J. Michelle Molina

To Overcome Oneself: The Jesuit Ethic and the Spirit of Global Expansion. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2013. Pp. xiv + 278. Hb, £34.95.

Dr. Molina's overall argument in favor of the pre-modern, religious roots of the modern (disembodied) self (a process which she claims was neither restricted to nor defined by the West) is bound to stimulate considerable debate. Furthermore, she draws effectively on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories to show how anachronistic it is of us to posit the existence of "the inner (wo)man" and the duality of mind/body in the early modern period (18–19). Her big question is a highly pertinent one: how did Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*—that "science of the self"—not only develop a "narrative sense of self" (8–9) but also contribute to the spiritual dynamic that enabled Roman Catholicism to become the first world religion. It is refreshing to see due weight being given to the medieval legacy that informed Loyola's *Exercises*. That said, as an historian of early modern Roman Catholicism with specific interest in the reciprocal relationship between the Old and New Worlds in the making of the first religion with global reach, I found the treatment of several themes problematic and inconclusive.

To begin with, although it is clear that Molina is determined to exorcise what this reviewer once referred to as "the curse of Max Weber" (whereby Catholicism is excluded from playing any part in the emergence of modernity), her engagement with the extensive literature which has sought to counter this exclusion is surprisingly limited, even given that her focus is on Mesoamerica. A central strand of this historiography has been founded on showing the structural similarities between the Protestant and Catholic Reformations and how the common process of confessionalization constructed a political subject whose body and soul came to be controlled by the state in collusion with the territorial churches. This has been championed for Catholic culture pre-eminently by Wolfgang Reinhard, who has also written extensively on the history of colonialism (in both German and English translation), which he sees as having been enabled by the whole process. Mention of Reinhard is, however, nowhere to be found in Molina's text. Given the importance of confession to her narrative of the emergence of the modern self, it is striking to notice the absence of any engagement with the work of John Bossy, whose *Christianity in the West 1400–1700* (1985) remains the most powerful evocation of the "[soul-] world we have lost." Also absent is reference to the work of Bossy's supervisor, H. Outram Evennett, chapter three of whose *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation* (1968, but given as lectures as long ago as 1951) memorably characterized the *Exercises* as "a shock-tactic spiritual gymnastic [instructor's

manual]” and linked this directly to the effectiveness of Jesuit global dynamism.

I understand that Molina is working out of a different tradition which views the *Exercises* as a Foucauldian “technique [or technology] of the self” (16) and in phenomenological terms as “a ritualization of being through which the exercitant became an object to herself” (43), an unintended consequence of which was to bring the notion of “self” into being. However, I believe that her characterization of their intended effect as being the monasticization of the laity is historically misleading. By her own admission, it was the mendicants (not monks) who offered the bridge between “the retreat-from-the-world of pure monasticism and the Jesuit form of worldly Catholicism” (27). Molina is on firmer ground when she relates—all too briefly—Ignatius to the tradition of *recogimiento* which had been dominant in late medieval Spain and which became topical (and dangerous) owing to the association of this form of silent prayer with the heterodox *alumbrados* precisely when Loyola was undergoing the experiences which lie behind the *Exercises*. That said, I really don’t believe that one can discuss the role played by the *Exercises* in taking Christianization to a new internalized and embodied level without engaging more extensively with the wider literature, which has, more recently, led to a growing interest in the history of the senses. (See here the work of Wietse de Boer, particularly his book *Conquest of the Soul* about Carlo Borromeo’s Milan, from 2001, and the collection of essays he has co-edited with Christine Göttler: *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe*, Brill, 2012. Also relevant is Moshe Sluhovskyy’s excellent article: “St Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* and their contribution to modern introspective subjectivity” in the *Catholic Historical Review*, October 2013.) Although all this research is focused overwhelmingly on the Old World it has manifest relevance for the New, since by Molina’s own admission (to borrow the phrase of Claudio Lomnitz): “New Spain was Europe’s westernmost extremity” (5).

Although I am aware that Molina’s argument does not turn on the meaning of particular words or even phrases within the *Exercises*, I must confess to being uneasy in a work of academic scholarship to find the author making but a single reference to the critical edition of this key text (I. Calveras & C. de Dalmases, eds., *Exercitia spiritualia Sancti Ignatii de Loyola et eorum directoria*, Monumenta Ignatiana, series II, vol. 1, Rome, 1969). Instead she uses a single translation and commentary, that by George Ganss in the “Classics in Western Spirituality” series (1991), which in certain respects is inferior to that by Joseph Munitz (available as part of the Penguin edition of *Loyola’s Personal Writings*, 1996). The same is true as regards Molina’s exclusive reliance on the albeit excellent English edition (1996) of the directories for the *Exercises* edited and translated by Martin E. Palmer for the Institute of Jesuit Sources. Elsewhere, when discussing Loyola’s

correspondence with women, Molina relies solely on the 1960 English translation of Hugo Rahner's 1956 edition without cross-referencing any of the letters with either the more recent edition and commentary offered by Martin Palmer in his selected *Letters and Instructions* for the Institute of Jesuit Sources (2006) or to what remains the standard edition of the complete letters (*Monumenta ignatiana: Epistolae et Instructiones*, 12 vols., Madrid, 1903–11).

When discussing the history of the reception of the *Exercises*, Molina also appears to rely almost entirely on a single volume of a single (three-volume) work: Ignacio de Iparraguirre's *Historia de la práctica de los Ejercicios de San Ignacio: evolución en Europa durante el siglo XVII*. Finally, repeated reference to Jerónimo Nadal's *Illustrated Spiritual Exercises* is misleading, since Molina has clearly derived this title from a 2001 edition which was simply a repackaging of illustrations from Nadal's *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia*, that may well have been used in conjunction with the *Exercises* but which fulfilled an altogether broader remit as the first fully illustrated version of the gospel story (including, in China, accompanying the recitation of the rosary). Moreover the "edition" Molina refers to is utterly inferior to the three-volume edition of Nadal's work available with a full commentary by Walter Melion and published by St Joseph's University Press (2003–05).

The second big claim made by Molina—i.e. in addition to the pre-modern origins of the disembodied self—relates to the fact that this process was not exclusively Western but also embraced the New World. She also asks us to "dismantle a reified notion of 'Europe'" owing to the fact that "the Indies were in the heart of Europe, because... they could be found in the depths of one's own heart" (6). Although I am very sympathetic to such an attempt to break with Eurocentric conventions, recent research on the *litterae indipetae* (those letters sent by Jesuits to the father general asking for permission to go on mission to the Indies) by the Australian scholar Camilla Russell, has clearly demonstrated that the petitioners' knowledge of "the Indies" was surprisingly Eurocentric. I know that the author is dealing with the West Indies, but as she herself allows, for many of her subjects, Mexico was seen as only a stopover *en route* to the East Indies by way of the annual Manila bullion fleet which left from Acapulco for the Philippines.

A line of inquiry which might have been more rewarding for Molina would have been to examine what might be termed the feedback factor; in other words, to look not only at the ways in which Roman Catholic devotional and spiritual practices and teaching were appropriated and/or (mis)understood by peoples in the New World, but also the ways in which information about the attempted Christianization of the Indies was communicated and (mis)understood by the Old World and to consider the impact this had on the recalibration

in Europe of what it even meant to be Christian. One such impact was the “invention of the Indigenous” in the Old World, to borrow Alix Cooper’s felicitous phrase (and title of her 2007 monograph), one which, I believe, is a more capacious and fruitful concept than simply having recourse to “the other Indies.” Exploration of these themes—which collectively might be seen as constituting the conversion of the Old world by the New—would be far more productive than simply saying: “Hey, look! Here are some New Worlders who are taking the *Exercises* and displaying a particular devotion to the Sacred Heart, which means that the discovery of the self is not just a Western monopoly.”

Here, unfortunately, the section on Mexican manifestations of a Jesuit-inspired devotion to the Sacred Heart is inadequately contextualized (not only *vis à vis* the Old World, but also South America which is almost never referred to in the book despite the higher profile presence of Jesuits there than in Mesoamerica). The essential problem here is one of sources, since Molina’s Mexican case studies consist of a single Italian priest, knowledge of whom has been gleaned from that far from transparent medium, hagiography, together with letters written by several nuns who made the *Exercises*. Knowledge about the latter is the result of what seems to be the single archival discovery of the entire book (the absence of a separate section in the bibliography devoted to unpublished sources is revealing in this regard). This is in sharp contrast to one of the two major historians of eighteenth-century Mexican Catholicism, Brian Larkin, cited by Molina, whose balanced assessment of the resilience of “external” performative Christianity founded upon an “immanent” view of the sacred in the face of reforms which championed a more transcendent view of the holy is based on an exhaustive examination of over 1,700 wills.

Molina states that “limiting ‘interiority’” to the shift from “Baroque-to-Enlightened” is to “ask the history of Christianity to turn on a dime” (203) and then proposes that the “inward turn” was not only pre-Trent and pre-Luther and pre-Calvin but can be pushed back to the twelfth century. This made this reader begin to wonder why she had bothered to focus on the *Spiritual Exercises* in the first place. This is unfortunate, since, for all its shortcomings, this is a stimulating and serious study which deploys a theoretically-informed perspective mostly to good effect to shed light on one of the key documents relating to the history of the self: that tuning-fork of the soul, which is the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Simon Ditchfield

University of York

simon.ditchfield@york.ac.uk