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 **Acatamiento: Living in an Attitude of Affectionate Awe—An  
Ignatian Reflection on the Unitive Way**

Joan Nut h

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In his *Spiritual Diary* of February 27, 1544, Ignatius penned the word *acatamiento* to summarize his basic attitude toward God. Using the word with increasing frequency in succeeding days, he seems to have considered it as signifying the beginning of a new phase in his spiritual journey. Translated as "affectionate awe," this word sums up the creature's fundamental relationship to the Creator, the God who is both immanent and transcendent. This paper first speculates on what *acatamiento* meant for Ignatius as a new direction in his mystical path. Next it puts it into dialogue with the *Spiritual Exercises*, and then examines both in light of the preceding western mystical tradition, notably around three staples of that tradition: *lectio divina*, the threefold way, and affective piety toward the human Jesus. The essay concludes with a few words

## *Acatamiento*: Living in an Attitude of Affectionate Awe—An Ignatian Reflection on the Unitive Way

JOAN NUTH

I perceived deeply in my heart . . . Jesus . . . representing me, or placing me, or serving as my mediator with the Most Holy Trinity in order that intellectual vision might be granted to me. At this perception and sight I was covered with tears and love terminating chiefly on Jesus. Toward the Trinity too I felt a respect of affectionate awe (*acatamiento*) closer to reverential love than to anything else.<sup>1</sup>

Ignatius of Loyola penned these words into his *Spiritual Diary*<sup>2</sup> on Wednesday, February 27, 1544, summarizing his prayer for that day, and using, for the first time, the term *acatamiento* to express his attitude toward God. Subsequently, he circled the entry, indicating its special significance for him. In the succeeding journal pages, he used the term with increasing frequency, eventually daily, to record the fruit of his prayer, suggesting that it marked the beginning of a new phase in his spiritual journey.<sup>3</sup>

The word *acatamiento* is difficult to translate into English. Etymologically it comes from the Low Latin *cattare*, meaning “to look at something with attention,” and thus can mean “sight” or “presence.” It is related to the Spanish verb *acatar*, “to look at.” Essentially it seems to indicate “a voluntary acceptance of a rule or authority,” and is synonymous with such words as “obedience,” “submission,” “compliance,” “esteem,” “homage,” “respect,” or “veneration.”<sup>4</sup> Most modern Spanish dictionaries connect it to “reverence,” which is how translators have usually rendered the word from the *Spiritual Diary*. However, it must have meant something slightly different for Ignatius since he often uses it together with *reverencia*. Malatesta and Ganss translate *acatamiento* by the phrase “affectionate awe” because of the specific way Ignatius uses the word in his *Diary*, always with the connotation of an intimate love for the God before whom he is in obeisance. Ignatius’ freely chosen acceptance of the sovereignty of God, indicated by the use of *acatamiento*, is never experienced apart from the deeply felt love which motivates it.<sup>5</sup> “Affectionate awe” is a particularly felicitous translation to give clarity to this aspect of Ignatius’ devotion.

This translation of *acatamiento*, “affectionate awe,” with all it implies about Ignatius’ mystical life, is what I will examine here. When I first came across it in Ganss’s translation of the *Diary*, I was quite taken with it. It had a ring of familiarity with respect to what it evokes about the nature of the



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