavenly deception;" they will say anything, do anything, to get what they want.

If you want to know the outcome look at your history books. Jesuits saved Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, southern Germany, Belgium and Ireland from leaving their Church -- they built a wall which kept Protestantism from spreading beyond north Germany, Scandinavia, Holland and the British Isles. They started missions all over Asia and they reformed the Vatican. Why? How?

Simply because one man and his supporters dared to love the Lord our God with all their strength. As a Protestant, a theological liberal and a social libertarian (surely not labels given to Jesuit lovers), let me just say that Ignatius Loyola and his Company of Jesus wrote one of the most inspiring chapters in church history.

In the March 5 Washington Post could be found a sentence from the latest meeting of the National Council of Churches: "commitment to Jesus Christ must have an impact on the issues of social and economic justice through the stewardship, integrity and interdependence of Christian disciples."

That statement is supposed to represent the conviction of the 31 biggest, most powerful and wealthy Protestant and Eastern Orthodox denominations in America, with 42 million members.

It's a clear call for political, economic and social action on the part of Christians and churches. Now, do you think a U.S. senator is going to investigate the National Council of Churches as a political group masquerading as a religion? Can you imagine a New York rabbi warning that the last time he heard frightening stuff like that it came from the Nazis, or the Spanish inquisition? There will be no congressional investigation of the National Council by the Justice Department, the Internal Revenue Service, HEW, etc.

Why? Because everybody knows the NCC statement carries no more weight than the paper it was written on. Nobody expects the ordinary churches to be serious: to put fists and feet behind their words. Conventional Christianity has no intention of loving the Lord our God with all its strength, with total dedication, with 100 percent determination. Yet like the Jesuits of 400 years ago, Unification Church looks suspicious because we might try to put our ideas into practice. On the basis of three years spent watching you, listening to you, seeing you in action, I rather believe you might just turn out to be as successful as the Jesuits.

Does this mean the kingdom may not arrive in the near future? Let's put it this way. If you decide to reach the stars, you will at least have a good chance to climb to the top of the highest mountain and that's a lot higher than anybody else has got in recent years. Those who remember the past can be blessed to repeat it.

Let me conclude by suggesting an ideal worth pondering. A long time ago, about the year or so before World War II, a group of Protestant Christians in Europe and America started a movement called "Christus Victor." Prominent in it was the Dutch theologian Visser 't'Hooft who became the first general secretary of the World Council of Churches. If we are going to rebuild our world according to God's plan, these men said, we need a new vision of Christ. The first image of Christ in art was that of a young shepherd carrying a lamb over his shoulders.

Its relevance disappeared when men no longer lived the shepherd's life. The second image born in the Dark Ages was of the suffering Christ: Jesus on the cross, his head crowned with thorns, his side bleeding, his hands and feet pierced with nails. That image too has had merit but not for our time. Now what man must have is Christus Victor, the victorious Christ, Christ with a king's crown and purple robes. The idea was good but the churches lacked the will to make it a reality. Do you? Do we?

Reverend Sun Myung Moon's life and thought do not easily fit into any of the common pigeonholes used to classify men and ideas. What impresses me is how much his vision of the Christ who is yet to set up his kingdom parallels the Christus Victor ideal.

Nobody can get much inspired by the Good Shepherd of an agricultural and nomadic society which has been dead for centuries. Nor can one be really challenged to build a new world order on the basis of a Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief, who is helplessly nailed to a cross by the pagan state and the reactionary church. But Christus Victor -- the king recovering his rightful kingdom that kind of Messiah is the sort of man who can transform the world in the name of the God to whom we are called upon to dedicate all our strength. So be it.