

“APPLYING SUCH EXERCISES”: EARLY JESUIT PRACTICE

Précis: In his keynote address, the author examined Annotation 18. He maintained that the translation of the word “aplicar” as “adapt” is not supported by the text or by the practice of the early Jesuits. A better translation is “apply,” which implies a deep understanding the Exercises and also of the one making them. This translation makes better sense of Annotation 18. It also conforms to the way the Exercises were composed. And “apply” is certainly consonant with the way the earliest Jesuits made them. This new translation both frees and challenges current practice.

Such exercises are to be applied ...—... *se han de aplicar los tales ejercicios* (*Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Annotation Eighteen, opening sentence).

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This paper has three parts, largely independent of each other. Firstly, I shall explore this Ignatian word *aplicar*, and make some suggestions as to how the eighteenth annotation should be understood today. Secondly, I shall present a selection of the available data on how the early Jesuits set about “applying” Ignatius’s indications. Thirdly, I shall speculate on how the process of “applying” may have contributed to the composition of the text itself.

Though all three parts discuss texts and history, they are driven by concerns which are more theological and pastoral. The first part seeks to bring out how “applying”—the awkward lack of grammatical object is deliberate—is integral to Ignatius’s spiritual teaching; it is wrong to regard “applying” as more or less justifiable adulteration of a text that would ideally be received “pure”. The second part draws attention to how the sources and the standard histories, understandably, see the history of the Exercises up to 1599 as identical with the story of how the Society of Jesus became a stable institution. We need to break this intellectual habit before we can appreciate

fully what the tradition has to tell us about “applying such exercises”; Ignatian spirituality is a broader concept than Jesuit spirituality. The third part builds on these two ideas to suggest that Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises* is not so much the record of his own experience at Manresa, but rather the fruit of a later process of reflection and abstraction, informed above all by a recognition that the basic patterns of God’s action among us take indefinitely many different forms. “Applying”, in other words, is in an important sense integral to the process by which Ignatius actually composed his text, and should also inform how we read it and use it.

One. Annotation 18: Text and Sensitivity

Authors often praise Ignatius for having recognized the need for “adaptation”, “accommodation” and “sensitivity” in the giving of the Exercises and in pastoral care more generally. There is, however, only one text in the *Exercises* where Ignatius himself uses this kind of language: the 18th Annotation. This text is concerned primarily with potential exercitants who are in some way deficient, not worth much time or effort: they are *rudo*, with not much of a constitution (*con poca complisión*), “without learning (*sin letras*)”, “of little suitability (*de poco sujeto*)”, “of little natural capacity (*de poca capacidad natural*).”

Extending the principle to different contexts

Ignatian disciples have, surely rightly, extended the central principle here to very different contexts. Certainly those who make today’s *ejercicios leves*—exemplified by such practices as Weeks of Guided Prayer in Britain and Ireland, or weekend retreats in the United States—are not simply *rudes*. One North American Jesuit has the practice of getting those who come to weekend retreats to write down the concerns they bring with them. His summary account is impressive:

It is important to recognize, since the weekend retreat is sometimes talked down and criticized, that these areas are not surface concerns,

and these retreats are not about the trivial or the peripheral. Retreatants worry over “my inability to put religion in everyday life,” and “why my faith is so weak.” One person wrote simply, “I don’t believe Eucharist is Christ.” Some of these “ordinary Christians” typify deep-seated concerns that we tend to connect only with intellectuals, like the man who had “doubts about what I was taught about God – I thought he was just, now I see a lot of unnecessary suffering.” ... The ethical concerns, at least in many of their lives, are not fluff, and they suggest that St Ignatius’s concern to teach people how to examine conscience and go to the sacraments remains a steady task for us, even after Vatican II. Their moral struggle witnesses to the really great fight between powers and forces in humanity. They have trouble with drugs; pornography (“it’s like a narcotic and has a power over me I can’t control”); and even with “thoughts of suicide.” They wrestle with lust for persons other than their spouses (“Ah yes, the sex drive ... at my age it’s still there.”) They suffer homosexual fears and failures, tendency toward depression, withdrawal from others. Living chaste when divorced. Avoiding adulterous affairs with co-workers. Finding time for their families. Respecting their grown children. Loving their sons and daughters. One parent wrote, “Why can’t I tell my children, especially my son, that I love them, more often than I do?” Indeed, why this failure or any of these failures? The great need here is to face the mystery of sin—my own sin, sin in me and sin in the world. This is not fluff.¹

People who write responses like these may not have high religious culture, but nor are they the illiterate *rudes* that Ignatius’s 18th Annotation seems to envisage.

If anything, it is the 19th Annotation that better describes their reality: “loaded in public matters or decent business (*embarazado en cosas públicas o negocios convenientes*).” The element of enclosure and withdrawal in their Exercises is attenuated, partly because more would not be possible—as Ignatius’s 19th Annotation implies—but also because we have come to extend Ignatius’s teaching. We now see secular experience as itself a locus of God’s grace, itself as source of “exercises.” Maurice Giuliani’s pioneer work on Exercises in daily life suggestively articulates the key principle. During such

Exercises, it is “insufficient, and—without doubt—a little illusory” to think of the time of prayer (*oraison*, not *prière*) as “the moment of greatest spiritual intensity”. If the process is going well, the exercitant gradually learns to regard the very events of daily life as themselves “exercises”, as what Ignatius in the 1st Annotation calls “other spiritual activities”:

The teaching, “by this title ‘spiritual exercises’ is understood ... every means of preparing and disposing the soul” can be understood very readily when on its basis the retreatant has come to recognize that their day is rich in moments for which one must “prepare and dispose oneself” as for a presence of God at the heart of human activity.²

Watch your language: “adapt” and “apply”

It may help us do justice to our contemporary experience if we note that Ignatius—at least in his Spanish text—did not write of ‘adaptations of the Exercises’.³ The word he used was “apply”; he used the verb form, not the noun; and what was to be applied was not “*the Exercises*” but “such exercises.” At least in English, a literal translation of what Ignatius wrote sounds strange: “In accord with the disposition of the persons who wish to take spiritual exercises ... such exercises are to be applied”. Not surprisingly therefore, English translations habitually use the term “adapt”.⁴ Nevertheless, we should insist on Ignatius’s *aplicar*, because it avoids two unfortunate associations that creep in once translation and grammatical elegance have encouraged us to talk about “adaptations”.

Firstly, “applying such exercises” does not involve a change in their fundamental reality, but rather a sensitive and appropriate manifestation of what they essentially are. “Adaptation” indicates a more or less justifiable adulteration, to be minimized as far as possible; it amounts to a change in what the author wrote. Applying Ignatian exercises is not like that; to apply the Exercises is to enhance them.

Secondly, Ignatius uses a verb, not a noun: *aplicar* denotes not the revised version of a text but rather an interactive process. In Annotation 18, Ignatius is not encouraging us to produce a simplified alternative to his text, standing alongside it permanently, but rather constantly to keep re-presenting the text

we have in ever different ways, responsive to the person receiving the process.

Study of the *Constitutions* has shown how Ignatius habitually expresses his general principles not in the abstract but rather as they apply in particular contexts. Thus in the 18th Annotation, the central idea comes almost as a throwaway line, peripheral to the structure of the argument. One should not overburden the *rudes* or the weak:

Similarly each one should be given in accord with however they might want to dispose themselves, so that they can draw greater help and profit (*según que se quisieren disponer, se debe de dar a cada uno, porque más se pueda ayudar y aprovechar*).

The style of pastoral care this sentence suggests is *responsive*—we are not even told what we are supposed to give and *interactive*—the Spanish reflexive leaves open, in ways hard to reproduce in other languages, whether it is the director or the exercitant who is the real subject of *ayudar*. More theologically, we might speak of how the one giving exercises should be reverent before the other's individuality, reverent because there the Spirit may move in ways that cannot be predicted or specified. As Howard Gray has recently put the matter:

... a person's prior religious history provides the best interior context for making the Exercises. The wise guide of the Ignatian experience should be alert to how history, as a pattern of God's prior communication to the one making the Exercises, *defines the meaning* of such terms as "disordered affections", "seeking and finding God's will", "great spirit and generosity toward their Creator and Lord", and "consolation, desolation, and temptation".⁵

Ignatius's Annotation 18 reflects a set of assumptions about learning and society, and perhaps too the priorities of Jesuits who could not meet all the demands made on them—the paragraph ends, all too familiarly, with the comment, "there isn't time for everything (*faltando tiempo para todo*)."⁶ Subsequent tradition has detached 'applying such exercises' from this constricting, patronizing context. Ignatius here implies a rich, pluralist vision of God's action among us—in principle there may be as many ways of "applying such exercises" as there are exercitants. "Applying" may often take

the form of an attenuation of Ignatius's full text, or of a catechism lesson based more or less closely on Ignatian material, as the 18th annotation suggests. Equally, however, these are not the only forms "applying such exercises" can take. Nor are those forms in any sense the normative forms. At the heart of Ignatius's *aplicar* is a sense of reverence for how God's Spirit can be at work in the person one meets, in ways that may in principle be surprising, unpredictable, and new.

Two. Early Jesuit Practice

The Ignatian *aplicar*, then, properly understood is anything but a watering down of the Exercises; on the contrary, it is only in interaction that the Exercises are fully understood. It is perhaps only an extension of that point to contend that the *Exercises* are firstly a broadly Christian text, and only secondarily a narrowly Jesuit one. If we are to apply Ignatian exercises in ways appropriate to the diverse groups within God's people who are now asking for them, we may need to detach the Exercises in themselves from the Exercises as they have come to shape our own lives as Jesuits, our own distinctive "way of moving forward in the Lord". To echo Howard Gray's point quoted above: we must allow ourselves to recognize how key Ignatian concepts, applied within the life-experience of people very different from ourselves, may take unfamiliar forms, and we must train ourselves to foster these forms.

Biases in the sources

The attempt to find in early Jesuit material resources for such enlightened practice runs into methodological problems. These are well epitomized in a passage from the preliminary version of the *Official Directory*. After a discussion of the Three Methods of Prayer, we are told that of course there are other methods, taught by the Holy Spirit and used by those trained in the spiritual life. The initial draft and the final version go on to state explicitly that this teaching applies to Jesuits "as well", provided they have the approval

of their superior or spiritual director. The middle version, sent out to the whole Society for comment in 1591, says something different. The recognition of other methods,

... is to be understood with regard to others, outside. For our people must be recommended never to draw back from this magnificent way of the Exercises, firstly because it is solid and secure, and then on account of the uniformity among us in all things that should be conserved as far as possible.⁷

Behind this observation lies a concern, widespread at the time, that prayer, and in particular any prayer arising from the Exercises, should not get out of control—a concern that is clearly by this stage in the tradition dampening

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enthusiasm for “applying such Exercises”. A proper interpretation of this concern as manifest in early writings on the Exercises remains to be written; it would have to take into account not only theological issues, but also political factors, both of Church and state, as well as the anthropological question of how a new religious order is to establish and maintain a distinctive identity. For the sake of

manageability, we can confine ourselves to noting two points. Firstly, whoever wrote these sentences in 1591 is recognising a difference between proper procedure with Jesuits and proper procedure with others. Secondly, and most importantly, both versions articulate only what is relevant for Jesuits: they acknowledge that people outside the Society can make the full Exercises in order to be helped along a spiritual path that is not a Jesuit one, but they leave the fruits of “applying” undescribed. Lay experience remains unarticulated.

The *Directory* has of course a whole chapter on how others, besides Jesuits, can be given the Exercises;⁸ nevertheless, the passage just discussed reflects in microcosm the general methodological problem in using the early history of the Ignatian movement as a resource for contemporary “applying such Exercises”. The two major modern works—the first two of Ignacio Iparraguirre’s magnificently erudite three volumes, and Joseph de Guibert’s *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*⁹—give priority to the development of specifically Jesuit spirituality. In the case of de Guibert, we

need only cite the title. Iparraguirre for his part frames his diverse material on the period between Ignatius's death and the publication of the *Directory* within a narrative of consolidation, one which is primarily the consolidation of the Society, itself. One of his chapter headings implies that the 'principal fruit' of the Exercises was the creation of a Jesuit school of spirituality.¹⁰ Though Iparraguirre—fortunately—records much that does not easily fit this vision, his overall narrative is one of how the Exercises come to shape a distinctive Jesuit culture; daily meditation in Ignatius's spirit enables whole lives to be lived "in the atmosphere of the Exercises", and produces "an inward ideological and affective assimilation" consolidating "the work done during the days of retreat".¹¹

It would not only be anachronistic and churlish to criticize Iparraguirre and de Guibert for this understanding of the Exercises as primarily a Jesuit text, but also unfair: their understanding reflects that latent in their sources, and it may well be impossible to develop systematically any alternative interpretation. Once the ministry of the Exercises outside the Society became a matter of routine, it was not written about.¹² There is the further methodological problem that spiritual expression, even in contemporary settings, is often inarticulate and shifting, not easily recorded, observed or measured.¹³ Nevertheless, it is important for us to be aware of the priorities implicit in the very way the tradition has been written up, if only so as to facilitate the recognition that today's "applying such exercises" throws up questions which the history we inherit does not answer directly. Historical scholarship serves primarily to show us how the recorded past differs from the present, and thus stimulates and empowers the renewal of practice.

Piae fabulae: anecdotes on giving Exercises

It is clear that the early Jesuits gave the Exercises widely, but we have little evidence on how. Iparraguirre's first volume does little more than state *that* the Exercises were adapted,¹⁴ and to elaborate on the 18th Annotation. In the second we hear of retreats of various kinds. There are interesting accounts of Exercises made by Teresa of Avila and by Bérulle, rather undermining textbook accounts of these figures as exemplifying a spirituality somehow to

be contrasted with the Ignatian.¹⁵ Rossignoli, writing in the eighteenth century, speaks of Luis de la Puente (1554-1624) in terms that are attractive and suggestive, but lacking in detail:

... the most admirable thing about him was how he applied his spirit and teaching in different ways matching the situations and characteristics of the exercitants, making himself something appropriate for each one, as if the meditation were for that person alone. He would do this with learned people and with ignorant ones, with the good and the bad, with the virtuous and with great sinners...¹⁶

Other data appear less promising to a modern reader. In 1599, Acquaviva told Jesuits in Naples quite simply that the Exercises should not be given to women; in 1600, he relents a little, and tells the Rhineland provincial:

We have already written on many other occasions that it doesn't seem to be worth the trouble to give these Exercises to women. It is enough if our people leave them with some spiritual books and recommend that they read them. At most you could teach them some method of prayer on their own in church, and give them some points for meditation that are more suitable for them.¹⁷

On some occasions, the Exercises seem to have functioned repressively, as a means of social control. In 1558 Pedro Saavedra visited a Franciscan convent in Spain where Francis Borja had worked three years previously, seemingly in vain. From a situation where "they had never seen Constitutions, nor kept them—factions among them, as it was in the beginning—obedience in neither word or deed, as if they'd never taken a vow", Saavedra's Exercises wrought a major change:

They only speak to the Prioress when she rebukes them, not raising their eyes, nor returning a word. ... They have almost all made a general confession. They say they do not know how they could have been saved, if God had not been pleased to give them light through the means in the Exercises. They are so enthusiastic for their mortifications that it's necessary to restrain them. ... (One) placed herself at the door of the refectory and asked that for the love of Christ Our Lord's Passion everyone leaving should slap her and spit in her face; as they weren't so well trained for this, each one hit her gently in

the face, weeping profusely with compassion. Since they began to busy themselves with this sort of consideration, there has never been discord, but the greatest love and charity among them, great conformity.¹⁸

How early jesuits made Exercises

Nevertheless, our current knowledge of how people in the sixteenth century outside the Society actually experienced the Exercises is no more than a collection of anecdotes. No secure generalizations can be made. We do, however, have some quasi-statistical data on the practice of the Exercises among early Jesuit novices: data which may, if interpreted imaginatively, be of use and inspiration to us.

During some of his visitations in the 1560s, Nadal administered personal questionnaires; according to Iparraguirre, 1,323 responses survive.¹⁹ Given that the number of Jesuits at Laínez's death is reckoned to be around 3,500, this represents a significant cross-section. Of these Iparraguirre judges that 1009 had made the Exercises in some form or other; if one excludes the brothers, and a set of answers from Cologne that are anomalous, this represents all but 46. Reasons for their not doing them at all include problems with health, and problems with lack of time and space.²⁰ Jesuits were practising the Exercises in this period, therefore, perhaps not quite as the matter of course we would expect, but nevertheless almost universally. What, however, is rather more surprising, is the range of ways in which this occurred. The length of time spent varied, and significant numbers either practised a form of Exercises in daily life, or else made the Exercises in stages, with significant breaks in the process. Let us look briefly at each these in turn.

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Out of the sample of just over 1000, 231 did only the First Week, and were in retreat for less than 10 days. 257 did between 10 and 17 days, 124 did three weeks, and 209 did the whole month. There are some exceptional

cases: one who did 35 days, 16 who did 40, one who did 42 days, 2 who did two months, and one unfortunate Andres Carvalho did 74 days.²¹ A 1561 letter of Nadal to Miguel de Sousa, the Portuguese master of novices, speaks of the easiest arrangement as being that all should receive the first week and some part of the second “so that they have an introduction to the art of meditating”. Beyond that:

... anybody in whom you don't see any reason for their not being given them—an obvious incapacity, an obvious sense that there's no point, some kind of mental or bodily indisposition—should receive them all. It is for the appointed superiors to see whether the whole Exercises, or only a part, are to be given, considering the particular circumstances.²²

In practice, the youth of the recruits seems to have led to problems. In 1555, Leão Enriques, the Portuguese novice director wrote informing Ignatius of how he was thinking of relaxing his regime; “they're just lads, and they give themselves very impetuously to (the Exercises)”. Novices generally between the ages of 14 and 20, were being put through a thirty day retreat immediately following a brief first probation; during the retreat, they did not leave their

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cubicles except to go to Mass. Not surprisingly, they often emerged from the experience “sick in the head” and incapable of the Society's ministries. Enriques is asking permission, which he obtained, to loosen the regime: to defer, to shorten, to counteract the tendency towards depression or melancholy by interspersing the Exercises with ‘some recreations’. By contrast, a mature recruit, Juan Ramírez de Oviedo, had

already led a regular life of prayer for more than sixteen years before entering the Society. The Exercises gave him a headache, because it pained him to give up mode of prayer he was already practising.²³

A significant minority seem to have made some form of Exercises in daily life: they write of having made the Exercises “around the house”, “not enclosed”, ‘doing my ordinary services’, “during the Society's normal times of prayer”, “not in retreat”, “not as the only thing”, “while working with the Brothers”. One of the Society's earliest legislative documents had spoken of

how new Jesuits could make the Exercises “for a full month, or taking one hour or some hours each day”. Achille Gagliardi (1537-1607), a significant if controversial figure, was quite clear on an underlying principle here:

It must be noted, and with insistence, that the Exercises must last a whole lifetime without interruption, with people exercising themselves in them during their daily hour of prayer, their examens, and what they do throughout the day. For it is in this way that evils get uprooted and virtues come to grow, as vocations mature.²⁴

Giovanni Battista Ceccotti (1544-1639)—though he specifically excludes from this generalization novices making their first retreat—talks of how the matter of prayer can be given for consideration “without a fixed limit of time”; it can be dealt with “as one would deal with a serious matter of business, turning it over and tossing it around throughout the day”. To mingle the Exercises with spiritual ministries does nothing to diminish their power or effectiveness.²⁵

There was also quite a frequent practice of giving the Exercises in stages, with significant breaks between the various weeks. José Guimerá did the first week following his entry to the Society in 1554, “and later they gave me some more, and I never did them all”. Gaspar de la Fuente writes of how he did “the two weeks for 12 or 13 days—from that point I didn’t make them consecutively, but two or three times with interruptions”.²⁶ Gagliardi developed an elaborate scheme. He envisaged novices making the first week at the outset, and then taking a two month break before doing the second week in closed retreat, for 15 days at the most. After a further break, they would then repeat those Exercises in the time of their daily prayer—“lest they be overstressed by new things being given, and so that what has already been done be better imprinted”—before returning to retreat for the rest of the Exercises, again for a maximum of 15 days. Then, yet again, they would be given the whole Ignatian process in summary. This cycle lasts about six months. This is, however, only the beginning: the Exercises as proper to the purgative way. The cycle has to be repeated twice before the end of the novitiate, once for the illuminative way and once for the unitive way.²⁷

Points of view

Iparraguirre lovingly assembles all this data, but he also finds it anomalous: the central message is that this period of “imprecise personal accommodation” represents the kind of instability inherent in the process of institutional establishment, and came to be replaced by a happier situation of “firmer regulation”, where the Exercises were practised in a closed thirty-day form.

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This interpretation is criticizable: there is some tension between the preference for fidelity to Ignatius’s text here and Iparraguirre’s strictures elsewhere about the fundamentalist, restorationist tendencies of Mercurian and Miró, and some of Iparraguirre’s auxiliary hypotheses sound lame.²⁸ Nevertheless, the sense that Jesuit spiritual formation in

the 1550s and 1560s was a haphazard business in need of regulation must surely broadly reflect the perceptions of Jesuits at the time. Moreover, there is an objective institutional need informing such an interpretation: even now, we are facing anew the issue of how the Society of Jesus, having recovered the sensitivity to individuals latent in Ignatian spirituality, can nevertheless establish and maintain a “corporate identity”.²⁹

Suppose, however, we allow ourselves to abstract—obviously anachronistically, but nevertheless in a way that may be helpful for us today—from specifically Jesuit concerns in interpreting this material. Then what appears in a more institution-centred interpretation as disorder might look different: a range of improvised, diverse and flexible responses to young men’s needs for spiritual development in untidy, limited, particular situations. Further, this reading might well converge with Ignatius’s focus on the individual in his description of the month of “spiritual exercises” in the *Examen*:

... examining his awareness, going through his whole past life and making a general confession, meditating on his sins, and contemplating the steps 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 people concerned, as will be taught him in our Lord, etc.³⁰

More theologically, what one mind-set might see as more or less excusable deviations from an ideal—Iparraguirre revealingly talks about superiors' providential care bringing about a situation better "than what one might have expected in such irregular times"³¹—can also be interpreted in terms of a Spirit working in all things: not just Christ our Lord and his bride, the Church (*SpEx* 365), but also a person's experience, shaped by problematic circumstances, especially those regarding health. On that vision, the workings of grace are essentially interactive; any text, however sacred, is only one resource among others for encountering a God who continues to speak in freedom.

Three. "Applying" and Ignatian Tradition

This paper has been written to encourage a ministry in which preaching is grounded on listening. When we give the Exercises, we are not "adapting" our spirituality in such a way that others can become like us, but rather letting our own spirituality catalyse new encounters with grace in the other. "Applying such exercises" as fully and radically as we should requires us to recognise an institutional bias in the way we have inherited the tradition; we need to filter out concerns—in themselves quite legitimate—about Jesuit cohesion from a spirituality which is of its nature interactive, open-ended, and permanently unfinished. In the final part of this paper, I want to explore how these ideas might lead us to develop our views of the process by which the text of the *Exercises* came into being.

Manresa and beyond

Jesuit narratives often present the *Exercises* as a record of Ignatius's own experience in Manresa, subsequently written up over time. Thus Cándido de Dalmases's biography contains several pages—admittedly written "in the order of conjecture"—presenting Ignatius as going through the process of the

Exercises, in the order recorded in the book, at Manresa;³² Nadal tells us of Ignatius accepting through prayer the meditations normally called the *Spiritual Exercises*.³³ Ignatius's own *Autobiography*, however, suggests something rather different:

He said to me that as for the *Exercises* he had not produced them all at one time, rather that some things which he used to observe in his soul and find useful for himself it seemed to him could also be useful for others, and so he used to put them in writing: for example, regarding the examination of conscience with that method of the lines etc. As for the elections, he told me specifically that he had drawn them from that variety of spirit and thoughts which he had had when he was in Loyola, when he was still ill from his leg.³⁴

At least on its own, this passage suggests a more cumulative, reflective process of composition. Ignatius's own account of Manresa gives the impression that he learnt much there about the constructive handling of scruples and about how evil may take on the appearance of good; he also, evidently, had some powerful experiences culminating in the illumination by the Cardoner. But there is no sense of the overall structure of the *Exercises* coming into being.

The Jesuit narratives are influenced by Nadal's theology of the special grace of a religious order focussed in the life of the founder—itself a replacement for a more collegial account of the Society's founding; they may also owe something to the romantic image of a charismatic individual. A sensitivity to the issues involved in “applying such Exercises” may lead us to see matters differently. In this light, the generative energy of the text comes not primarily from the events of Manresa, but rather from a subsequent process of empowering abstraction. The book of the *Exercises* is precisely not a record of Ignatius's own experience; apart from some similarities in technical vocabulary, we would never guess that the author of the dry, structured *Spiritual Exercises* also wrote the *Spiritual Diary* and dictated the *Autobiography*, with all their dramatic, sometimes strange episodes. Ignatius was not just a man gifted with extraordinary graces in prayer; he also had a rare gift of being able to distance himself from the colourful detail of his own religious history, simply to providing a “way and order of meditating and

contemplating”, by which others could find modes of discipleship as personal, even idiosyncratic, as his own.

“When his studies were finished, he brought together those first extracts of exercises, added much, arranged it all, and gave them to be examined and judged by the Apostolic See”.³⁵ Commenting on this statement of Nadal’s, Leturia speaks of how, in Paris, the literary structure of Ignatius’s work must have changed:

The work composed at Manresa was there as a help for himself as director of exercises. This ... definitive work was there to help other directors of exercises, Spaniards and non-Spaniards... For in a personal *vade mecum* certain points, even important ones, could be silently assumed or be expressed in shifting, embryonic form; but in a manual or directory entrusted to other directors, they needed to be pinned down.³⁶

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The process of abstraction, assembly and ordering to which Nadal and Leturia are pointing may properly be seen, not as some secondary phase in the elaboration of the *Exercises*, but rather as the point at which the reality of the text is created. There are literary grounds for placing the process, *pace* Nadal, at the beginning rather than the end of the Paris period;³⁷ it could have been protracted and unconscious. Nevertheless, it represents a qualitative, essential shift. Nadal’s *disgessit omnia*—“he arranged it all”—is better understood, not so much as a rearrangement of a pre-existing reality, but rather as the very creation of the “method and structure” which we know as the Exercises. Ignatius’s formative experiences at Manresa lead him “to help souls”; as he reflects on his ongoing experience, he recognises—perhaps unconsciously—that his own religious history is not the model for others, and that people of different temperaments and histories have to undergo their own process of discovery and discernment. It may well be that Jesuit discipleship originates in Ignatius’s Manresa experience; but Ignatian spirituality, with its acute sensitivity to the different ways in which people can be led by God’s grace, originates primarily in a subsequent, largely unrecorded, process of reflection and abstraction. It is when others become

not just recipients but also teachers of Ignatius's wisdom that its full reality is first disclosed.

Interactive writing

Moreover, the process of abstraction is permanently continuing. Achille Gagliardi's commentary on the *Exercises* includes a striking warning to over-prescriptive directors:

They err who want to tie those receiving the Exercises to what they have experienced within themselves, or to that to which they themselves have been called and impelled. They fail to notice that this is the plague and perversion of this art; this is to tie God down, and impose on God a law whereby God should act with another soul as God has done with theirs, whereas most often something very different is appropriate for it, both because of the soul's capacity and of how the divine good pleasure is executed. Therefore they must

abstract from themselves, and, accommodating to the soul's receptivity, put forward those rules from the book that are appropriate for it.³⁸

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different ways in which
people can be led by God*

This evocative comment prompts the reflection that the abstracting from oneself required in giving the Exercises lies in continuity with the very process of how the text was composed.

The epilogue to the *Autobiography*, quoted above, suggests that Ignatius gradually refined his text in the light of experience. Given that the earliest surviving version dates from the mid 1530s, it is difficult for us to chart this process. Possibly we can note a shift in Ignatius's understanding of the first time of election and its relationship to "consolation without preceding cause". Ignatius's letter to Teresa Rejadell in 1535—whom he probably did not know personally and which outlines what Ignatius presents as "the general procedure of the enemy with those who love God our Lord", what "often happens"—seems to connect the two: God's

action is one of “raising us entirely to His divine love, without our being able to resist His purpose, even if we wanted”.³⁹ At a later stage, reflected in the final text of the *Exercises* and in the vision of meat recounted in the *Autobiography* (n. 27), the first time experience appears not to be a “consolation”, but simply a irresistible experience of being drawn to a particular option.⁴⁰ Even more conjecturally, one might possibly discern a still earlier and more underdeveloped version of the teaching in the trial testimony of María de la Flor in 1527. Her description of Ignatius’s teaching about “the service of God” is reported to have begun as follows:

Inigo told her that he would have to talk to her one month continuously. In this month she would have to go to confession every week, and receive communion. At the first time, she was to be very happy and not know where it was coming to her from; the next week she would be very sad, but that he hoped in God that she would feel much benefit from this.⁴¹

The precise evolution of the process is hidden from us, but surely Ignatius must have refined somehow his understanding of discernment and consolation as he dealt with different people. As he “applies such exercises” he grows more and more in a process of “abstracting from himself”, of being open to new ways in which, as the 15th Annotation puts it, the creator deals immediately with the creature. In significant ways, Ignatius’s exercitants contributed to the text we have; we should receive that text as an invitation to continue the process.

A way of moving forward (*modo de proceder*)

In connection with part VIII of the *Constitutions*, Dominique Bertrand writes of how that text needs to be read not as a set of provisions requiring legitimate “adaptation”, but rather as holding future Jesuits open to tasks never completed, and questions never resolved, that are inherent to their charism.⁴² Something similar can be said about the Annotations on “applying such exercises” and setting oneself as a balance. “Each one should be given in accord with however they might want to dispose themselves.” To give the Exercises is to expose oneself to the graced reality and history of another

person, and therefore permanently to be asking certain questions in ever new ways. What is this person teaching me? What demands does this make on me? How must I dispose myself so that this new reality can be fostered by our relationship, and develop in freedom?

Perhaps the comparison with the *Constitutions* can be developed one step further. Though the *Exercises* offer resources for a far wider range of Christians than the *Constitutions*, their underlying approach to how human beings know God is similar, and the *Constitutions* articulates it more clearly. Like the *Constitutions*, the text of the *Exercises* represents not a set of permanently valid prescriptions, but rather the definitive expression of a distinctive *modo de proceder*, a way of moving forward. As we “apply” the Exercises, we are also developing them; here too we are moving further along a way which is the divine service.⁴³ In pastoral contexts unimaginable to the early Jesuits, we are discovering meanings and potentials in the text of which no-one in the sixteenth century could have dreamt. Such a process, far from being something we need to apologize for or justify, is integral to authentic Ignatian practice.

Developing theology

Abstract though the above may sound, it merely describes what we are doing instinctively. Since Ignatius wrote his text, the changing experience of Christians has led us to develop some of the theologies implicit in his formulations. We would no longer distinguish the lives of the vows and of the commandments in quite the way Ignatius does; the experience of technological warfare involving whole populations renders Ignatius’s chivalric imagery problematic; our understanding of salvation outside the Church has become more generous; liberation theology, particularly of the feminist variety, raises profound systematic questions about our traditional religious language; our sense of the importance of basic human needs may well lead us to present less starkly Ignatius’s calls to heroic self-sacrifice. These developments are properly pluralist, not fully articulated, and permanently in process; the Exercises indeed provide a space where ideas and experiences somehow going beyond conventional patterns can be worked with. To carry the tradition forward in this untidy way is not to

adulterate it or even to change it, for this tradition is intrinsically dialogical and interactive, and at its heart lie the free, charismatic realities of the Ignatian colloquy, of “reflecting and drawing profit”.

A recent article presents a powerful case study of a Protestant woman minister in Canada making the contemplation of the risen Christ’s appearance to Mary. The woman had herself many years previously buried a small son; she found herself resisting the contemplation on the ground that it has no scriptural source, but then, being in desolation, was prompted by her director nevertheless to try. Spontaneously, waking up in the middle of the night, she found herself dialoguing with her dead son, now an adult:

He said I was making a great mistake in clinging to my dead baby because he was still alive in Christ. I told him that was cold comfort when every fibre of my body wanted to hold him. He replied I could hold him in every baby I baptize, in everyone I love, with the passionate, unconditional, life-affirming love I once gave him. He also told me there is a place of bitterness inside me that has been there ever since his death—a hard, dead, impenetrable place untouched by Christ’s love though the rest of my grief has healed. He showed me how I have sealed this spot up tight like a tomb to keep the pain inside, and said that Christ wanted to bring new life from this dark place but that I had to let the tomb be opened.

This experience enables her to pray the contemplation as written, and to experience deep healing.⁴⁴ Ignatius’s text is rightly deployed only in interaction with a life story, only if it is presented in such a way that it can gather new meaning of a kind that he himself could never have envisaged. This newness is obviously quite personal, but it can also have a more general theological significance: this particular story shows how experiences of motherhood might feed ordained ministry in ways that would never have occurred until very recently. Indeed, just as the early Jesuits came under inquisitorial suspicion, so an authentic ministry of the Exercises today will engage human experience in ways that official teaching may regard as problematic.

Nadal tells us that the Lord communicated the Exercises to Ignatius at Manresa,

... guiding him in this way so that he could employ himself completely in our Lord's service and in the health and salvation of souls—this God showed him through devotion particularly in two exercises, namely those of the King and of the Standards.⁴⁵

If we are to “apply such exercises” as fully and creatively as we should, we need to read carefully the link being made here between the *Exercises* and the Jesuit vocation. Clearly Ignatius did discover his own vocation through some antecedent of the prayer of the Second Week. But we sell his creative genius short if we fail to recognise that the method Ignatius developed goes far beyond the personal discovery he made by using it. The book of the *Exercises* is not simply a set of *fervorini* inviting us to follow Christ the King; it fosters the “health and salvation of souls” more radically than such sermons ever could, by empowering styles of discipleship quite different from Ignatius's own. It is of course right that we should cherish the memories of our own faith history, but Ignatius ultimately encourages us to move beyond this, to “apply such exercises”, to engage in permanent abstraction from ourselves, so that the glory of God may be manifest in ways ever new, ever greater. Perhaps, indeed, this is what the tradition really meant when it spoke of permanent abnegation and mortification.

Notes

1. Denis Daly, “The Frontier that Runs through Each Human Heart”, *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, 28/2 [Summer 1997], 49-55, at 51 ff.
2. Maurice Giuliani, *L'expérience des Exercices spirituels dans la vie* (Paris: Desclée, 1990), 23-26.
3. The Vulgate's term is *accommodari*, the *Versio prima* uses *aptari*.
4. So Ganss, Munitiz-Yeomans, even the exemplarily literal Mullan.
5. Howard J. Gray, “Joy and Friendship in the Fourth Week”, *The Way Supplement*, 99 (Winter 2000), 11-21, at 13, my emphasis.
6. On the hermeneutics implicit here, see below in the third part of this article.
7. MHSJ MI *Dir*, 740 (*Official Directory*, n 268). The preliminary versions are not given in Martin E. Palmer *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), and Iparraguirre's edition offers no indication as to why the earlier version was finally preferred.
8. nn. 68-83, chapter 9.

9. Translated by William J. Young and edited by George E. Ganss (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986 [orig. written by 1942]).
10. Ignacio Iparraguirre, *Historia de los Ejercicios de San Ignacio Vol 2: Desde la muerte de San Ignacio hasta la promulgación del Directorio oficial. 1556-1599* (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1955), 465. (This book is hereafter cited as Iparraguirre, *Historia*, 2).
11. *Ibid.*, 295, 373.
12. *Ibid.*, 25*: "... there was very little difference in the effects between one five-year period and another, between Spain and Italy. It seemed superfluous for people to return again and again in their reports to something that had such little external profile, and which was now well established in the Society's Colleges. This work was taken for granted as something normal. It was only when people of special significance entered the story, or there was some special circumstance that seemed extraordinary to them, that they reported it. Thus the norm was, both in official and in private letters, that people did not talk about exercitants except in rare and extraordinary circumstances, just as they did not talk about how every class ran, or about the normal confessions and sermons."
13. Iparraguirre rightly observes, "The Exercises were in themselves something private, intimate in character, to an outside view insignificant. ... These things without external history or significance were not archived" (*Ibid.*, 28*-29*).
14. Ignacio Iparraguirre, *Practica de los Ejercicios de San Ignacio de Loyola en vida de su autor. 1522-1556* (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1946—hereafter *Historia*, 1), 6, 164
15. Iparraguirre, *Historia*, 2.124-132, 160-168.
16. *Ibid.*, 67.
17. *Ibid.*, 226.
18. Saavedra to Borja, 12 April 1558 (MHSJ LQ 5.592-594), cited in Iparraguirre, *Historia* 2.230-231.
19. Iparraguirre, *Historia*, 2.257-258, 267; the questions are reproduced in MHSJ MN 1.789-95; and a selection of the answers in MHSJ MN 2.527-89. Some of this data has been used in a provocative article—though not in a way directly helpful for our purposes—by T.V. Cohen: "Why the Jesuits Joined 1540-1600", *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* (1974), 237-258.
20. Iparraguirre, *Historia*, 2.267-268, 271-272.
21. *Ibid.*, 275-276.
22. *Ibid.*, 272.
23. Enríques to Ignatius, 22 August 1555 (MHSJ *Epp.Mixt.* 4.818-819), cf MHSJ *Pol.Chron.* 6.720, Iparraguirre, *Historia*, 340; for Ramírez de Oviedo, see Iparraguirre, *Historia*, 2.282.

- 24.MHSJ MI *Const*, 1.40; Iparraguirre, *Historia*, 2.262, 277-278.
- 25.Ibid., 279, 281; Ceccotti's directory, edited by Enrique Basabe, was published in seven extracts over eleven years in *Manresa*, beginning at 11 (1935), 244-265.
- 26.Iparraguirre, *Historia*, 2.282, taking issue on detail with an article that is nevertheless rich in material and worth consulting: Eusebio Hernández, 'La manera tercera de ejercicios completos, según S. Ignacio', *Manresa*, 18 (1946), 101-132. It is sometimes hard to distinguish in the sources this practice of interspersed Exercises from the giving of a brief retreat during the first probation, followed by the Exercises proper early in the second probation.
- 27.Iparraguirre, *Historia*, 2.288-290.
- 28.He speculates, for example, that the religious culture of the young recruits in the 1550s and 1560s was marked by external devotions and a lack of profound spiritual discernment; hence there was need to go slowly. By contrast, young Jesuits in the 1950s were coming from "environments strongly influenced by four centuries of the penetration of the spirituality of the Exercises" (*Historia*, 2.277).
- 29.Franz Meures, "Jesuit Corporate Identity: Promoting Unity and Cohesion in the Society of Jesus", *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, 89 (Autumn 1998), 23-40.
- 30.*Examen*, 4.10 [65]
- 31.Iparraguirre, *Historia*, 2.284.
- 32.Cándido de Dalmases, *Ignatius of Loyola: Founder of the Jesuits*, translated by Jerome M. Aixala (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985 [1979]), 66-70.
- 33.MHSJ MI FN 2.241. A number of relevant sources are conveniently set out as an appendix to Pedro de Leturia, "Génesis de los Ejercicios de San Ignacio y su influjo en la fundación de la Compañía de Jesús", in *Estudios ignacianos*, 2 vols., edited by Ignacio Iparraguirre (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1957), 2.3-55; here 52.
- 34.*Autobiography*, 99.2-3.
- 35.MHSJ MN 4.826 (Leturia, "Génesis", 51): *Post consummata studia, congeffit delibationes illas exercitorum primas, addidit multa, digessit omnia, dedit examinanda et iudicanda sedi apostolicae*.
- 36.Leturia, 'Génesis', 24.
- 37.José Calveras, "Estudios sobre la redacción de los textos latinos de los Ejercicios anteriores a la Vulgata", *Arvbi-vum historicum Societatis Jesu*, 31 (1962), 3-99, at 65, argues that elements in the *Versio prima* are written in a crude Latin style, and therefore antedate Ignatius's meeting with Favre.
- 38.Achille Gagliardi, *Commentarii seu Expanationes in Exercitia spiritualia Sancti Patris Ignatii de Loyola*, edited by Constantin van Aken (Brugge: Desclée, 1887 [1590?]), 48-49. The 1996 French translation (Paris: Desclée) does not include the final sentence quoted (p 69).
- 39.Ignatius to Teresa Rejadell, 18 June 1536 (MHSJ MI Epp 1.99-107), at 101, 105.

40. This analysis is influenced by Leo Bakker, *Freiheit und Erfahrung: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen über die Unterscheidung der Geister bei Ignatius von Loyola* (Würzburg: Echter, 1970), 33-65; and by Jules J. Toner, *Discerning God's Will: Ignatius of Loyola's Teaching on Christian Decision Making* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1991), 107-129. It is developed more fully in my *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 178-179, 263-265.
41. MHSJ MI FD 334.
42. Dominique Bertrand, *Un corps pour l'Esprit: Essai sur l'expérience communautaire selon les Constitutions de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Paris: ~~Dal~~ de Brouwer, 1974), 175-179.
43. *Constitutions*, Preamble [134.5].
44. Janet K. Ruffing, "Resurrection Faith in the Midst of Grief: Where Is the One I Love?", *The Way Supplement*, 99 (Winter 2000), 98-108, at 102-104, quoting from Diane Lynne Elder Clark, "Tearing the Veil: A Poetic Journey towards Holiness" (unpublished D. Min dissertation, St Stephen's College, Edmonton, Alberta).
45. MHSJ MI FN 1.307 (Leturia, "Génesis", 50).

