

THE EIGHTEENTH ANNOTATION AND THE EARLY DIRECTORIES

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IN THE giving of the Exercises, as in other fields of ministry currently under re-appraisal, return to the sources is both indispensable and potentially hazardous. The hazards — the real danger of absolutizing the past with the consequent neglect of new needs and possibilities — must be kept clearly in mind; the more so since unreflective literalism is an occupational temptation of practitioners of the Exercises. Nevertheless, the fact remains that we give the Exercises on the basis of a tradition. Behind us stand not only Ignatius's text but substantial evidence of the use and interpretation of the book in the first decades of jesuit history. Reflection on the past must therefore be expected to have something to contribute towards dealing with the questions we ask about the present. In the following review of approaches to the Exercises during the time of the Directories (1540-99), I want to look at two questions in particular. First, how far were the early Jesuits prepared to go in adapting the Exercises to individuals? And secondly, how far, if at all, did the early Jesuits work with the categories so familiar today of individual and group retreats, preached and personally directed retreats?

Any discussion of forms of the Exercises, whether in Ignatius's or any other age, must take as axiomatic the quite distinctive character of the 'full and integral' Exercises, and their privileged status as 'the first and most efficacious ministry of the Society' (Nadal). At the same time, it was a ministry which the early Jesuits exercised with a definite though not extreme restraint. The insistence of the *Constitutions* that the full Exercises should be given only to 'a few outstanding persons'¹ must be interpreted in the light of the thousand-odd known instances of the full Exercises in the lifetime of Ignatius.² Moreover, it is legitimate to suppose that Ignatius's cautious attitude was partly prompted by concern for his heavily taxed work-force and that he might have given the Exercises more freely than he did had there been time for 'every good enterprise'.³

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Nevertheless, practical considerations apart, Ignatius considered that the full Exercises called for education, maturity and more than common generosity, and that no benefit would accrue to individuals if making them became a fashion.

But in early jesuit usage, the term 'making the Exercises' had a fluidity that has since been lost. Modern distinctions between 'ignatian retreats' and the Exercises, between 'the thirty days' and 'adaptations' are absent from their terminology; and 'the Exercises' may refer either to the full Exercises or to the whole gamut of ways in which elements of the doctrine and methodology of Ignatius's book could be put to use. And when we ask who were the people who might make the Exercises in this wide sense, the answer we get from the Directories is impressively all-embracing. Virtually no age-group, no social or religious category, no level of spiritual or educational attainment, seems excluded on principle from the sometimes laboured classifications of the Directories. The humblest class of exercitant is the *rudis* — the person lacking intellectual subtlety, reflective capacity and quite possibly literacy.⁴ Proceeding up the scale we find mention of 'the slightly more gifted',⁵ the gifted who seek only to purge their conscience;⁶ people with both the mental and spiritual aptitude for the full Exercises but who have neither the time to make them nor a compelling need. In various forms the Exercises were given to ecclesiastics. Among laymen, 'people of rank', 'judges', 'those holding public office' are singled out for mention. Religious, especially 'novice-masters, superiors, baccalaureates and preachers' are particularly apt candidates 'since the fruit produced will not remain in them alone but will generally flow to others'.⁷ Suitably adapted, the Exercises might contribute to the catechesis of Jews, pagans and Protestants (Nadal). Confessors of schoolboys are recommended to give the Exercises to their charges by the fourth jesuit General, Everard Mercurian (with the interesting admonition that boys are more effectively moved by the thought of paradise than hell).⁸ And in view of the preponderance of masculine pronouns in jesuit sources it may be worth noting that the early jesuit ministry of the Exercises — like Ignatius's own ministry at Manresa — knew no limit of sex, though Ignatius stipulated that women should come to the church for their meditations.⁹

When we turn to the question of how the Exercises were 'adapted' to the variegated categories of people who made them, we must bear in mind that adaptation is essential to the methodology of the Exercises and not a concession permissible in some forms of retreat

while out of place in others. From the book of the Exercises as well as the Directories, it is clear that even in the full Exercises, personal criteria must to some extent determine the structure and content of the Exercises as actually made. In the Exercises, food and the use of penance are left entirely to the discretion and devotion of the individual, and one of the earliest Directories (derived from Ignatius's own directions) elaborates on this point. In the matter of food, the exercitant is to tell the server what he wants for the next meal; and 'if he asks for a chicken or a trifle' they are to be given.¹⁰ As for penance he is simply to be told what the Exercises say about them and given an instrument of penance if he asks for one.¹¹ Other modifications of régime are allowed for, which the text of the Exercises does not explicitly envisage. Thus, while silence is normally absolute, situations might arise in 'which the director or some mature and discreet person appointed by him might remain with the exercitant after dinner or supper for suitable recreation'.¹² Similarly, the server in charge of the exercitant's material needs might occasionally be a personal friend to whom, with the director's permission, he might 'open his heart'.¹³

More important, even in the full Exercises, the personal criterion must govern the very presentation of the ignatian material. Points are to be given in writing or dictated. If possible, the director should not come with these points ready-made, and while he should have studied his material beforehand he should come armed with the book.¹⁴ Indeed, the absence of the book — only afterwards, if at all, would the sixteenth-century exercitant get his hands on a copy — is one of the more striking differences between the procedures of Ignatius's time and ours. In the sixteenth century the book of the Exercises was regarded primarily as a director's guide, secondly as a devotional aid to those who had already made the Exercises, and not at all as a retreatant's manual.¹⁵ The material of the Exercises came in the form of a personal communication from a director who knew the Exercises and knew the exercitant.

But if adaptation belongs to the Exercises as such, it is carried to its furthest extent in the ministry of the Exercises in the wide sense, where we find evidence of a whole spectrum of devotional activity, all derived from the book of the Exercises, all designated as 'making the Exercises' yet differing in various degrees from the full Exercises. First, and cutting across other variations, there is the distinction of situation corresponding to the nineteenth and twentieth annotations. The ideal conditions, certainly, were held to be those available in a

jesuit college or novitiate: silence, privacy, freedom from immediate concerns. On the other hand a sizeable proportion of those who made the Exercises did so at home. The régime they followed was such as to demand real commitment: an hour to an hour and a half of daily meditation and fidelity to such observances as the director should judge suitable;¹⁶ but all this was a far cry from the twentieth annotation. Yet it was one of the ways the Directories envisage the full Exercises being made.

Secondly, variations of personal capacity and opportunity lead to retreats of varying lengths and to widely differing programmes of prayer. On the question of length, we find references in the Directories to retreats of eight days,¹⁷ eight to ten days,¹⁸ ten to twelve days,¹⁹ fifteen days or more.²⁰ Similarly, individual needs must determine the use of time during retreat, a point developed at some length by the German Paul Hoffaeus whose *Instructiones Magistro Exercitantium* (c. 1575-80) contain detailed information on the kinds of *horaria* that sixteenth-century exercitants might be required to follow in the course of a 'closed retreat'. Of those with scant capacity for sustained prayer he demands two periods of half an hour only, in addition to which the programme included repetition of the morning prayer with the director; instruction on christian doctrine, the rosary and the manner of hearing mass; attendance at three masses at intervals during the morning and vespers in the evening; reading, writing, manual work.²¹ The 'more capable' were to make two hours of prayer.²² For every other category of retreatant up to those making the Exercises in their entirety Hoffaeus allows individuals to adopt the number of hours of prayer they wish (*de horis transigendum est quot velint*),²³ with the cautious proviso that german layfolk (*externi germani*) should not usually exceed three hours.²⁴ He also proposes a way of covering the full programme of the Exercises on the basis of three hours prayer a day.²⁵

Thirdly, individual variety is reflected in the variety of content that we find included under the Exercises in the wide sense. This meant in practice that for many, perhaps the majority, of those who made the Exercises, the basic stress was on the laying of foundations. Repeatedly the Directories emphasize what is spelt out in the eighteenth annotation: the first week meditations, the examens, the first method of prayer, basic moral instruction, preparation for a regular sacramental life, in short the whole programme of practical asceticism which the early Jesuits saw as the pre-condition for progress. Such was the programme to which Faber and Laynez

introduced the townsfolk of Parma in 1540, and which Ignatius commends to jesuit superiors in a circular letter in 1554:

About the Spiritual Exercises our father has commissioned me to say there should be a record in every group of what you thought right to adopt with men and also women (but let the women come to the church to make the Exercises). He means the Exercises of the First Week, leaving them some method of praying according to their capacity, and this is not meant to be with any restriction of persons, provided they take a few hours in the day for that effect. In this way, the utility of the Exercises can be extended to many, up to the General Confession and some method of prayer as has been said'.²⁶

But while the early Jesuits had their feet on the ground and did not believe in teaching people to run before they could walk, it would be false to assume that the contents of the later exercises were played down in the case of those not making the full course. The popular ministry of the Exercises included the meditation on the life of Christ. Mercurian proposes meditation on the mysteries of the rosary for the *rudes et illiterati*, while the infancy and passion gospels figure in his programme for schoolboys.²⁷ The *Contemplatio ad amorem*, whose precise significance in the Exercises is variously interpreted, is included by Hoffaeus in his recommendations for 'those wishing to purge their consciences by a general confession'.²⁸ And although material relevant to the election is to be used sparingly outside the thirty days, even this could be given to people willing to devote at least fifteen days to the Exercises.²⁹ So while the first week was specially suitable for the ordinary Christian, the evidence of the Directories forbids us to divide the ministry of the Exercises into a simple division between first week and thirty days. They suggest rather that the potential of the Exercises to meet the needs of individuals could be realized only if the practice of the Exercises ranged across the multiple gradations of a spectrum.

The Exercises, whatever their form, were 'personal', then, in the sense that they consisted in a programme and content adapted to the needs and circumstances of the individual. Furthermore, it is beyond question that they were normally personal in the sense that they were conducted on a person-to-person basis and that making the Exercises in a group was regarded by the early Jesuits as a *pis aller* to be avoided if possible. From the practical viewpoint, of course, this has obvious disadvantages, and the practical merits of the group were recognized from the beginning. Ignatius conceded

that a convent community which wanted to make the Exercises *might* do them as a group, but he goes on to say that in that event 'they would certainly receive less fruit'.³⁰ By the time of Acquaviva's generalate, we find a novice master, pressured by numbers, gathering his charges together for points and common reflection; the experiment was crushed by Acquaviva on the grounds that the Exercises must be conducted on the basis of the 'agitations in the exercitant's soul'.³¹ Hoffaeus envisages the possibility of retreats where points might be given in common and a copy posted on the notice board — but again such measures were to be adopted only under force of circumstances.³² The general principle, however, is clear. Whatever the exceptions might have been — and there seems no coercive evidence that in Ignatius's lifetime the Exercises were ever given except person-to-person — the normal basis on which the Exercises were made was the personal relationship between 'the one who gives' and 'the one who makes'.

As far as the full Exercises are concerned, this claim obviously poses no difficulty. The Exercises were given on a sufficiently limited scale for personal direction to fall within the scope of jesuit resources. How in terms of sheer human possibility could the Exercises have been given one-to-one in every case, even in situations, as at Parma, when they were given to whole neighbourhoods? The answer lies in the principle that not only exercitants but also givers of the Exercises fall into many 'grades' and hence it will often be a sufficient qualification for giving the Exercises simply to have made them oneself. A key figure in the early history of the Exercises is the neophyte retreat giver. Sometimes he might be a jesuit novice; giving the Exercises under the guidance of an experienced practitioner in cases 'where less is risked'.³³ Sometimes he might be a religious — indeed the effects of the Exercises on religious communities appear to have been achieved largely by religious giving the Exercises to one another. He might be a parish priest passing on the Exercises to his 'subjects', or he might be a lay person, like the schoolmasters whom Faber describes as giving the Exercises to their apter pupils,³⁴ or a certain Julia Zerbini, confined to her bed by continual sickness, 'who had discovered the sweetness of the Exercises and began imparting them to the ladies who visited her'.³⁵ It was at Parma, where hundreds are reported to have made the Exercises at a single time, that the principle of the neophyte director was exploited to the utmost. The occasion was clearly something of a *tour de force* and it seemed natural to a later generation

to suppose that what happened was on the lines of the mission-type retreats pioneered a century later in Brittany. In fact what happened was a massive enlistment of local resources:

The Exercises grow from day to day. Many of those who have made them give them to others, one to ten another to fourteen. And so as soon as one nestful is completed another begins, so we see our children's children to the third and fourth generation. And altogether there is such a change in the life and customs of all, that it is something to praise God for.³⁶

Clearly, we are not dealing here with direction in the sense in which the term is to be understood of Ignatius or Faber. Indeed, 'direction' would be too inflated a term to use of a role which consisted presumably of the simplest kind of exposition. Neither, of course, were the Exercises as given to all-comers remotely comparable to the full Exercises which Ignatius and the early Jesuits refused to popularize. Nevertheless the evidence leaves no doubt of their profound conviction that popular Exercises were a possibility, that there was something in the Exercises that given a little time and prayer could be trusted to work powerfully in the lives of ordinary people. They believed, too, that ordinary people could not only grasp this 'something' but pass it on.

The earliest, most exhaustive Directory, that of Juan Polanco, Ignatius's secretary, begins by asking what kind of people will make suitable exercitants. He lists four classes of men who are carefully and successively identified in annotations 18, 19 and 20. The principle 'the Spiritual Exercises must be adapted to the disposition of the persons who wish to make them, according to their age, education and talent', remains paramount. If the desire were there, the opportunity, ideally, would be found to give the individual person *some* exercises, even if these are on the light side (*leves*), even if what is achieved is no more than 'a plan of confessing more frequently than he has been used to': always, however, safeguarding the capacity of the individual 'who must never be given anything that he cannot readily cope with'.

NOTES

¹ *Constitutions*, 409.

² Iparraguirre, Ignacio, S.J.: *Práctica de los Ejercicios de san Ignacio de Loyola en vida de su autor* (Bilbao/Rome, 1946), Appendix 1.

³ 'In the end you act. Your reverence must take into account the time you have, and your occupations, and the fruit of service to God, always putting in the first place the good which is

greatest, most obligatory, and most appropriate to your own office and those entrusted to you, since it is impossible to take up all good enterprises'. Letter of Ignatius to a Jesuit engaged in giving the Exercises individually to members of a convent community. *Ep Ig*, ix, 220. Quoted in de Guibert: *The Jesuits, their spiritual doctrine and practice* (Chicago, 1964), p 125.

⁴ *MHSJ* 76, p 220.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 76, p 221.

⁷ 1599 Directory, ch ix, *MHSJ* 76, p 613. Translated in Longridge, W. H.: *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola*, 5th ed. (London, 1955), p 293.

⁸ *MHSJ* 76, pp. 254-55.

⁹ On the subject of women exercitants, the 1599 Directory contains the following sagacious paragraph: 'The same method should be followed with them as with persons of little education, unless one or other among them should be of such good judgment and capacity for spiritual things, and should have so much leisure at home as shall enable her to make all the Exercises fully, or the greater part requires that women should come to our Church to receive the meditations, and every caution should be taken that there may be no room for any suspicion or scandal. For which reason it may be best that the meditations should not be given in writing, but by word of mouth, lest men should think that some of them were letters. But if writing must be used, let it be done with great discretion'. *MHSJ* 76, p 616. Translated Longridge, *op. cit.*, p 295.

¹⁰ *MHSJ* 76, p 79. Translated in *Autograph Directories of St Ignatius Loyola*, Program to adapt the Spiritual Exercises (New Jersey), p 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 80.

¹² 1599 Directory, ch vi, *MHSJ* 76, p 603. Translated Longridge, *op. cit.*, p 288.

¹³ *Ibid.*, ch iv, *MHSJ* 76, p 595. Longridge, *op. cit.*, p 284.

¹⁴ *MHSJ* 76, pp 74-75. Translated in *Autograph Directories of St Ignatius Loyola*, p 9.

¹⁵ In 1555, Ignatius wrote to a friend who had requested a copy of the book of the Exercises: 'I am sending you a book of the Exercises, that it may be useful to you. . . . The fact is that the force and energy of the Exercises consists in practice and activity, as their very name makes clear; and yet I did not find myself able to refuse your request. However, if possible, the book should be given only after the Exercises have been made'. *Ep Ig*, ix, 701. Cf Ganss, George E., S.J.: 'The authentic Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius: some facts of history and terminology', in *Studies in the spirituality of Jesuits* (November 1969), vol 1, no 2, p 12.

¹⁶ Exx 19; *MHSJ* 76, p 234.

¹⁷ *MHSJ* 76, p 137.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 281.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 224.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p 137.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp 230-33.

²² *Ibid.*, p 220.

²³ *Ibid.*, p 220.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p 224.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 235-40.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p 106.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 249, 255.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p 221.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p 224.

³⁰ Letter of Ignatius, cf n 3 above.

³¹ Hugh, G. A., S.J.: 'The Exercises for Individuals and for Groups', Program to adapt the Spiritual Exercises, p 133.

³² *MHSJ* 76, p 230.

³³ *Constitutions*, 408-9.

³⁴ Hugh, *op. cit.*, p 144.

³⁵ Hugh, *op. cit.*, p 140.

³⁶ Letter of Laynez, cf Hugh, *op. cit.*, p 141.