Pierre Favre (1506–46) was the first of Ignatius’ companions to have stayed with him, and hence the second Jesuit. After the Society was founded in 1540, he was sent on mission to Germany, and in 1542 he began to keep a spiritual journal. He begins by recalling the events of his life, and notably his encounter with Ignatius in Paris. Though Pierre helped Ignatius with his studies, the roles of master and pupil were soon reversed:

As time passed he became my master in spiritual things and gave me a method of raising myself to a knowledge of the divine will and of myself. In the end we became one in desire and will and one in a firm resolve to take up that life we lead today – we, the present or future members of this Society of which I am unworthy.¹

This quotation expresses two important truths about the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. First, the common life of the Society of Jesus is closely connected to the experience of the Exercises. Favre and the other Jesuit companions share a “firm resolve to take up that life we lead today” – a resolve that proceeds from the goal of the Exercises: “a knowledge of the divine will and of myself.” For Ignatius, both the Exercises and the Society were key means through which he realized his life-project of “the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine.”² Jesuits became Jesuits through the Exercises – “most of the good people who are today in the Society have left the world to come to it by using this way.” Conversely, the Exercises were seen, right from the beginning, as the Society’s own characteristic ministry – “among the means which our Society uses, this one is very proper to her, and God has used it in large measure among countless souls.”³

Second, it is significant that Favre’s account evokes the text of the Exercises only secondarily and indirectly, while stressing far more the quite personal and particular process of growth that he undergoes at Ignatius’ hands. This passage of his journal tells us far more about
Favre himself than about what Ignatius had written. Typically expressive is the following paragraph:

Before that – I mean before having settled upon the course of my life through the help given me by God through In˜igo – I was always very unsure of myself and blown about by many winds: sometimes wishing to be married, sometimes to be a doctor, sometimes a lawyer, sometimes a lecturer, sometimes a professor of theology, sometimes a cleric without a degree – at times wishing to be a monk. I was being borne about previously by these winds, according as the greater or the lesser heavenly body was dominant, that is, according as one or other attraction reigned. Delivering me, as I have said, from these attractions by the consolations of his Spirit, our Lord led me to make a firm decision to become a priest completely dedicated to his service.⁴

Spiritual Exercises is not a book to be read; Ignatius is quite explicit that the person making the Exercises should not have the full text to hand, and not know what is coming (Exx. 11). Rather, Ignatius’ book is a collection of resources that “the one who gives to another the way and order of meditating and contemplating” (Exx. 2) should have in mind when seeking to help the particular individual who is undergoing the process. The fundamental principle is that they be applied to the dispositions of the person who wishes to receive them: “to each one it should be given in accord with however they might want to dispose themselves, so that there can be greater help and profit (según que se quisieren disponer, se debe de dar a cada uno, porque más se pueda ayudar y aprovechar)” (Exx. 18). When Ignatius writes about how the Exercises might help a potential Jesuit recruit, the stress is on the exercitant’s distinctive experience, shaped as it is by a particular history. The candidate is to be occupied in,

making spiritual exercises for one month or a little more or less; that is to say, in examining his consciousness, turning over his whole past life and making a general confession, meditating upon 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 person, as will be taught him in our Lord etc.⁵

Ignatius does not directly prescribe the use of his own book – he simply says “spiritual exercises.” The candidate’s personal history should somehow come into contact with the story of Christ, but always in a way that respects his personal capacities.
In what follows, I want first to explore how this sensitivity to God's ongoing action in human history informs Ignatius’ general approach to prayer and spiritual growth in *Spiritual Exercises*. Then I shall offer – in a disconnected fashion befitting the content – some basic information on key elements in Ignatius’ text. Finally, I shall present some reflections for historians on how the Ignatian Exercises have functioned in Jesuit life.

**IGNATIAN PRAYER**

Central to *Spiritual Exercises* is a particular approach to prayer around a Gospel text, illustrated most fully – and by way of example – in connection with the Incarnation and birth of Christ (*Exx. 101–17*). Ignatius begins with three preambles, or preludes. The first is the recall of the story:

The first Prelude is the narrative and it will be here how Our Lady went forth from Nazareth, about nine months with child, as can be piously meditated, seated on an ass, and accompanied by Joseph and a maid, taking an ox, to go to Bethlehem to pay the tribute which Caesar imposed on all those lands.

The jargon for the second is “composition of place”: a setting oneself within the scene. In the case of the birth of Christ:

   to see with the sight of the imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem; considering the length and the breadth, and whether such road is level or through valleys or over hills; likewise looking at the place or cave of the Nativity, how large, how small, how low, how high, and how it was prepared.

The third “prelude” is a prayer, “for what I want: it will be to ask for knowledge of the Lord from inside, Who for me has become human that I may more love and follow Him”.

After this prayer for knowledge, love, and dedication to service, there follow the three main “points.” Typically, an Ignatian contemplation has just three of them: you begin by focusing on what the scene looks like; then you consider what the characters are saying; finally, you ponder what the characters might be doing. After each point, you are expected to “reflect and draw profit.” In the contemplation on Christ’s birth, Ignatius spells the process out a little further – perhaps at the beginning he is a little clearer than he otherwise might be:

“I making myself a poor creature and a wretch of an unworthy slave, looking at them and serving them in their needs, with all possible
respect and reverence, as if I found myself present.” The prayer ends with a “colloquy,” an imaginative conversation. It is in the contemplation on the Incarnation that this is most clearly set out:

At the end a Colloquy is to be made, thinking what I ought to say to the Three Divine Persons, or to the Eternal Word incarnate, or to our Mother and Lady, asking according to what I feel in me, in order more to follow and imitate our Lord, so lately incarnate.

Ignatius encourages us imaginatively to engage one of the figures in the scene, and to develop a conversation that might somehow lead us closer to the goal desired.

The key text for interpreting this method of prayer is the second of the so-called Annotations [Ignatius’ indicative notes at the beginning of the book]:

the person who gives to another the way and order in which to meditate or contemplate, ought to relate faithfully the events of such Contemplation or Meditation, going over the Points with only a short or summary development: for if the person who is contemplating takes the true foundation which is the story, working on it and thinking about it on their own, and finds something which makes them understand or feel for the story a little more . . . [it is better] . . . than if the one who gives the Exercises had explained and expanded the meaning of the story a great deal – for it is not the knowing of much that contents and satisfies the soul, but the feeling and relish for things from inside. (Exx. 2)

The energy is meant to come not from the creativity or eloquence of the retreat-giver, but from the person’s own prayer – and hence the presentation of the exercise should be minimalist, no more [though also no less] than what will enable the person’s own process to start.

Crucial to the prayer is the retreatant’s own reflection and drawing profit – an idea that recurs at the end of every “point.” Ignatius’ own conversion on his sickbed in Loyola had begun with his reflections on chivalric romances and on religious texts; he expects the retreatant to do the same. Ignatius had recognized a difference, perhaps quite a subtle one, in the quality of his reactions. The delight from “that worldly stuff” would vanish, and leave him feeling “dry and discontented”; by contrast, when he thought about the heroic exploits of the saints, he was left “content and happy” even after he had left the actual thoughts aside. As he reflected on “this difference in kind” of reaction he assigned it to a “difference in kind of spirits that were stirring: the

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one from the devil and the other from God.” Luis Gonçalves da Câmara, the Jesuit to whom Ignatius was dictating his life story, added a note that included the claim: “later, when he produced the Exercises, it was from here that he began to get clarity regarding the difference in kind of spirits.”

Ignatius is far too respectful of the retreatant’s individuality to suggest that the content of his own reactions should be normative. But it is nevertheless clear that he expects the retreatant to get in touch with the diversity of his or her reactions to the Gospel story, and gradually to become aware of which of these are more authentic, leading the person towards a fuller kind of life. The clear indication of this connection in the text comes in Ignatius’ expectation that the exercitant should make repeticiones of the prayer – “re-seekings” or “re-petitions” (“repetition,” the transliteration that has become standard in the jargon, is clearly misleading). A repetición depends on the noting of “some more crucial (principales) parts … where the person has felt some knowledge, consolation or desolation” (Exx. 118). Ignatius wants the process to be driven by the exercitant’s responses to the text, and he rather expects that these will be conflicting (to the point of suggesting in Exx. 6 that where conflict is absent the director should be worried). The hope is that cumulative reflection on responses will gradually lead to clarity regarding the overall shape of God’s invitation to the exercitant.

Another crucial element in Ignatian prayer is the so-called colloquy, or imaginative conversation, that Ignatius suggests should happen at the end of the prayer. The phrase “asking according to what I feel in me” is another indication that it is the person’s responses and desires which determine the process. An early text of the Exercises, probably to be attributed to Jean Codure, one of the first ten companions, expands on Ignatius’ terse indications in a way that confirms the point:

And here describe what you want, not so as to teach God, who knows what you desire before you turn to prayer, but that you may set your own mind alight with a greater desire of the same good as you are naming it and explaining it in words.

The whole process is aimed at the clarification of desire.

**Themes and ideas**

The basic principle, then, for reading Spiritual Exercises is that the book is only a means to an end: the free interplay of the Creator with the creature (Exx. 15), leading to the disposition of the creature’s life in
such a way as to promote the soul’s salvation (Exx. 21). It is this open-ended goal that governs Ignatius’ bitty, otherwise seemingly random, text.

Near the beginning, Ignatius presents us with a structure:

... the following exercises are divided into four parts:
  first, the consideration and contemplation on sins;
  second, the life of Christ our Lord up to Palm Sunday inclusively;
  third, the passion of Christ our Lord;
  fourth, the resurrection and ascension, with the three methods of prayer. (Exx. 4)

Because Ignatius envisages his process taking about a month, he calls each of these parts “weeks.” It is not the case, however, that each of these “weeks” lasts “seven or eight days,” because people will attain the goals of each “week” at different speeds. These four main parts, or “weeks,” are supplemented with other material. There is a set of introductory observations – Annotations – placed before the First Week; some rules about eating are placed, perhaps anomalously, at the end of the Third Week; and finally we have an extensive set of appendices – Gospel scenes set out in “points” for prayer, together with guidelines about the discernment of spirits, about the giving of alms, about scruples, and about allegiance to the Church. The next sections begin with looking at how the different weeks present God’s action in Christ, before moving on to what Ignatius says and implies about our response.

The “weeks” of the Exercises

Ignatius’ purpose is to provide support in order that “the Creator and Lord Himself should communicate Himself to His devout soul” (Exx. 15). A modern Jesuit theologian, Karl Rahner (1904–84), wrote a piece in which he imagined Ignatius speaking to a contemporary Jesuit, and justly commented on this claim: “Such a conviction perhaps sounds innocuous in your pious trade, working as it does with the most elevated words available. But fundamentally it is outrageous ...” The pattern of the Incarnation, of God united substantially with the creature, persists in human experience at large; hence the creature’s task is to discover and cooperate with this divine initiative. But it remains a mystery, a matter of wonder and improvised discovery. How can it be that the infinite unites itself to the finite? Still more, how can the divine goodness be united with the creation’s manifest imperfection? Christianity, properly understood, does not
answer these questions. Its proper mode of expression is question and exclamation rather than statement; it bespeaks a mystery beckoning our committed participation, rather than a state of affairs that we can neutrally describe.

Ignatius’ First Week initiates us into the interplay, the sheerly incomprehensible contrast, between divine goodness and creaturely sinfulness. The text certainly presupposes an encouragement of repentance, sacramental confession, and contrition, and it recommends us to think of hell “in order that, if, through my faults, I should forget the love of the Eternal Lord, at least the fear of the pains may help me not to come into sin” (Exx. 65). But its central concern is deeper. Central to the grace of the First Week is an awed sense of how creaturely perversity fails to frustrate divine love:

to consider what God is, against Whom I have sinned, according to His attributes; comparing them with their contraries in me – His Wisdom with my ignorance; His Omnipotence with my weakness; His Justice with my iniquity; His Goodness with my malice.

[Exx. 59]

... an exclamation wonderingly with increased feeling, going through all creatures, how they have left me in life and preserved me in it; the Angels, how they are the sword of the Divine Justice, how yet they have endured me, and guarded me, and prayed for me; the Saints, how they have been engaged in interceding and praying for me; and the heavens, sun, moon, stars, and elements, fruits, birds, fishes and animals – and the earth, how it has not opened to swallow me up, creating new Hells for me to suffer in them forever!

[Exx. 60]

Ignatius does not present us with an extended treatise on the nature of sin. Central to the First Week are two key exercises, one about how sin has been at work in the creation at large (typified by the fallen angels, by Adam and Eve, and by one hypothetical damned sinner), and one about the individual’s history of complicity in this rejection of God’s plan. The genre of a prayer exercise enables Ignatius to avoid the insoluble problems about whether sin is a matter of conditioning or free consent, or indeed about its origin within the providence of God. Instead, the focus is on how the individual responds; the third and fourth of the First Week Exercises specifically direct the exercitant to work with what the evocation of sin summons forth from his or her own memory (Exx. 62, 64). The tone is constantly one
of awed exploration, of imaginative dialogue or “colloquy,” with a focus on what all this means for me.

Imagining Christ our Lord present and placed on the Cross, to make a Colloquy; how from Creator He has come to make Himself a human being, and from life eternal has come to temporal death, and thus to die for my sins. Likewise, looking at myself: what I have done for Christ, what I am doing for Christ, what I ought to do for Christ. And so, seeing Him in this state, and nailed thus on the Cross, to go over that which might present itself. (Exx. 53)

As the process deepens, Ignatius encourages us to place ourselves imaginatively within a community of those who are not tainted by this history of non-response to God: Christ Himself, Mary His mother, and the Father, and to ask for three key gifts:

first, that I may feel an interior knowledge of my sins, and hatred of them; second, that I may feel the disorder of my actions, so that, hating them, I may correct myself and put myself in order; third, to ask knowledge of the world, in order that, hating it, I may put away from me worldly and vain things. (Exx. 63)

The point of the Ignatian First Week is to learn to cope realistically with sin: to recognize its reality, but also to learn to read the world in a way that is not simply controlled by it. It is an important preparatory step for the processes of choice and discernment regarding the form of one’s discipleship of Jesus which come in the Second Week.

The Second Week centers on the life of Christ, from conception to Palm Sunday; a major part of it is taken up with the Gospel-centered prayer described earlier in this essay. During this time, Ignatius envisages that people should make an “election,” an option about the state of life they are to adopt or a reorientation within one that has already been chosen (Exx. 189). What needs to be noted here is the frame within which Ignatius sets his Gospel contemplation. The Week begins with a consideration of Christ the King. There follow three “days” when the prayer centers on the infancy narratives in the Gospels, and from the fifth day onwards Ignatius suggests various scenes from Jesus’ ministry (though the director is free to reduce or add to these – Exx. 162).

On day four, Ignatius begins explicitly to prepare for the Election, and he seems to envisage this process occurring in parallel with the Gospel prayer through the rest of the Second Week. Central here are a meditation on “Two Standards” (Exx. 136–47), aimed at enabling the exercitant to become sensitive to the subtler strategies by which he or
she might be tempted (Exx. 10); a consideration of three classes of
person, whose respective responses to God’s call are indefinite procras-
tination, an attempt at manipulative bargaining, and complete accep-
tance (Exx. 149–56); and a pondering of “Three Kinds of Humility”
(Exx. 164–68).

Both the Kingdom meditation and these exercises prior to the
Election center on a desire to follow Christ in his suffering that is
nevertheless significantly qualified. Here is the version that comes in
the Two Standards:

that I may be received under His standard; and first in the highest
spiritual poverty, and – if His Divine Majesty would be served and
would want to choose and receive me – not less in actual poverty;
second, in suffering contumely and injuries, to imitate Him more
in them, if only I can suffer them without the sin of any person, or
displeasure of His Divine Majesty. (Exx. 147)

The complexity here is puzzling, and the temptation is to oversimplify
it, most obviously by commending devotion to the crucified Christ
without facing the issues about masochism and the fact that Ignatius
does introduce qualifications, admittedly rather obscurely. Perhaps
once again it is the dynamics of the divine engagement with creaturely
evil that are central here. Without wanting to condone or justify evil in
any way, Ignatius is reminding us of a conviction that is surely central
to Christianity: a belief in Christ’s power, and ours in Him, myster-
iously to overcome evil, the power of Christ that in itself – in abstrac-
tion from the evil – is supremely desirable.

About the Third Week and the Fourth Week rather less can be said.
The prayer centers first on Christ’s Passion and death, and then on his
resurrection appearances. Ignatius’ language here is brief and elliptical,
and commentators are tempted to fill it out with whatever is their own
preferred theology of the cross and resurrection. The graces he
encourages us to pray for are suggestively formulated. In the second
exercise of the Third Week, we are told: “It belongs to the Passion to
ask for grief with Christ in grief, shatteredness with Christ shattered,
tears, interior pain at such great pain that Christ suffered for me” (Exx.
203). For its part, the prayer of desire governing the Fourth Week is
more than simple joy because Christ has risen; Ignatius seems to be
hinting at a sharing in Christ’s own joy at the experience of having
risen: “to ask for what I want, and it will be here to ask for grace to
rejoice and be glad intensely at so great glory and joy of Christ our Lord”
(Exx. 221). The sheer length of the experience – in conventional
contemporary practice generally nine or ten days for the two Weeks together – gives it a distinctive character. For whatever reason, the official commentary on the Exercises finally published in 1599 – and arguably the official Latin translation of 1548 – significantly downplayed passages such as these. What Ignatius intended here arguably was not received in the mainstream Jesuit tradition.¹⁰

Movements and decisions

What can we say in general terms about how the individual retreatant might respond to this material? First, and most straightforwardly, we as retreatants should be open to whatever God might want to bring about within us, or ask of us (Exx. 5) – or, to use Ignatius’ own word “indifferent,”¹¹ with the result that “we do not want health more than sickness, riches than poverty, honor than dishonor, a long life than a short one,” but desire and choose only “what is more conducive for us in view of the end for which we are created” (Exx. 23).

At the end of the process, in the so-called “Contemplation to Attain Love,” Ignatius envisages the relationship between Creator and creature more fully. The creature is to respond in kind to the Creator’s self-giving generosity in creation, redemption, and particular gifts, “pondering with much feeling how the same Lord desires to give me Himself as much as He can”:

And with this to reflect on myself, considering with much reason and justice, what I ought on my side to offer and give to His Divine Majesty, that is to say, everything that is mine, and myself with it, as one who makes an offering with much feeling: Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will, all that I have and possess. You gave it to me: to you, Lord, I return it; it is all yours; dispose it entirely to your will; give me your love and grace – that is enough for me. (Exx. 234)

Second, Ignatius positively expects that the retreatant should experience movements both of attraction towards God and repulsion away from God – or, to use the technical terms, consolation and desolation. One of Ignatius’ reasons for stressing indifference is precisely that we become the more sensitive to the patterns of God’s working in our experience; should such movements not be occurring, Ignatius suggests that the retreat-giver needs to become suspicious (Exx. 6). The retreat-giver’s central task is to help the exercitant “perceive and know in some manner the different movements which are caused in the soul, the good to receive them and the bad to
reject them” (Exx. 313). There are two sets of “rules” (one to be used generally, the other for use only when the exercitant is being tempted subtly, by an apparent good) that are designed to help in this regard (Exx. 313–36).

Third, a full engagement with the Exercises should lead the retreater to make some form of election or decision. Ignatius sets out three ways – his word is “times” – in which this can occur. The second of these, which many commentators take to be normative, is rooted in the reflection on consolations and desolations: “when enough light and knowledge is received by experience of consolations and desolations, and by the experience of the discernment of various spirits” (Exx. 176). But Ignatius’ own heading for this passage suggests that the other two ways are equally valid: one that evokes a sense of irresistible conviction (Exx. 175), and one rooted in objective consideration of the pros and cons of a particular option (Exx. 178–88).12

Fourth, the fruit of the process should be within the life of the Church:

It is necessary that everything about which we want to make an election should be indifferent, or good, in itself, and should be allowed within our Holy Mother the hierarchical Church, and not bad nor opposed to her. (Exx. 170)

The Exercises were written at the time of a Reformation schism, generated by an experienced conviction of justification by faith, independent of church practice. In Spain particularly, many who claimed insight into divine matters on the basis of experience were regarded as suspect, and indeed condemned as alumbrados. Ignatius himself in Spain, and subsequently the first Jesuits as a group, came frequently under suspicion.13

The underlying issue here is that the conviction of God’s working directly with the creature (Exx. 15) raises at least the logical possibility that what the individual discovers in this way may go beyond what is ecclesiastically sanctioned. It is clear that the early Jesuits, through the Exercises, sought to promote life within the Church, but they had no solution to this theological problem, and addressed the issues diplomatically rather than theoretically. Ignatius merely made the fundamental intention explicit by developing a set of rules “in the interests of the true sense that we should have in the Church militant” (Exx. 352–70). The Jesuit tradition lives with the tension between a missionary commitment to life at the Church’s boundaries and an allegiance to the visible, hierarchical institution.
It remains to make a few observations about the Spiritual Exercises in historical context. It was a commonplace in early Jesuit writing about the Exercises to speak of how Ignatius had learned the wisdom of the Exercises “not so much by books as by the unction of the Holy Spirit and from experience.” However much such a statement raises the contemporary historian’s suspicions, it is plausible to suggest an independence of Ignatius’ text from earlier literary sources. Parallels may be drawn with other documents in Christian tradition, and Ignatius himself points us to what he read on his sickbed in Loyola as a stimulus, but no significant and substantial intellectual dependency on Ignatius’ part has been established. Whatever he had read, he gave his material a structure and slant that was both decisive and original. Moreover, though Jesuit tradition has regularly traced the text of the Exercises back to intense personal experiences of Ignatius at Loyola in 1521 and Manresa in 1523, the early biographical material echoes only some elements from the rules about discernment and about scruples. Between those experiences and the appearance of something close to the present text in the mid-1530s, Ignatius accomplished a feat of literary organization, and above all of abstraction. From his more personal writings, we know that he himself had intense spiritual experiences; remarkably, however, both in Spiritual Exercises and in the Constitutions, he keeps his own history rigorously out of the text, and encourages each reader to undergo his or her own process of growth. The achievement, however, remained largely unrecognized in the hagiography written by his followers.

Because the gestation of the text is so hidden from us, it is also hazardous to situate it against the historiographical categories now used in accounts of sixteenth-century Catholicism. It makes sense to see Spiritual Exercises as a work of early modernity, and responding to the changes in religious sensibility provoked by the invention of printing. In this respect, there are indeed striking parallels between Ignatius’ account of the relief of scruples at Manresa and Luther’s discovery of justification by faith; at the same time, however, Luther’s marginalization of moral action and performance from religious identity in The Freedom of a Christian contrasts markedly with the formulation of the prayer with which Ignatius would have us begin each exercise: “that all my intentions, actions and operations may be directed purely in the service and praise of His Divine Majesty” (Exx. 46). Even at this level,
Ignatius can be read as a figure of both Catholic Reform and Counter-Reformation. There seems to have been Jesuit participation in the whole range of spiritual and intellectual currents within early modern Catholicism short of outright schism.

Neither of Ignatius’ major works, *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions*, is a prescriptive text; the concern, rather, is to offer a “way of proceeding,” a way of handling realities as yet unforeseen. Hence the history of how those texts have been interpreted virtually coincides with the history of the Society of Jesus itself as it has interacted with different ages and cultures. One foundational shift, however, should be highlighted. It is an unanswered question of Jesuit history why the small group round Ignatius, once it arrived in Rome and was constituted as a Society of Jesus in 1540, grew to 1,000 members in the sixteen years up till Ignatius’ death in 1556, but it is clear that this institutional expansion outpaced the ability of the new membership to absorb and pass on the spirituality of the Exercises, and indeed to develop that spirituality in such a way that it could nourish the corporate identity of a relatively large international organization. The disparity gave rise to confusion and conflict that was resolved only in the generalate of Claudio Acquaviva (1580–1615). Ignatius seems to have presupposed that people would make the Exercises only once, as a life-changing experience. The *Constitutions* seems to envisage a relatively small group of itinerant apostles, resourced by a network of helpers – or “coadjutors” – who would maintain a support network of houses. Only later did it become normal for Jesuits to think of the Society as a new, alternative kind of religious order in the full sense, paralleling the Dominicans or Franciscans. A seminal secondary work speaks of “the definitive systematization of Jesuit spirituality in the light of the Exercises”; it was in Acquaviva’s generalate that the Society of Jesus finally settled as a large and distinctive group of consecrated religious. The process required that the Society’s distinctive spiritual resource, the Exercises, become a basis for daily life; Jesuits came to make a week’s retreat on an annual basis, and normally to draw on the Exercises also for their daily prayer. There were significant arguments about the regulation of prayer, and about the balance between the cognitive and the affective, and these played themselves out in the discussions leading to the publication of the Official Directory, a supplementary handbook for retreat-givers.

Historians need to be cautious about linking Jesuit behavior to particular ideas within the spirituality of the Exercises. It is indeed true that Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* has shaped the corporate rhetoric
of the Jesuits, and served as an important element in their foundational myth. But the text has served these functions only because its interactive character encourages a variety of possible responses. Its most suggestive language evokes and stimulates rather than describes: the first “time” of election (Exx. 175), the “prayer of the senses” with which the Ignatian day culminates (Exx. 121–25), or the idea of a consolation “without preceding cause” (Exx. 330). Ignatius’ hope for the “Contemplation to Attain Love is” that the exercitant will be given knowledge from within of such great good received, so that recognizing this entirely, I may be able in all to love and serve His Divine Majesty. (Exx. 233)

But both the good and the response are particular; the wise interpreter of this text is cautious about making generalizations.

Notes

“Exx.” throughout the text refers by paragraph number to Spiritual Exercises. Many translations exist, and the question of translation may sometimes be contentious; in this essay I offer versions based on the 1909 “literal translation” by Elder Mullan, reproduced in D. Fleming, Draw Me into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises – a Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996). The standard critical editions of Ignatian sources are to be found in the more than 150 volumes of the Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu (MHSI), begun in Madrid in the 1890s, and now published from the Jesuit Historical Institute in Rome. This essay uses the 12 volumes of Ignatius’ letters (EI), and the second MHSI edition of Spiritual Exercises (MI [1969]).

1 The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre, ed. and trans. E. Murphy, J. Padberg, and M. Palmer (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 64–65.


3 Both quotations come from Polanco [on Ignatius’ behalf] to Philipp Faber [Leernus], 3 February 1554 (MHSI EI 6, 280–82). A convenient collection of passages from Ignatian letters dealing with the Exercises can be found in Texte autographe des Exercices Spirituels et documents contemporains (1526–1615), ed. E. Gueydan et al. (Paris: Desclée, 1985), 214–27. This passage occurs on p. 217.

4 The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre, 67.

5 Constitutions, Examen 4.9 [64], my translation. Ignatius’ detachment from his own program here echoes the beginning of Spiritual Exercises. The first note “to give some understanding of the Spiritual Exercises which follow” begins by stating that “spiritual exercises” denotes
“every way” – not just, therefore, the ways in the book – of examining consciousness, of meditation, contemplation, and the like (Exx. 1).


9 Thus the famous and extensive Hell sermon in James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man rather misses the Ignatian point, not only because of its content, but also because of the very genre in which it is written.


11 It may be significant that Ignatius avoids the noun form “indifference.” The literature reflects a more general uncertainty in Christian spirituality as to whether the goal should be escape from the material order or right engagement with it.

12 See, in reaction to Karl Rahner and many who have followed him in prioritizing the second “time,” J. Toner, Discerning God’s Will: Ignatius of Loyola’s Teaching on Christian Decision Making [St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1991].

13 See Ignatius to John III of Portugal, 15 March 1545 [Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola, selected and translated by W. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 79–91], in which, as a means of preventing rumor, Ignatius catalogues the various processes in which he had been involved.


'Accommodated Texts' and the Interpretation of the *Spiritual Exercises,*" *The Way* 44/1 (January 2005 [1994]), 101–16. On the basis of different styles in the earliest Latin translation of the text, it may be possible to differentiate between material available when Ignatius first arrived in Paris in 1528 and what was added later: see J. Calveras, “Estudios sobre la redacción de los textos latinos de los Ejercicios anteriores a la Vulgata,” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu* 31 (1962), 3–99.


18 The texts are conveniently collected in *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises.*