

The SPIRITUAL EXERCISES
of SAINT IGNATIUS
or MANRESA

Nihil Obstat

Remigius Lafort, D.D.

Censor

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The SPIRITUAL EXERCISES
of SAINT IGNATIUS
or MANRESA

SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Explained Step-by-Step for Independent Use

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.



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*For what doth it profit a man, if he gain the
whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?
Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?
—Matthew 16:26*

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PREFACE

THE name of “SPIRITUAL EXERCISES” indicates that the faithful who come to the school of St. Ignatius to make a retreat are called upon to use the faculties of their understanding and their heart. They come to act for themselves, not to see another act; in acting, they come to exert themselves, not to give themselves up to barren contemplation; they come to exercise, not their body and its organs, but their soul and its chief powers—the understanding and the will.

The object of this undertaking, altogether interior and practical as it is, is clearly pointed out by the title even of the book.¹ Nothing vague, idle, or purely speculative, is to occupy man in the retreat. He comes to learn to conquer himself; to free himself from evil passions; to reform the disorder, great or little, of his past life, and to regulate it for the future by a plan conformable to the Divine will. Can man, during his short sojourn on earth—become, too, by baptism a Christian, the disciple and subject of Jesus Christ—can he propose to himself an end more noble, more holy, more glorifying to his Creator?

To attain so high an end, many obstacles must be overcome and many means made use of. Solitude; silence; cessation of ordinary business and study; all reading foreign to the Exercises; the setting aside of

1. “Spiritual Exercises; chosen with a view to lead Man to conquer himself, to disengage himself from the fatal influence of evil affections, and, with his heart thus set free, to trace out for himself the plan of a truly Christian life.”

all preoccupation as to the future and all thoughts (although pious) that are not in harmony with the work of each day; recollection of the senses; restraint of the eyes and the obscurity that favors it; confession of sins, which puts an end to remorse and calms disquiet; finally, wise counsels, which prevent too much effervescence, exaltation, or fatigue, which point out illusions, arouse languor, moderate indiscreet fervor. Such are the principal precautions taken to overcome the obstacles that might injure this work of reform.

The natural means employed, according to the degree of moral and physical strength of each one, are examination of conscience; meditation; the study, or rather the contemplation, of Jesus Christ; reading of passages chosen from the holy Gospel and from *Imitation of Christ*; penance; and recourse to the advice of a director.

Finally, by prayer, by mortification, by receiving the holy Sacraments of penance and the Eucharist, the assistance of God infinitely good is sought, in order to cooperate with the efforts of His faithful creature.

Thus, all obstacles being set aside, man employs all his resources in reforming himself, and God adds to His goodwill the succors of His grace and the cooperation of His infinite power.

The object of retreat is sublime. The means it employs are powerful, but are they equally certain, and are they chosen with wise discretion? Do they not excite in man, with danger to his head or his heart, sentiments more factitious than natural, constrained rather than spontaneous? St. Ignatius has foreseen this objection. "Let the nature, the length, the number of the exercises, be always suited," he says, "to the age, the capacity, the health, the good-will of the person in retreat; let no one be burdened; let each one do only what he can with profit, what he himself desires in the plenitude of his will, without ever going beyond his strength or the grace of the moment, without ever passing the limits fixed for him by a prudent director enlightened by experience."

Moreover, we have only to define the principal exercises we have named, to show evidently that they are all as prudent and discreet as they are powerful and efficacious. These definitions will assist the reader

in forming for himself a more exact idea of them, one that will become more readily practical

1. *Examination*. When the attentive soul looks in upon itself, in order to compare its thoughts, its words and its actions with the commandments of God and the Church, to sigh over the opposition that it finds between its conduct and the Divine law, this exercise is called “Examination” and is either general or particular, according as it refers to all the faults committed, or to only one kind, *quotidien*, or that which is made every day, or that which is preparatory to ordinary or extraordinary confession. St. Ignatius recommends this exercise above all others, as without doubt the most conducive to a knowledge and reform of ourselves, the most favorable to reflection and the least likely to lead to exaltation and enthusiasm. He wishes this examination to be made with exactness and frequently but without exaggeration or scruple.

The methods that St. Ignatius traces out for each of these examinations are remarkable for their simplicity and efficacy. The following is for the daily general examination: after you have recollected yourself, you will thank God for the graces He has bestowed on you during the day; you will then beg of Him light to know your ingratitude and grace to detest it. Then you will think over the different hours or the different occupations of the day, examining your thoughts, words, actions, or omissions. After having seen the number of your faults, you must repent of them by exciting yourself to sincere sorrow; and, finally, you will make a firm resolution to avoid them for the future.

To arrive with certainty at amendment of life and the correction of our faults, the “Particular Examen” is still more useful. It goes direct to the predominant sin or vice of our character; in order to vanquish its enemies, it begins by isolating them and attacks them one by one. The method of proceeding is this. Each morning, you fix the exact point to be arrived at in this single combat. Every time during the day that you remark one of those faults that you wish to avoid above all others, you

must offer to God some testimony of your repentance and to yourself some means of recalling your fault (e.g., by placing your hand on your heart, in such a way that this sign cannot be remarked by others). After noon and at night you will seek in your conscience the number of your failures.² You must note the result of this inquiry and compare your progress of the day with that of the day before, that of the week with the preceding week, being careful that your faults diminish each day. Thus, you will bestow the same care in extirpating your faults and cultivating the opposite virtues that the merchant does in calculating his receipts and expenses; the interest that a sick person takes in being informed of the progress of his cure or sickness; the constancy and vigilance of the general of an army, who is always well informed of the maneuvers and movements of the enemy.

Finally, with regard to an *examination preparatory to confession*, you may make use of a form. St. Ignatius gives a very abridged one, preferring to leave the director to add what is suitable to the capacity and disposition of each one, rather than to trace out himself a catalogue of sins, necessarily inapplicable to many. You may also, according to the method called “The First Manner of Praying,” take the commandments of God and the Church and the principal duties of your state and on each one ask yourself the following questions: “What does this commandment or this duty prescribe? In what have I been unfaithful?” Before going from one to the other, make an act of contrition; to offer some satisfaction to God and to obtain the grace of being more faithful henceforward, recite a short prayer. By this means your examination of conscience has the first of those qualities it ought always to have—it has *sorrow*; it comprises, moreover, meditation and instruction. Hence “The First Manner of Praying” should be taught to all and practiced even when we are not preparing for confession.

2. *Meditation.* When the memory has recalled to the soul the recollection of some dogmatical or moral truth, when the understanding

2. See p. 197.

exerts itself to penetrate it and the will to submit to it, attach and devote itself to it, we then say that we meditate. Meditation is also called the “Exercise of the Three Powers of the Soul.”

The subject of the meditation should be considered beforehand and divided into two or three points that fix the memory, containing each one some circumstance worthy of attention. From the commencement of the exercise, the person in retreat must occupy his memory, his imagination, his will, with the subject of the mystery to be meditated on. This beginning is called the “prelude.” The memory supplies the two or three points prepared; the imagination forms a sort of picture of them, if it can do so without constraint and without dwelling on it too long; the heart asks in a fervent prayer that it may know and love. The whole is done in the presence of Jesus Christ, who sees us, and in a respectful attitude that renders to Him at once the homage of our souls and of our bodies.

The soul, having thus seized the entire subject, has only to be penetrated and nourished by it. Reflections, colloquies (or conversations with God) and affections are the necessary results of the remembrance and the attentive consideration of the objects. There the soul finds light, unction, a feeling of the Divine presence or of the Divine will; there it rests without being anxious about proceeding farther. The body also is kept in the attitude that our experience has shown to be most favorable to recollection. This exercise, which lasts an hour, being finished, the person in retreat must employ another quarter of an hour in examining how he has conducted himself during the hour he has conversed with the Lord, giving Him thanks for any success and sighing at His feet for whatever negligences he has been guilty of.

This method, without comparing it with others, is incontestably a simple, prudent and practical one. There is in it nothing subtle, embarrassing, or minute. The flight of the soul is directed without being shackled; the means that unite the soul to God are all employed in it but only in accordance with the end to be attained. We find in it all that is useful and nothing superfluous.

3. *Contemplation*. In this age, so little contemplative, we must define exactly what is meant by contemplation.

We contemplate rather than meditate when, after the memory has recalled the whole, or some detail, of the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the soul, in a state of profound recollection, employs itself in seeing, hearing, considering the different circumstances of the mystery, for the purpose of being instructed, edified and moved by it. This contemplation takes the name of “Application of the Senses” when the soul nourishes itself at leisure, and without the employment of the understanding, on all that the mystery offers to it to see, to hear, to taste, to feel, almost as if the fact present to the imagination passed before the eyes and affected all the bodily senses.

Thus, in meditation, it is the *understanding* that is exerted on an abstract truth, of which it seeks to be convinced; in *contemplation*, it is the soul that applies itself to the Incarnate Truth, which represents to itself the practical teachings of the Man-God, which applies itself to see, to hear, the Word made flesh—to “*contemplate*” Him; such is the word that has been chosen to express these acts. Let us show, in a few words, that nothing is more conformable to the Divine will, to the practice of the Church and of the Saints, that nothing is more salutary to souls, than this contemplative view of Jesus Christ.

Why did the Son of God become man? To speak to our senses, to move us, to instruct us, by the great spectacles of the manger, of Thabor, and of Calvary; by this wonderful sight to fix our imaginations, to attach our hearts, while at the same time He redeems us by the bloody sacrifice of His death. “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see; blessed are the ears that hear what you hear,” said the Saviour to His disciples; “for I say to you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see these things, and have not seen them” (*Luke* 10:23–24). But if the just themselves, who lived before the Incarnation of the Word, were deprived of this powerful help, all those who are called to believe in the Gospel to the end of time ought to find their profit in it. Jesus Christ willed that the recital of His actions, the summary of His discourses, should be

written by the inspiration of His Spirit and promulgated through the entire world; He willed that all eyes should be turned toward Him as toward the true brazen serpent, the sight of which cures all the stings of the infernal serpent. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep and He wishes His sheep to know Him. Supreme High-Priest, He ordered His Apostles to preach His Gospel to every creature, promising life to those who believed in His words and threatening with eternal death those who refused to believe in them.

Around the altar where He dwells, inaccessible to our senses, the Church, His spouse, never ceases to represent the mysteries of His life, death and resurrection. The complete representation of all His mortal life, including the time that prepared His coming, the mission of the Holy Ghost, which consummated the work, and the glorification of the Saints who have been justified by His merits, occupies the course of the year. The first Sunday of Advent, the Church cries out, "Jesus Christ our King is about to appear; come, let us adore Him." At the great solemnities of Christmas, "Christ is born for us; come, let us adore Him." At Easter, "The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia."

All the offices and rites of the Church speak in the same tone, tend to the same end. Our holy Mother, by her songs, joyful or sorrowful, by the bright or the sad color of her ornaments, by the variety and beauty of her ceremonies, by the decoration of her temples and altars, by the use she makes in her cathedrals of painting, sculpture, music, eloquence, poetry—labors conformably to the intentions of our heavenly Father in uniting us by all our powers and faculties to the Word incarnate, crucified and risen for us. She would, if possible, make all her children, like the Apostles, hearers of His word and witnesses of His miracles; she wishes that each one of us should be able to say with the beloved disciple, "That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have heard, and our hands have handled, this is what we believe and preach unto you of the Word of Life" (*1 John* 1:1).

This idea of the Church has been fully understood by the Saints. The Fathers, in their homilies, most frequently content themselves by

quoting and explaining some words of the Gospel; religious orders have taken for statutes and rules the counsels or example of Jesus Christ; true reformers sent by Heaven to revive in certain provinces, or among certain classes of the Church, the true spirit that ought always to animate it, what have they done? St. Francis, in recalling by his example evangelical poverty and simplicity; St. Dominic, by preaching the Rosary; St. Ignatius, by writing the Exercises; the Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice, by establishing the “Way of the Cross”; Père de la Colombière by spreading everywhere the devotion of the Sacred Heart, aimed at nothing else than bringing those souls nearer to Jesus Christ who were losing sight of Him. And have not the greatest Saints in all ages been those who by constant contemplation have the best studied and the most faithfully reproduced Jesus Christ in themselves? Are not those predestined to heaven, says the Apostle, at the same time predestined to be conformable to the Divine model that the Father has given us in His Son? (*Rom.* 8:29).

It was doubtless these considerations, this design of God and His Church, that inspired St. Ignatius in the methods he has traced out for *contemplation, application of the senses, composition of place*, and so on. We must beware of considering as curious or unnecessary the care that has been manifested by the Three Divine Persons in the circumstances of the Incarnation of the Word and the Church in the structure and the details of her Liturgy.

But St. Ignatius does not wish his disciples to exercise themselves merely in contemplating Jesus Christ as the Teacher, the Model, the Saviour of all; he incessantly reminds them that they must study Him above all as *their* teacher, *their* model, *their* Saviour. He constantly inculcates a truth too much forgotten among Christians, yet one of the sweetest to the heart and the most efficacious for the reform of our lives, namely, that Jesus Christ said, did and suffered for each one of us in particular what He said, did and suffered for the whole human race.

Yes, the Man-God, in the immensity of His intelligence and His love, had present in His thoughts and in His heart each man, no less

than the universal family of Adam; what He did for all He did for each one; and there is not any sinner on earth who may not say with as much truth as the Apostle, "Jesus Christ loved me, and gave Himself for me" (*Gal. 2:20*). Yes, for *me* as if I was the only sinner among men; yes, for me, not less than for all. Would the sun light me more if I were the only one to receive his rays? So, if I had been the only sinner in the universe, the Divine Sun of justice would not have shed upon me less light or less warmth from His bosom. When I receive Jesus Christ at the holy table with a multitude of other faithful, do I not receive Jesus Christ as entirely as if I were the only one in all the universe admitted to communion? So in the manger; on the mountain, where He proclaimed the eight beatitudes; on the cross, where He consummated His sacrifice; on the altar, where He remains night and day, Jesus Christ is my whole salvation and my life: each of His words is said for me and each of His actions and His sufferings is for me and for my benefit. This principle, so productive of the fruit of salvation, is constantly recalled by St. Ignatius. He wishes this consideration to serve as a prelude to all the Exercises: "I will see from the beginning Jesus Christ with His eyes fixed on me. I will ask of Him the grace to understand with what intention, with what view, on what condition, He became man, poor, obedient, humble, for me; what were His thoughts, His wishes, in dying for me, in rising again for me."

This solemn subject, which can be but touched upon in a preface, deserves profound study. We add yet another reflection. Before God, the intervals of time and place are nothing. His eternity is all time and His immensity all place. For God, nothing has been, all is; nothing is out of Him, all is in Him. From this point of view, which is that of the Christian occupied in contemplating his Saviour, we have not to go back eighteen centuries to make the journey of the Holy Land, in order to find ourselves at Bethlehem or at Calvary. Bethlehem, Calvary, are before our eyes, and Jesus Our Saviour is born there, dies there today, even this very moment. Thus it is for our instruction, for the redemption and salvation of our own souls, that the Man-God now comes into the world, now

suffers, now dies. This is the foundation of contemplation; this is what should make it not only easy and delightful but above all efficacious and useful. And this thought we have seen is that of God, of Jesus Christ, of the Church. Since Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life; since each one of His words is a center of light, each of His actions a precept or a counsel; since to know Him is the end of a Christian and, as the Apostle says, "life eternal," we cannot place too much value on all that brings us nearer to Him and unites the faithful soul to Him.

The means used by St. Ignatius to lead man to an amendment of his life, which are, above all, examination of conscience, meditation and the contemplation of Jesus Christ, being thus defined and appreciated, either in themselves or in the method assigned to each one in the book of Exercises, we must now consider the disposition of these means or the progress and method of the "Exercises" considered as a whole.

St. Ignatius supposes the Christian who presents himself at the entrance of the course to be of sound reason, intelligent, animated by a courageous will, master of his time and of his future, but yet a sinner; and of this sinner he proposes to make a saint, and a great saint, forever. The enterprise is great, it is difficult; it is the grandest work that apostolic zeal can propose to itself; it is the work of Jesus Christ Himself. But how can man, whom Jesus Christ has made His cooperator in the work of the salvation of souls, unite to the Divine action the most intelligent and efficacious means? Such is the problem that the author of the Exercises proposed to himself and the solution of which the Lord Himself revealed to him, for there is in the method something more than a mere masterpiece of human genius; the finger of God is there.

In order to change, by the assistance of Divine grace, a sinner into a saint, there is first the empire of evil to be destroyed in the heart, then, the reign of good to be established. This work once done, would not be durable if not consolidated by foresight and avoidance of the obstacles that otherwise would react on this sudden revolution. Finally, it would not be complete if, begun by the imperfect but necessary sentiment of fear, it were not crowned by hope and love.

In another point of view, we may say that the sinner, to become a saint, must first have learned to sin no more, then to act and to suffer as a true disciple of Jesus Christ and finally, that he must have, by love, an earnest of eternal rest and joy.

Hence the series of operations that St. Ignatius has distributed into four weeks, which comprise each an indefinite number of days, corresponding to what the ancients called the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive ways.

The first week, which is principally addressed to the reason, is employed in destroying the reign of sin, or in reforming all that may be disorderly in the affections and the conduct.

Next, the faith of the Christian is called to the aid of the reason of man; Jesus Christ presents Himself as the Saviour from sin and as the model of the repentant sinner. Jesus Christ passed through the way of the commandments, or *common* life, then through the *perfect* life, or the way of counsels. Studied successively in these two states, He teaches us to act as a Christian, and as a perfect Christian. He becomes, as it were, the mold wherein the penitent takes the exterior and interior form of the true disciple of Jesus Christ; He is, as it were, the rule upon which henceforward his life will be ordered.

But the world, the flesh and the devil will terribly persecute the neophyte, if he persist in his intention. St. Ignatius, therefore, during the third week, applies himself to forearm him on all sides against his enemies, visible and invisible.

Jesus Christ, on the eve of His death, has provided for him “a table,” whence, according to the Psalmist, he will draw strength against all his enemies (*Ps.* 22:27). In His discourse after the Last Supper, the Son of God fortifies him by the strongest encouragements and the most sublime promises; then, suffering in soul and body, from His agony in the Garden of Olives until His death on the cross, He teaches him to undergo, without desisting from his resolution, weariness, fear, sadness, humiliation, suffering, death. The work of the second week is not only continued, it is, above all, corroborated, confirmed.

Finally, the true Christian is called from combat to victory, from the tomb to resurrection, from earth to heaven, from fear and hope to love. He exercises himself also, but in a sweeter manner—in loving; it is Jesus Christ risen that he contemplates, and his apparitions bring him each day an increase of peace. The hope of eternal good rouses love in his heart; and this love, true, efficacious, consummated by an entire abandonment of himself into the hands of God, who has given Himself to him, tends “to transform” him into the image of Jesus Christ, the Divine object of his holy love.

The first week, intended for the purification of the soul, begins by “the end of man,” and ends by general confession and receiving the Eucharist. The second is occupied entirely in rendering the faithful like to Jesus; it begins with the final end of the Christian, or the reign of Christ, and concludes by the choice of a state of life, or a plan of amendment in the state already chosen. The third is employed in continuing and confirming the work of the two first. Its special fruit should be resignation to sufferings and the endeavor to find strength against them in the Eucharist. The fourth week should lead the Christian, regenerated and confirmed in grace, to perfect love; it ends by the irrevocable donation of ourselves to Jesus Christ.

When first entering into retreat, the sinner calls down upon himself the grace that flows from the wounds of Jesus Christ; he says incessantly, *Anima Christi, sanctifica me!* Become just, and strengthened in justice by this Divine grace, he says to Him at the end of the last week, “Since Thou hast given Thyself entirely to me, let me now belong wholly to Thee: take me; keep me!” *Suscipe, Domine, universam meam libertatem!* If he says at first to Jesus Christ, as Jesus Christ Himself said to His Father, “All Thine is mine”; he adds at the end, “All that is mine is Thine!” The gift is reciprocal, the exchange perfect, the transformation is complete.

While the disciple thus advances by this way, which leads from hell to heaven, St. Ignatius conducts him from the more simple and easy to what appears at first the more unusual and more arduous. First, he

proposed to him only considerations entirely rational, without prescribing either time or method for making them, without even giving them that name of meditation that alarms inexperience. Thus, he leads him to desire and willingly receive the methods of examination and meditation indicated above. The “Triple Sin,” or the history of the fallen angels, of Adam cast out of Paradise, of man damned for his personal sin, shows, by the most natural and the easiest application of all, how meditation is the exercise of the three powers of the soul and what is the use of the preludes and the colloquies. The subject of Hell, which soon follows and which ought to speak so strongly to the imagination, serves as a model of the “Application of the Senses.” As soon as Our Lord presents Himself, it is by contemplation that we apply ourselves to studying Him as our model. What a first exercise had discovered to us, frequent repetitions should impress more deeply on the soul. During the third and fourth weeks, certain views of faith, or considerations, as touching as they are practical, are proposed for additional points of contemplation.

In the work of each week, the faithful is directed by advice and rules that ought to actuate, direct and, at need, moderate his zeal. Among the multitude of lessons that mystic theology might give him, and with which an inexperienced person would not have failed to saturate him, St. Ignatius, with a rare sobriety, a profound wisdom, an exquisite discernment, has chosen those most suitable for his purpose. During the first week, he instructs in examination of conscience, meditation, discernment of different spirits, which solicit to good or evil a soul yet in sin or just emerging from it; he teaches the necessity and the practice of penance; he teaches us to know and to avoid scruples; he shows the advantages and the facility of making a good general confession.

During the second week, he continues to enlighten the steps of the person in retreat by rules for the discernment of spirits. He renders contemplation easy to him and directs him in the choice of a state, if he be in a position to choose one; and if his state is already fixed, he teaches him to reform it, in the detail of his conduct, on the model of Jesus Christ. If he has wealth to distribute, he recalls to him the rules of the Gospel.

The third week is best chosen to teach the disciple of Jesus Christ, attentive in contemplating His sufferings, the manner of conforming to his Divine model as to the care to be given to the body, especially in his meals. For the rest, the nearer the person in retreat draws to the end, the more he acquires experience and the less he requires to have this sort of rules multiplied for his instruction. St. Ignatius, though giving advice suitable to the fourth week and, in general, to paschal time, feast days, to the happy position of a soul that Jesus Christ fills with His peace and inebriates with His joy, does not assign any special study for this time of happiness.

The different manners of praying, the meditations on the life of Our Saviour, the observations on scruples, on alms, the rules of orthodox faith, of discernment of spirits, are, as a body of reserve, placed near this army ranged for battle, which we have just passed in review. The director, according to the need of the person in retreat, presents to him as a defense in his combat, as a torch on his path, such a rule, such a meditation, such a method of conversing familiarly with God, as he judges best. The first manner of praying may be usefully taught to all; the second and third assist in making vocal prayer intelligently and experimentally. The meditations, of which St. Ignatius only indicates the principal points, referring to the Gospel for the developments, are made after the model traced at the beginning of each week. The rules of orthodox faith, written at the time when the pretended reform raised its standard against the Church, are not less useful to meditate on now than in former days. Nothing, again, can be more luminous, more profound, more practical, than these indications given by St. Ignatius for discerning the different spirits that act on ours, for the purpose either of saving or destroying us.

All these rules (whatever may be the modest name attached to them, such as “annotations or additions”) are all penetrated by the spirit of the Gospel, by the doctrine of the Church, the traditions of experience, the teachings of the highest philosophy, enlightened and directed by faith. This may be illustrated by a single example. At the end of the second week, we find the rule of “election.” Here is the summary of the rules so

deeply important in their object—"the choice of a state." God can only make His good pleasure known to us through our senses by an act of His omnipotence, or to our understanding by a manifestation of His Word, or to our Heart by an interior touch of His Spirit. The first voice is that heard by Matthew at his counter, by Paul cast to the earth on the road to Damascus. It has to be mentioned because the Lord sometimes employs it; but it is the farthest removed from the ordinary ways of Providence, and it would be presumption for us to wait for it to lead us to act. The third is the most frequently heard, and we learn to discern with certainty the movements that the Spirit of God impresses on the heart of His creature by consulting the rules for the discernment of spirits. Finally, the second is manifest when the understanding, free from all the influences of the heart, examines and sees by reflection, by the study of its aptitudes, by the comparison between such and such a way, that which in the present case is the most direct and the most certain, in order to arrive at the final end of every free being—salvation. After having discovered by this method (which may be called the *analytical*) the advantages of such or such a choice and the manifestation of the Divine will by such or such an interior voice, St. Ignatius wishes that, for greater certainty, another mode (which may be called the *synthetical*) should be employed. Thus, if they wish to put the decision at which they think they have arrived to the proof by the thought of approaching death, of the judgment of Jesus Christ, they ought to ask themselves, "Have I chosen this course solely with a view to the interests of my salvation? Should I counsel this choice to one of my friends who, in the same dispositions that I am, should ask my advice?" Moreover, we must pray before, during and after the deliberation; and the director is at hand, not to suggest or give the impulse but to smooth the way, set aside the obstacles, dissipate the illusions, recall the rules, lead us gently to observe them and applaud the choice made according to God's will.

Enlightened by lessons and advice equally wise, the course, for any person who is able to fulfill the conditions mentioned above, lasts for about thirty days. Each day he devotes four hours (not consecutive)

to meditation; almost every night he takes from his rest another hour for this purpose. This hour at night is so silent, so profoundly calm, so favorable to recollection, that those who during their retreat have devoted it to the first exercise, have praised the inspiration of St. Ignatius and have congratulated themselves on their courage. Two quarters of an hour, one in the middle of the day, the other before sleep, are given to examination of conscience. Some chapters of the *Imitation of Christ* the narratives of the Gospel that develop the subject of meditation, are nearly all the *reading*. He visits the church, assists at Mass; he may see his director every day. According to the needs of his soul, according to the mysteries meditated on, he practices more or less penance; surrounds himself with darkness, or enjoys the perfume of flowers and the serenity of the heavens. The number of days of each week is not fixed; each ends when its aim is attained. The first, for a sinner not submissive to grace, may be very long; for a soul already reconciled to God, it will be much shorter; but it must never be omitted, even in a retreat of eight or ten days. When the end of man has been deliberately considered, we find in the book of St. Ignatius meditations pointed out only for one day, with this remark, however: if the spiritual profit of the person requires it, let him continue to meditate on the consequences and the chastisements of sin. The second week, when its object is the choice of a state of life, has frequently to be prolonged. St. Ignatius has appointed meditations for it for 12 or 13 days, although it may not reach that term, or may continue longer. The third is only half as long as the second in its plan. The fourth, like the first, is left entirely to the discernment of the director.

In tracing out this great and perfectly arranged plan, St. Ignatius has never for a moment lost sight of the infirmity of man, of the variety of his resources and his wants and of the multiform action of grace in the heart. So, in opening this sublime course to elevated minds and generous hearts, in directing their efforts toward the highest perfection, in stimulating their emulation by the most noble motives, in making, in short, the best use of their capacity and strength, the author of the

“Exercises” has not forgotten the infinitely greater number of limited capacities and feeble wills. One of the first rules that this great man lays down for the director of a retreat is “that he adapt the exercises to the age, the capacity, the strength of the person about to perform them; that he never impose too heavy a burden on an unenlightened mind or a faint heart; that he never propose anything to any one which is not in proportion to his present strength and good-will.” Thus, a very few only of chosen ones will be allowed to go through the whole course of the exercises. Those of the first week, and the different manners of praying, will suit a great number of persons; but they may require to be modified even for them. It will suffice for many to be taught how to examine their consciences; to meditate half an hour every morning on the commandments of God or the capital sins; to confess and communicate every week and to practice the works of mercy. One who is able to do more, but is much occupied, may, if he can spare an hour and a half every day, receive from his director the developments of the subjects disposed in their natural order, as well as the corresponding rules and methods. Every day, when he returns home, he must devote an hour to meditation, returning the next day and the day after to the same subject, so as to supply by this double repetition the effect that the continuation of the exercises would have produced.

Thus St. Ignatius makes himself “all to all men”; he sacrifices to the utility of each the beauty and harmony of his plan; or, to express it better, his plan is to carry to the highest state of perfection those who are capable of it and yet to be useful to more limited minds and more imperfect wills. Magnificent as a whole, his book is precious in its smallest details. The approbation of the Holy See is remarkable in that it relates to every part as well as to the entire work. We will cite these remarkable words, which have far more authority than any praise of ours: “After having examined,” says Paul III in his Bull *Pastoralis Officii*, “these Exercises and Rules, and from the information and testimony of the examiners, we declare them full of piety and holiness, and that they are and will be very useful and advantageous to the edification and

profit of the faithful. We wish also, as is suitable, to take into consideration the abundant fruits that Ignatius and his companions constantly produce through the whole world by the assistance of these spiritual teachings. Therefore, by our apostolic authority, by the tenor of these presents, and of our certain knowledge, we approve, praise, and fortify by all the authority of this writing, these teachings and spiritual Exercises, considered in the whole and in each part which they contain; earnestly exhorting all the faithful of both sexes throughout the world, each and every one, to be instructed in so good a school, and to profit by such holy lessons.”

To this solemn approbation and confirmation the succeeding Pontiffs have added many spiritual graces in favor of those who perform the said exercises. Alexander VII, Benedict XIV and Gregory XVI have granted a plenary indulgence to all the faithful who during eight days, or at least during five days, perform the exercises of St. Ignatius under the direction of a Father of the Society of Jesus. After having cited the testimony of the sovereign Pontiffs, we have no need to quote those of the Saints and the great Doctors of the Church.

May this book be the means of making the teachings of the holy founder of the Society of Jesus better appreciated; may it, together with this Society—always combated by hell, always protected by its Divine head—conduce to the greater glory of God, to the honor of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the salvation of many souls!