

FIRST THINGS

The first article in this review, "Notes for the One Giving Exercises," calls for an explanation, if not an apology, and both of these call for some history.

When he was Father General, Ignatius continually received requests that he write further directions on giving *Exercises*. He agreed but for reasons not known to us, never did. He did try; he managed one page. It appears later in this review as "The Autograph Directory." But Father General Ignatius never finished the directory the early companions asked him to write.

Actually, he did something rather better: He set up a program to train others to give *Spiritual Exercises*. It has been functioning now for four and a half centuries. At the end of that time, we need to recognize that program for what it is, notice how it has spread to other Ignatian Congregations, and ask whether it will serve all our needs today.

The program set up by Father General Ignatius to train directors of *Exercises* begins with the first experience in the novitiate, which "consists in making the Spiritual Exercises for one month or a little more or less; that is to say, in the candidate's examining his conscience, thinking over his whole past life and making a general confession, meditating upon his sins, contemplating the events and mysteries of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ our Lord, exercising himself in praying vocally and mentally according to the capacity of the persons, according to what will be taught to him in our Lord, and so forth" [*Examen*, 65]. Note that Ignatius has written in these sentences a succinct description of *Spiritual Exercises*. Note, too, his last phrase: "according to what will be taught to him in our Lord."

This phrase alludes to the first step in the ignatian program to train directors: they made the *Exercises*. But they did not all make the full authentic *Exercises*. Some were taught one thing and others, other things, "as may be judged expedient for them in our Lord" [*Cons.* 277]. Jerónimo Nadal found in visits all over Europe that many had been Jesuits for years without making Exercises at all, and many others had made only the First Week. These men were going through the full Jesuit formation, of course. For the Exercises of Annotation 18 inculcate no mere morality; they inculcate a profound spirituality. As Fr Parmananda Divarkar notes in later pages, the *Spiritual Exercises* transmit deep currents of Christian spirituality, probably best understood as belonging to the Pauline tradition. But those novices who did not make the full authentic Exercises were not going through the full program to train directors. They were preparing to give the First Week and the little methods of prayer. In fact, this first step is in reality a quiet selection process, not unlike the "discernment" done today in programs as far apart as northern Italy and South Korea, Québec and Melbourne.

The second step indicated in the training program is to give Exercises to others. Father General Ignatius sent novices from Rome to the universities in Paris and Salamanca with the mandate to take up the ministry of *Spiritual Exercises*. He legislated this practice in the *Constitutions*. In a paragraph about scholastics in studies he allowed that the work of giving Exercises "can be begun in the colleges," where the scholastics lived [*Cons.* 400]. He did not just *allow* the work: "After they have had experience of the Spiritual Exercises for themselves, they should acquire experience in giving them to others." [*Cons.* 408].

*a four-step program
for training directors*

How should they "acquire experience"? Two principles guide that: Start simple. Work with a mentor. So, starting simple forms the third step in training: "They could begin by giving the Exercises to some in whose cases less is risked," which means "only the exercises of the First Week" [*Cons.* 409]. The young Jesuits in the early Company would have encountered a lot of people thirsty for God, as beginners do again today in many places in the world. For though the full Exercises were not to be given in their entirety "except to a few persons" who face elections or serious decisions, "the exercises of the first week can be made available to large numbers; and some examinations of conscience and methods of prayer (especially the first of those which are touched on in the Exercises) can also be given far more widely" [*Cons.* 649]. Just about anyone can get a lot out of such spiritual exercises and then, as now, the millions in the middle yearn for peace of heart and a steady relation with God our Lord. No risk in having beginners help them through Exercises? Perhaps the only thing at risk in these "light Exercises" [*ejercicios leves*] is boredom.

The young Jesuits were to start simple and--here is the fourth step in the program--work with more experienced men. The beginners will learn "by conferring with someone more experienced about how they are proceeding, and noting well what such a person finds more useful and what less so" [*Cons.* 409]. Master Pierre Favre worked with the younger Jerónimo Doménech this way at Parma in the earliest days. This fourth step is mentoring, as indispensable now as it was then.

How long is this program to go on? How much training is necessary? Father General Ignatius may never have been asked, but he gave an indirect answer. Asked by a young Jesuit how he might give the fully authentic *Exercises* to a large convent, Ignatius suggested two ways. One would be to take a single member through the full *Exercises*, diligently and completely, and then to instruct that person to direct the rest of the community through them. Note that such a director's entire training was to be his or her own experience of *Exercises*. This might give us something to think about as we structure programs for training directors today.

The other suggestion about how to take a whole convent through the Exercises would be to take them as a group, "even though the same fruit would not be reaped." [*EppIgn* IX, 220]. Of course, while Father General Ignatius lived, he and his companions--and some religious women as well--were giving full Exercises one-to-one. But they were also giving the Exercises of the First Week according to Annotation 18

to groups of men and of women. Perhaps the earliest Jesuits and their colleagues needed encouragement to face groups as much as we need it today. Right at the end of his life, Father General Ignatius wrote a circular letter strongly encouraging the group retreat [*EppIgn* VII, 135].

After Father General Ignatius's death, his program to prepare Jesuits to give *Spiritual Exercises* stretched out into what we call today "ongoing formation." It took the form of the annual retreat. Very early on, Jesuits began making the Exercises annually for eight days or more. They were followed by other ignatian religious. The *Spiritual Exercises* thus became a major instrument of continuing formation. Eight-day Exercises still raise questions about adaptation, as Fr Philip Endean explores further along in these pages. But there is no question about their role in ongoing formation, not only of Jesuits but of all who belong to Ignatian Congregations, and not only personal but as directors of *Exercises*.

Quite early, groups of lay men and women were formed by ignatian spirituality and were gathered into companies. Father General Ignatius did this himself with a group of devout men in Rome, who became the Company of the Blessed Sacrament. Master Pierre Favre gathered the Company of the Most Holy Name of Jesus at Parma. After a few decades, women and men adapted ignatian spirituality for their emerging congregations. They made *Spiritual Exercises* integral to their formation. In some well-known instances, they also adapted the ignatian program to train directors of *Exercises*. There are many Ignatian Congregations; here are three instances from a history too few of us know.

ongoing formation in Ignatian Congregations

In 1611, the first instance, Mary Ward adopted the *Exercises* and even the Jesuit *Constitutions* for the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Reflecting on this, the IBVMs' General Chapter in 1983 declared: "The Spiritual Exercises are the heritage of our spirituality and the school of our prayer. Here we learn the freedom which is necessary for our apostolic activity and the discernment which will assist us, as contemplatives in action, to find God in all things, so that, filled with gratitude, we may love and serve Him [*SpEx*. 233]." The members make the Spiritual Exercises every year. A second instance: A congregation of clerics was founded in the early 1800s to spread spirituality, Oblati Mariae Virginis (OMV). These priests have adapted the *Spiritual Exercises* both for their own spirituality and for their apostolic work. As their constitutions declare, the Oblates "prefer to preach the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius" on the grounds that they "convey through meditations and instructions the full burden of all principal beliefs and main practices, and that in a series of truths so well linked together that they are readily

printed on hearts, which they gradually purify, illumine, and perfect." This same formation, the Oblates give themselves.

A final instance. The Congregation of Our Lady of the Retreat in the Cenacle, begun just as the Jesuits were being restored worldwide, also adopted the spirituality of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The Religious of the Cenacle combine three things in their institute: the mystery of the Lady Mary in the Cenacle, the charism of the Saint Thérèse Couderc to "make Jesus known and loved," and "the great current" of ignatian spirituality. As the renewed *Constitutions* put it, "From these early days the *Spiritual Exercises* have been an essential element of our religious formation and our apostolic service." The congregation's formation requires the study of the Exercises "as well as a sufficiently long and profound experience of the Exercises." This describes both their personal formation and also a program for training directors very like the one Father General Ignatius designed.

One other ignatian group cannot be omitted. The most recent *company* to adopt the *Spiritual Exercises* as their source of spirituality is the Christian Life Community. In "The CLC Charism," members declared that "the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius are both the specific source of this charism and the characteristic instrument of CLC spirituality" [28]. The Exercises "form the basis of the CLC formation process" [191]. Commonly, CLC communities adopt *Spiritual Exercises* as their apostolic action, often giving Exercises in Daily Life.

Go back to the beginning of this story: Father General Ignatius died without producing a directory. His living companions still hankered for one. So the twenty members of the First General Congregation in 1558 asked whether, with Ignatius gone, the Company could still hope for a directory "for giving Exercises" (Dec.107). They thought it could, so they commissioned Father General Lainez to see to it. Four generals and many surveys later, it was done: Father General Aquaviva published *Directorium Officiale* in 1599. It is a long document that gathered the experiences of many directors into an extraordinarily coherent set of norms and suggestions. During the four centuries since then, the directory has been printed over and over again. It has been so much used that many things in it would be completely familiar to directors today.

Through the centuries, men who were assigned to "give retreats" followed it. Gradually, these men became an elect few and took over all retreat-giving. Their story is not yet written, but during the century between Fathers General Roothaan and

Ledochowski, their apostolate of Exercises had gradually grown professionalized. The latter urged that young Jesuits be singled out for the apostolate and given education, mentoring, and a large library. In a word, that they become professionals who had mastered the *Directorium*. In a way this is historically curious. For though the *Directorium Officiale* remains a superb guide for the thirty-day retreat, it has proportionately little to say about the annual retreat and even less to say about group retreats. Yet both

*Directorium
Officiale guided the
orthodox
development of...*

of these, side-by-side with directed fully authentic Exercises, were already common in 1599. And, it is worth noting here, group Exercises and annual retreats gradually became the rule in giving and making Exercises, so that by the end of the 1800s, the Exercises given to groups by a preacher had completely taken the place of the one-on-one directed retreat implied in Annotation 19 and Annotation 20.

The two developments had never been unorthodox, by any means. Group retreats, to start with them, had been urged by Father General Ignatius in the circular letter already referred to. Early on, they developed into the "mission." Jesuits would go into areas where religious life was not strong and give *Exercises* to groups according to Annotation 18. The practice was emphatically affirmed by GC5 in 1593, whose members seem to have been hearing criticism of this "preached mission," perhaps of the kind heard today about week-end retreats. Their decree declares rather tartly that such Exercises were not merely to be tolerated. Far from it, they "are among the principal ministries of the Society," the very flower of the Jesuit charism. As if to gild the lily, the decree adds that this labor is "especially appropriate for the professed" (Dec.46). Do members of Ignatian Con-gregations think so four centuries later?

The second orthodox practice that had become common by Father General Aquaviva's time was making the *Spiritual Exercises* for a week or so every year. In 1608, GC6 gave this practice "the highest recommendation" (Dec.29). The congregation was recommending a practice not uncommon at that time; St Charles Borromeo, for instance, promoted it among his diocesan clergy. But going through *Spiritual Exercises* over and over again soon raised the issue of what to give during this week. What Exercises? Answering, GC7 in 1615 decreed that "everyone make the annual Spiritual Exercises exactly... and observe that application of time and method whereby the full Exercises are wont to be made" (Dec.25). Obliquely, this congregation fixed "that application of time and method," too. For in the same decree, it legislated that everyone pray at a fixed hour in the morning, that a meditation-visitor look in every day, that the men make their prayer and examen in their own rooms, that all spend a quarter-hour before evening examen preparing the morning meditation--and that Annotation 20 is to be exactly observed in the annual Exercises.

Effectively, these developments--the annual retreat, preached Exercises, and the legislation of piety--reflected a strong identification of *Spiritual Exercises* with *their characteristic material for prayer, kept in exact order*. That identification stayed fixed once GC8 in 1645 made the annual retreat obligatory for every Jesuit. For two and a half centuries afterwards, the *Spiritual Exercises* are mentioned in Jesuit legislation only in passing.

The two developments--the annual retreat and preaching group Exercises--in time produced a further two. First, they produced Jesuit preachers who, having preached the Exercises numerous times, put their "meditations" into books, scores and even hundreds of them. This development peaked early, perhaps turning

... the annual retreat,
preached exercises, and
retreat houses

into a spate of print that may well have fed into GC21's decree that "At present we should do less to encourage Ours to write and more to urge some of them to resist their itch to write." On the evidence, the itch overcame the resistance.

The preached retreat and the annual *Exercises* also promoted the development of the retreat house. Even in Ignatius's lifetime, Jesuit houses often enough had a few rooms where men [*sic*] would come to make Exercises. Ignatius hoped that a novitiate built in Rome might also be used to house retreatants. This practice of setting aside room in the house would later be written into more than one Ignatian Congregation's constitutions, in the Canossian Daughters of Charity's, for instance. But it was only in the 1660s that Jesuits--in France--thought to build a house just for giving retreats. By the middle of the 1700s, a number of these houses spread from Palermo to Prague to Barcelona. What went on in them? The history has not yet been written. But we have good evidence that what went on would be very familiar in hundreds of ignatian retreat houses today. Take as an illustrative example what we call "handouts" today. Even in the later 1600s, the Jesuits in these retreat houses printed pages and folders giving instructions and the matter for prayer. Some of those that have survived--for long retreats, eight-day retreats, and for weekend retreats--read very like ones handed out today.

The twentieth century cultivated the retreat given to groups not only in congregations' mother houses, but also in retreat houses. Interestingly, at least in some parts of the world, this was faith doing justice. For instance, it is instructive to note that a little more than a hundred years ago, contemplating "the evils of the wretched times in which we find ourselves," GC24 urged on Jesuits "the spiritual care of men, especially workers and the poor...through the Spiritual Exercises and our sodalities" (Dec.20). Forty years later, GC28 urged Jesuits to be "thoroughly acquainted" with economic and social conditions in their regions. But before teaching the Church's social doctrine to workers and capitalists alike, and before "fostering unions and social institutes," Jesuits should first of all "take special care to provide spiritual help for workers and their leaders" (Dec.29). They did this outstandingly by giving *Spiritual Exercises* in the retreat houses.

What were those *Exercises*? Pope Pius XI was convinced that they were "in a special way suited to the needs of our times," and he declared *Spiritual Exercises* the paragon and paradigm of all spiritual exercises in *Mens Nostra*. How to give them preoccupied GC27 in 1923. The congregation asked that Jesuits "preserve that proportion and method" in *Exercises* "according to the intent of the Directory" (ch.10; Dec.55). This may sound a bit odd now. For the only method of giving Exercises at that time was preaching, whereas the paragraphs in the Directory insist continually on the importance of the director. The next congregation, GC28, seems to be even more off the mark: "By giving the Exercises, Ours should faithfully abide by the method used by our holy father Ignatius; they should therefore become most conversant with both the book of the

Exercises and the *Directory* " (Dec. 30). How many Jesuits or other Ignatians in 1938 were directing exercitants one-on-one, which was outstandingly "the method used by our holy father Ignatius"?

Jesuits were nonetheless convinced that their Exercises were wholly authentic. How could they? The answer demands a history not yet written, but the method detailed in a famous letter written by Father General Ledochowski in 1935 gives some strong indications: All four Weeks and all of their materials, from the Principle and Foundation to the Contemplatio, were to be given in their correct order. There was to be profound silence and genuine seclusion. The retreatants must have plenty of time for mental prayer on their own. Thirty days remained the most authentic Exercises. Retreats of eight days must follow the book. Authentic Exercises can be given in three complete days but not in fewer. All Exercises are to be given to groups who gathered four or five times a day. Most emphatically, the *materials* were to be carefully adapted to the group making the Exercises: to laboring men, to youths, to Jesuit scholastics in different stages of formation, to members of the distinctive Ignatian Congregations. This is what "adapted to the individual" meant then, when *personal* still implied membership in a community and *individual* indicated a member of a group and not a member over against a group.

*preserving the method
of the Directorium*

For about a generation now, we have tended to lump all of these Exercises together as "preached," and have found it hard to think of them as "authentic" in any genuine sense. But Father General Ledochowski reported a distinction that we need to listen to. "If we *preach* [*Spiritual Exercises*] rather than *give* them," he wrote, we go contrary to the calls in Annotation 2 to adapt and to be brief. Hence, in retreats to religious and clergy, we must not talk longer than a half-hour. Apparently, that was the amount of time that those groups, whose education then was at best modest, needed for a simple statement of "points." Laborers and all of the laity who came to our retreat houses required more than a half-hour. But an absolute was that the individuals in every group were to have time for mental prayer on their own. This is the way of "giving" *Spiritual Exercises* that Pope Pius XI considered "in a special way suited to the needs of the time." We may have been hasty in entertaining huge doubts about that.

Not that doubts have all been recent. Two generations ago, the members of GC28 had been concerned about authenticity in giving Exercises. "Nowadays," as they read the situation in 1938, "the Exercises are customarily given to various groups, either of clerics or of laity, gathered together and under circumstances altogether different from those in which they were once given" (Dec. 30). Well, perhaps. Those who give Exercises today have at their fingertips a great deal of historical information on that point. We know, as few if any of the members of GC28 knew, how different and how similar are today's practices and those of Ignatius's day.

*remaining faithful to the
Exercises*

At the end of the twentieth century, we are clear that Father General Ignatius wrote Annotation 18 as well as Annotation 19 and 20. We know that Exercises were offered to every kind of faithful and in many formats from the very earliest days. We also know that Annotations 19 and 20 in particular require "individual direction." Indeed, during the last few decades we have grown very partial to this individual direction, for excellent reasons. For one, we are profoundly influenced by a century of depth psychology and by the ripening of modern individualism. And for another, the *Exercises* are once again being used to help men and women make an election about their way of life (which had been left out of the long retreat given to novices). The pendulum may have swung very far, however, and we may be emphasizing one-on-one Exercises to the detriment of other formats that could be more useful to many. So we need to reflect on the history we have recovered.

We also need, urgently, to reflect on another development, so recent as to have no history: lay directors. This is the opposite of the profession-alization of the early 1900s. For many are now giving *Exercises* who have enjoyed (or endured) nothing at all akin to the training program detailed in the Jesuit *Constitutions* and adapted by Ignatian Congregations. From this, issues arise about remaining faithful to *Spiritual Exercises*. They fall into two large categories: the need for another program for training directors, and the need for a directory. The first depends on the second, so we are back to asking the primordial question whether we need and are able to make a directory?

Everywhere around the globe, when directors are asked whether a kind of handbook or directory be useful, they answer that it would be. But they all agree that a mere book will not do it; a process might. The process to shape such a handbook or directory has been underway for some time. Efforts have been reported in this review by colleagues in Latin America, in Italy, and elsewhere (see "At the Frontiers" in #81 and #86). And, finally to get back to the article that occasioned this overlong historical meander, the most recent gathering of experiences from around the world is reported in the article called "Notes for the One Giving Exercises."