

ONE LAST WORD

We are tempted to muddle through, but it won't do. We are also tempted to wonder what Master Ignatius would say; that won't do, either. Here's the issue: The *Spiritual Exercises* continue to be a powerful instrument for making an election or a decision, for finding meaning and peace, and for what we now call "adult catechesis." Until three decades ago, all but a very few scholars were quite clear about how to use this instrument: one "gave" the *Exercises* faithfully while adapting them to the group; one "made" the *Exercises* correctly and generously; and God gave all the grace the maker would take. That's rather stark. It may not describe our thinking; it does describe our doing.

Now look. Far from the quietly marching cohorts, *Exercises* are given in retreat houses or homes or parishes, to one or five or a hundred. "Points" became a Scripture reference and then handouts, following the Weeks or not touching them. Preachers became directors; directors became guides or companions. Those who give Exercises had to learn how to help an election (only the rarest ever having been helped themselves). They had to re-discover Annotation 19, then 18. The "real" Exercises were once for an elite, and the rest got preached to. Now we have found that the authentic Exercises are much broader, adept even at turning daily life into a ministry. Understandably, we may be tempted to muddle through and wonder what Master Ignatius would make of all this.

We haven't time. The instrument remains powerful, helping every kind of Christian and, we are discovering, some who are not Christian. It helps the people vitalize religion, shucking its freight of extrinsicism and apartness, with spirituality, interiorizing their belief and hope and finding God's love. This shift to spirituality is needed in the West where "religion" has been decaying for centuries. The shift will help in the East where religions have awakened politically and coexistence will come only in sharing life and spirituality.

This powerful instrument, however, does not work like a sacrament, *ex opere operato*, by the simple fact that the work is done. Rather, Exercises work *ex opere operantis*, or better, *ex opere operantium*, in virtue of the work of the ones working. For there are three freedoms involved here: one divine and two human. The issue here is the freedom of the one who gives Exercises. Muddle through? Presume on Master Ignatius? Or perhaps pray and, desperate measures, study and reflect?