

The logo consists of the letters 'CIS' in a bold, red, serif font. The letters are set against a white, irregularly shaped background that resembles a torn piece of paper. The 'C' and 'I' are connected, and the 'S' is separate to the right.

CENTRUM IGNATIANUM
SPIRITUALITATIS

**THE MINISTRY OF
THE EXERCISES
IN THE SOCIETY TODAY**

Results of a Survey

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CENTRUM IGNATIANUM SPIRITUALITATIS

Rome, Italy

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INTRODUCTION

On November 20, 1982 our Ignatian Centre of Spirituality (CIS) sent out to all Jesuit Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Regions a Questionnaire on the Apostolate of the Spiritual Exercises. In his covering letter accompanying the Questionnaire, the CIS Director had thus expressed the aims and intention of this "CIS Inquiry on the Spiritual Exercises":

"It is well over 16 years since Father Clemente Espinosa conducted a world-wide inquiry on our apostolate of the Spiritual Exercises in preparation for the First World Congress of the Spiritual Exercises...

Spurred on by the desires of the Holy Father expressed in his recent 'Allocution to Jesuit Provincial Superiors' (February 27, 1982) and in preparation for the coming General Congregation, it would be very helpful to know what exactly is happening all over the Society in its apostolate of the Spiritual Exercises and what orientations it is taking for the future.

Our Centre of Ignatian Spirituality is therefore sending out the accompanying questionnaire so that, in the hope of receiving clear facts and concrete data, it can offer to the Society as a whole a comprehensive view of the present thrust in, and future hopes for, the Jesuit apostolate of the Exercises" (AR XVIII, 1982, p. 846).

The response to the Questionnaire was good. Of the then 83 Jesuit Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Regions, 63 sent in answers of differing length and quality. Only one entire Assistancy of the 12 Jesuit groups of Provinces called Assistanicies did not respond at all. Together with the responses came the sharing of some very interesting specific experiences in the ministry of the Exercises.

In attempting to put this material together, CIS was faced with several options. We could collate the answers

either Assistency-wise or according to broad geographical areas. This would have the advantage of highlighting a sort of internal comparative study, but then would suffer distinctly in the overall comprehensive view presented of the ministry of the Exercises in the Society today. We have decided, therefore, to offer some sort of a unified vision, following strictly the headings or chapters into which the original Questionnaire was divided. And, here too, we have judged it best to let our correspondents speak for themselves as far as possible; this would be one way of preserving the 'freshness' and incisiveness of the actual responses to the Questionnaire. All this would constitute Section I of the results of our Inquiry, entitled "Collated Results of the Survey".

Our reporting of these results would be greatly impoverished if we completely neglected the specific and significant experiences shared with us, especially in the contemporary application and adaptation of the Exercises. And so, we have chosen to gather such specific experiences under Section II, "The Sharing of Some Significant Experiences".

This Section II opens with a very personal contribution of *Father Francesco Rossi de Gasperi's* (Italy), Professor of Sacred Scripture and Spiritual Director at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Jerusalem. His rich practical experience, covering twenty years, of integrating the Exercises into the movement of Sacred Scripture is profoundly stimulating. This substantial contribution is followed by three shorter articles. First, *Father Pedro Arriaga* (Mexico), Director of SEDOC (Servicios Educativos de Occidente) among the Basic Christian Communities of Lomas de Polanco, writes of the development of his pastoral work in the suburbs of Guadalajara into an interesting experience of the Exercises in Daily Life. Then, the *Upper Canadian Province* - and in particular *Father Jean-Marc Laporte*, who is Professor of Theology at Regis College, Toronto - reports an original adaptation of Annotation 18 in the form of the integration of the GC 32 call to promote justice into a concrete experience of the Exercises. Finally, the central role played by the Exercises in the spirituality and way of life of the Christian Life Communities (CLC) is described by *Father Patrick O'Sullivan* (Australia), the head of the CLC Secretariat at Jesuit Headquarters, Rome.

The present issue closes with a couple of brief Appendices. *Father George Bottereau's* (France) essay offers a personal interpretation of the closing phrase of the Ignatian prayer "Take, O Lord, and receive..." (Appendix I). Our readers will also be interested in knowing of some current projects of work on the text of the Exercises (Appendix II) as reported by *Father Edouard Gueydan* (France), who is responsible for initiating them, and is now busy seeing them through with international collaboration.

While deeply pleased to offer this overview on "The Ministry of the Exercises in the Society Today", CIS is extremely grateful to all those who, throughout the worldwide Society, have taken the trouble to answer its Questionnaire and share their precious experiences in the area of what is truly "the soul of Jesuit life and apostolate" - the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola.

THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES
AS
PROFOUND ENTRY INTO THE JOURNEY OF BIBLICAL FAITH

Francesco Rossi de Gasperis
(Italian Province)

The method I usually follow today in giving the Spiritual Exercises is the result of two converging *insights* that I had some twenty years ago. The *first* concerns the insertion of the Ignatian Exercises into the movement of the *way of life* traced by Sacred Scripture (cf. Ps 16,11 = Ac 2,28). The *second* has to do with the spacing out of the four Ignatian Weeks over a period of one full year at least.

Later the Ignatian Centre of Spirituality evinced much interest in this particular manner of giving the Exercises, and has now requested me to share this at some length in that Montmartre spirit of *koinonia*, of which Father General Kolvenbach recently reminded the entire Society on the occasion of the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the vows of Montmartre (Paris, 15 August 1534).

My sharing, therefore, will consist in my describing my own personal understanding of the Ignatian itinerary. Let me remind the reader in all simplicity that this is not a description of some personal ideology spun out at my work desk, but a procedure which I have actually put into practice in about a hundred retreats given in different parts of the world - especially in a number of *thirty-day retreats*, each given over a period of twelve months.

I. FROM "THE BIBLE IN THE EXERCISES"
TO "THE EXERCISES IN THE BIBLE"

1. *The Bible and the Spiritual Exercises*

It seems to me that in the justified reaction against *preached retreats*, as also in the providential rediscovery

of *guided retreats*, what is sometimes overlooked is the fact that, while the Exercises are certainly and primarily a *ministry of the Spirit*, this ministry of the Spirit arises indissociably from a *ministry of the Word*.

The content-matter of the four or five *exercises* to be done each day is entirely biblical and evangelical, including those few which are not at first sight apparently so - such as, the second exercise of the First Week on personal sin (*55-61), the exercise on the three classes of men (149-157), and the contemplation to attain love (230-237).

The careful ongoing discernment with which the exercitant is to examine the succession of his interior movements, aided of course by the one who gives the Exercises, has to do with these movements precisely inasmuch as they surface in his consciousness as the result of consistent reading, meditation and prayer throughout the day on the Word of God: "the facts of the contemplation" (literally, "the history I am to contemplate") (2; etc.). Ignatius assumes that this Word is proposed to the exercitant by another person, the one who gives the Exercises (2; etc.).

I personally think that this *proposing or giving of the Word* - surely a ministry very different from preaching and more akin to what Ignatius calls the ministry of *leer* [1] - cannot honestly be restricted in the authentic Ignatian Exercises to just indicating once a day some biblical passages which the exercitant will then for his part read, meditate and pray upon.

The Church context within which I have actually had to exercise my ministry in Europe - as well as in Asia and

* When not otherwise indicated, the numbers within rounded brackets refer to the numbers of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. The numbers within square brackets refer to the notes at the bottom of the page.

1. Cf. F. ROSSI DE GASPERIS, *Bibbia ed Esercizi spirituali*. La Bibbia negli Esercizi spirituali e gli Esercizi spirituali nella Bibbia, Roma 1982, pp. 45-46. Referred to hereafter as *Bibbia ed Esercizi Spirituali*.

in Africa - has appeared to me to be, in general, considerably far removed from an obvious and immediate understanding and grasp of the Word of God in its truest sense.

I soon became aware that numerous groups of Christians - including priests and religious men and women - still base their lives on a theology that has not its source in the Word of God as understood in the great liturgical and spiritual tradition of the Church; they live, rather, out of a theology communicated through types of catechesis that are often alien to the sources of divine revelation, and that are mixed up with ideas, devotions and human precepts to which, in practice, more weight is accorded than to the Word of the Lord (cf. Mk 7,6-9; Mt 15,6b-9).

These types of catechesis - weak and insipid, at times erroneous and in any case insufficient, often stunted at a middle school if not grossly infantile level - frequently make the exercitant practically incapable of grasping the full sense of the Word of God proposed to him. What kind of Spirit then could generally proceed from such a lack of understanding of the Word? And, therefore, what kind of Spirit would present itself for the discernment of the one who is making the Exercises, as well as of the one who is giving them?

But it is not merely ignorance that, in my opinion, makes it necessary in the case of many Christians to present an accurate and faithful *narration of the facts*, so that the one who is contemplating takes into account their *true foundation* (2). I have encountered equally, if not more, serious deficiencies in areas where a fuller religious education is fairly widespread. In this case, the mediation between the Word of God and the culture of the believer is often exercised not by elementary catechisms which have long since - perhaps too hurriedly and indiscriminately - been set aside, but by reductionist and confusing ideologies of a psychological, philosophical or socio-political nature; or by partisan schools of anthropology, by spiritual orientations dependent on extra-christian traditions, by "schools of wisdom" concocted with the help of all types of syncretism, by practices never subjected to critical evaluation; or finally by expressions of "good faith" which for all their sincerity are only half-truths, if not downright erroneous and false.

I have come across believers who are far more piqued by curiosity than moved by a desire for conversion; those for whom the spiritual is of interest only inasmuch as it is a component of the political; fideists that are allergic to any and every ascetical endeavour, or proponents of a pelagian anthropocentrism; humanists, too, practically closed to all transcendence.

I have met persons who have given up all hope of ever being able to achieve conversion; those for whom being in tune with the Church is practically reduced to legalism and to a sort of regimented party sense of belonging and of obedience; spiritualists sold out to the most naive intolerance of every form of incarnation and institution; charismatics more attached to their movement of "renewal" than to the newness of the Gospel of God; faithful of that type of Christianity that is sectarian or that is, on the other hand, so "open" as to end up being dissolved in an a-historical religious universalism which sadly lacks that specific sense of direction that God has given to all history (from Israel to the nations; from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth: Lk 24,47; Ac 1,4.8).

More and more frequently I meet with Christians accustomed to manipulating God's Word to their interest and advantage, rather than to listening to it in its *entirety* and to putting it into practice obediently (cf. James 1,21-25); Christians who make their lives depend primarily on "signs", through which they seek, without too much discernment, to keep under constant control the wisdom and will of Him whose home is in inaccessible light (1 Tim 6,16), that kind of light that for the light of the human mind is much more enigma - at times even darkness which blinds and confuses - than object of trite experimental testing (cf. Ps 139,12; Rom 11,33-35; 1 Cor 13,12; etc.).

I run into Christians who do not know what to do with the Old Testament; Christians steeped in a practically monophysite Christology, for whom the fact that "Jesus was God" makes Him just a God to be adored and an ideal to be contemplated from afar, one who has scarcely anything to say to us wretched mortals. I meet persons who, though well on in years, are still incapable of distinguishing between the real and the corporeal, between sincerity and truth, between good faith and true faith.

I have, and still do, come across a practice of Christianity that is very like a humanistic gnosis centred on "Man" in general, rather than a *history* which, starting from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then passing through Moses, David and the whole of Israel, culminates in Jesus of Nazareth and in His Church until His return (cf. Mt 1,1-16; Heb 11,1-12,2).

Often I meet with "Christs" fashioned by the hands of men with all the ingredients of the current ideologies - "Christs" who bear such scanty and such distorted resemblance to Jesus of Nazareth, son of Miriam and Messiah of Israel and of the nations.

Let me repeat that I have encountered, and still encounter, these and other types of Christians, not on the periphery of the community of the Church, but at the heart of every one of its levels - including missionaries and catechists, indeed some of those who have been, and are still, asking to make the Spiritual Exercises.

Quite frankly, I have never felt it would be right to offer such exercitants mere indications of chapters and verses of the Sacred Books for their reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation through each whole day of the retreat. I know, of course, that the Ignatian Exercises are not a ministry of catechesis (*didachē, didaskalia*), but rather a ministry which looks to the conversion of the one who makes them (kerygmatic). Hence, without transforming the Exercises into a form of catechesis, and much less into a course of religious education, I have thought it necessary to start from a ministry of the Word that is at once intense, accurate, updated and suited to the context in which this ministry is exercised.

In practice, in a thirty-day retreat I propose "*points*" three times a day, and in other retreats twice a day. But in all cases I insist that the exercitants make four *exercises* a day, while I suggest that at least the final one among these consist of a more simple type of prayer - unified and contemplative - similar to that which Ignatius terms the *application of senses* (121-126; etc.).

Over a period of twenty five years I have been able to observe that this particular ministry of the Word, besides its practical application to the actual period of the

Exercises, bears lasting fruit in the enlightenment and orientation of the life of faith of the exercitants, in that it offers a corrective to their understanding of this life of faith and achieves a more authentic realization of their baptismal covenant. After all, it is this covenant that is our most basic *election* and conversion, of which we stand constantly and ever more vitally in need, and which must never be lost sight of at any stage of the Exercises.

2. *The striking formal parallelism between the Exercises and the Bible*

Now, I have been struck by the biblical character of the Exercises, not merely or principally because of the *content-matter* of the meditations-contemplations proposed by Ignatius. As I have written elsewhere, after having striven for long years to integrate the Bible in the Exercises, I have ended up by integrating the Exercises in the Bible [2].

The most important *insight* that I have had in the course of a prolonged and passionate study of the Scriptures is that they can, for all practical purposes, be termed: *Spiritual Exercises given by God to His people: Israel-Church.*

Far from being a book of learning or of science, or even just a book of doctrine, the Sacred Scriptures are essentially *Torah*, that is *teaching* - a practical manual offered to the people of the faith and to every believer *to help them journey along the WAY* (Ac 9,2; 18,25-26; 19,9.23; 22,4; 24,5.14.22), *to help them run steadily in the race of faith* (Heb 12,1). The Scriptures are a book of wisdom, in the sense dear to the semitic cultures and to all those of the Near and Far East; not a book of study to be turned into an object of research, but a school of practical living, a guide to train one to walk (*h'lk*) with God - as Enoch did (Gen 5,22.24) and Noah (Gen 6,9) - as well as before Him, as Abram did (Gen 17,1); a *book meant for life and for sal-*

vation, a truth in which one must walk (Ps 86,11) - a *halakhah* [3].

What Ignatius did was just to personalize to the fullest this divine path of salvation offered to all believers. He put it within the very concrete reach of the conscience of every exercitant, thanks to the gifts of wisdom and counsel granted him by the Spirit.

The Bible is the great topographical map of the journey of the covenant of salvation which winds its way throughout the vast region of the world. Ignatius' role has been to be a very personal guide, leading each person in particular (cf. 95) along the sure paths of this journey of faithfulness and of salvation, through the whole expanse or circuit of all the earth, filled with human beings in all their diversity (cf. 102.103.106-108) [4].

Having once discovered this, I grasped that the Exercises do not merely make use of some biblical or gospel content-matter. Between the Bible and the Exercises there exist contact points not merely, nor even principally, of *content-matter*. What is more important - indeed, of decisive importance - is the precise *formal* parallelism of the itinerary; the progressive nature of the journey through stages marked out by the same Spirit (cf. 365); the close likeness between the peak point of saving history as traced out by God in the objective history of mankind - Jesus, Lord and Messiah - and that of the history written by God into the personal history of each exercitant (91-98); the consonance between the criteria of the dispensation of salvation for the whole world and those of the following of Jesus proposed to every individual disciple (136-147).

And so, rather than begin with the Exercises in order to refer subsequently to the Bible, I thought and attempted to begin with the Bible, and in it I discovered the movement of the Exercises. The result has been one of amazing beauty and of unsuspected efficacy for the exercitants, and perhaps even more for me.

3. *Bibbia ed Esercizi spirituali*, p. 28.

4. *Bibbia ed Esercizi spirituali*, pp. 27-29.

The specifically *Ignatian* flavour of the Exercises then stood out clearly as being much more in keeping with the character of Ignatius. For Ignatius did not intend to propose a journey *of his own making*, but just to make himself "a poor little unworthy slave of the incarnate Word of God, with all possible homage and reverence" (114).

Thus, freeing the Exercises of that burden of representing a kind of special path of the Spirit within the Church - a burden, in any case, out of proportion to their resources -, and placing them entirely at the service of the only path chosen and willed by God for His people and for every member of it, one restores to them their proper specific meaning, and one experiences in practice all their concrete power and influence. This, to my mind, is among other things the reason why the "Ignatian" Exercises can be - and in fact are - given to Christians of every rank within the Church: lay persons and clerics, bishops; monks and religious men and women, whether contemplative or dedicated to apostolic action, etc. They are "Ignatian" to such an extent that they can be a "help" to all sorts of persons.

3. *The method of the "Lectio divina"*

I have still something to say about the method which I have been actually following ever since I grasped what I have so far tried to describe, and which has made it possible for me to translate it all into practice.

This method is "the very ancient practice of *lectio divina*" which providentially was highly praised by General Congregation XXXI of the Society of Jesus. The same Congregation rightly hoped that from this practice would result as well a renewal for the ministry of the Spiritual Exercises (Decree 14 on "Prayer", n. 6).

In a little booklet published by the Ignatian Centre of Spirituality, "*Lectio divina' e orazione ignaziana. Lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio*" [5], I

5. (Ejercicios, 13), Roma² 1978. Cf also *Bibbia ed Esercizi spirituali*, pp. 30-49.

presented in 1977, though still in a somewhat sketchy way, my experience of this rediscovery. Once the internal dynamics and spirit of the Ignatian Exercises (I obviously mean the Exercises of the four Weeks in the first place) are, as I have said above, the very same as those of the Sacred Scriptures *taken as a unity* (which is how the Bible should be taken by the people of the faith), I have dared in giving the Exercises to invert the order of content-matter presentation - *the facts* or *history* (2: etc.) -, starting rather with the order of the sacred books (from Genesis to the New Testament) and remaining faithful to them in everything.

In the second part of this article I shall explain more in detail how I do this. At the moment I want only to describe briefly how I understand and practise the *lectio divina* in the course of the Exercises. This is at once much less and much more than what biblical scholars today call *exegesis*, be this inspired in the historical-critical method, or in that termed structuralist, or even of literary analysis. It is not even similar to what is styled *biblical theology*, which for its part selects and develops some *biblical themes*, rather than follow the text continuously step by step.

Personally, of course, I try as far as possible to keep abreast of ongoing developments in philology, exegesis and biblical theology. Nor do I neglect dogmatic and moral theology, whether positive or speculative - indeed, I hold this last to be of the greatest importance for the faith vitality of the people of God. I keep in touch as well with spiritual theology and the liturgy, as this is lived in the traditions of both the Western and the Eastern Churches.

However, in the reading of the text (*lectio-meditatio*) I try to restrict myself to "narrating accurately the facts...adhering to the points, and adding only a short or summary explanation" (2). This explanation compasses a literal understanding of the text, which is not exclusively limited to the monographic context of the passage or the book to which it belongs, but includes reading it in the light of the whole of Scripture, Old and New Testaments. Scripture, it is true, is the work of human authors, but in such a way that it is no less true that, at a higher level,

God is its one and only author. In fact, while the books that make up the Bible are numerous and greatly different, they still constitute *one single book*. Hence my *lectio-meditatio* is, from start to finish, a *Christian reading of the Scriptures*, which is inspired in that interpretation offered by the Risen Jesus to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24,13-35), or to the Eleven the evening of the day of Resurrection (Lk 24,44-49).

At this point I should explain how this *messianic* reading of the Scriptures is done without prejudice against, or injustice to, the *Tanakh* - the Hebrew Bible; for this is the fear of a number of my Jewish friends and brothers in Jerusalem. But this would both unduly lengthen the present article and lead me to stray considerably from the subject given me.

I propose the biblical text blending together into one the three senses of Scripture as explained by Origen: the *literal* sense, which concerns Israel or the generation of Jesus; the *ecclesial* sense, which refers to the entire Church of the New Testament which, on the one hand, relives the story of the people of the covenant in its messianic fulfilment in Jesus and, on the other, looks forward to the glorious coming of the same Messiah; and the *personal* sense, which refers to every Christian in whose life is reenacted the mystery of God's search for man - that is, following the history of the covenant from Abraham to Jesus.

My reading of the Bible can certainly be termed *spiritual*, despite the disrepute into which this particular term has fallen in so many sectors of the contemporary Church. For my reading is especially sensitive to the guidance of that very same Holy Spirit, Spirit of Christ, who presided over both the ministry of search and enquiry of the prophets of the *Preparation* and the ministry of the servants of the *Gospel* (1 Pet 1,10-12).

This my *lectio-meditatio* has no professorial or systematic pretensions whatsoever. It is principally inspired in *existential experience*, with which is spontaneously combined a concretization dictated by the actual moment of my life in the Church, as also by the quality and condition of the exercitants I have before me. For this reason I make sure to keep in touch with man's history, his cultures, his search for meaning, and in a special way with

happenings in the Church and in the churches of God spread throughout the world.

In a word, my *lectio-meditatio* of the Scriptures is on each occasion a completely new and overwhelming experience. There comes alive in it the remembrance of the whole past of the unfolding of God's plan and of my personal spiritual history; much light is shed on the need to live out in depth the present time that is gifted to us; all hope and every longing reach out towards the Lord Jesus who is to come: *Marana 'tha'!*

It is the Word of Adonai which descends upon each one, as it descended upon John, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea... (Lk 3,1-2). It is a Word which does not need to be explained much, for it carries hidden within itself all its meaning for each person. It is a Word which needs not just to be heard, but to be put into practice - *to be done* - immediately, here and now, both by me and by the one who listens to me. This is why my *lectio* is by no means any kind of *lecture*, a sort of conference or academic reading.

It goes without saying that the indispensable condition for the exercise of such a ministry is, on the part of the one who exercises it, the tireless penetration of the Word of God day and night, and the experience in daily living that this Word is more precious to him than a thousand pieces of gold and silver (Ps 119,72), sweeter than honey to his mouth (Ps 119,103), the joy of his heart (Ps 119,111). The Word is for him a song in the land where he lives in exile (Ps 119,54).

This way of reading the Sacred Scriptures is, after all, nothing new. It ties in with the great tradition of the Doctors of Israel, and especially of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. It is within the daily reach of all those who, in and with the Church, celebrate the Office of Readings in the Latin Liturgy of the Hours. But my own particular personal experience is that the faithful rejoice in, are amazed at, and yearn for, this kind of listening to the Word; they wonder at the riches that the Word reveals when it is read in this way - and these faithful include those who are professionally dedicated to the Word through academic study which is strangely much drier.

In the Exercises, as I have noted above, this *reading* ought to be duly contained within the sober limits of a presentation which should inspire and nourish, but by no means substitute, the *prayer* of the exercitant. Concretely I limit my own presentation of "points" to about 30 to 45 minutes: I then see to it that, with this *lectio-meditatio* done together, the exercitant has at least an hour and a half available for personal *oratio* and *contemplatio*.

II. THE FOUR WEEKS IN STAGES

1. *The origin and development of the experience*

The idea of spacing out the four Weeks of the Ignatian Exercises came to me in 1967 when, as Spiritual Father and later Rector of the Jesuit Roman Scholasticate of the Gesù, I was involved in the process of planning out afresh the formation of young Jesuits - a reworking of which actually took place later in the whole body of the Society. Those were troubled times, the eve of the many "revolutions" which then exploded in 1968. Many things, even fundamental issues, were seriously questioned, and not merely by the younger religious.

Convinced as I was that the Society possessed, and possesses, in the Spiritual Exercises, a great gift of God that is of *constitutive* importance for its life and mission, I proposed that the Exercises be chosen as the foundational basis for the formation of our novices. As I realized that the four *Weeks* of the Exercises constituted a series of *seasons or stages* of the spiritual life and journey, I proposed that the whole biennium of the novitiate be planned according to these stages: drawing inspiration from what Ignatius says in Annotations 4.9.10.11 of the book of the Exercises, I felt that each Week could be made a stage to be lived out and deepened in the course of a whole semester.

At the time my proposal was not taken into consideration by the commission set up for formation in the

Italian Assistancy; two years later, however, I had the occasion to put it into practice.

I met the Novice Mistress of a Religious Congregation whose rule prescribed precisely the Ignatian Exercises of thirty days for its novices. This experienced religious woman had some justifiable fears about the advisability of subjecting her young novices to an uninterrupted period of such intense spiritual strain. We agreed, then, to give a try to the experience of spacing out the four Weeks over the period of a year; but to this we added a programme of spiritual formation worked out for each interval between one Week and another, planning as well for interviews during these intervening periods so that the one giving the Exercises could follow the spiritual process and advancement of each exercitant. All this would amount to *a whole year of spiritual formation*, going from the way of purification to that of illumination and union, according to the mind of Ignatius seen in the Annotations of the Exercises (10).

The results of this first experience, realized in the year 1969-1970, seemed satisfactory. From then on, almost uninterruptedly, I offer this way of making the Exercises each year - without refusing, on the other hand, to give the Exercises of thirty days over the period of a month (cf. 4), when necessary. On this my particular way of giving the Exercises I wrote a brief article entitled *In quattro tempi* in the *Osservatore Romano* of 15 July 1971, p. 5.

I am aware of - and even partly share - the doubts and uncertainties that someone could have concerning this type of Exercises. The closely unified pace and internal dynamism characteristic of the Ignatian Exercises are, in this method, doubtless slowed down and in part lost. But it is not uncommon that, in the case of "beginners", such intense unity and dynamism are lived in a confusion between the psychic and the spiritual. The Exercises then run the risk of becoming a form of escapism from everyday reality, a sort of fleeting experience of spiritual indigestion; a dangerous illusion of a conversion that has not in fact taken place, and therefore an occasion of discouragement when such persons later slip back into mediocrity and even sin [6].

But the *Exercises in intensive stages*, which are different even from the very laudable *Exercices dans la vie courante* (cf. 19), make it possible for the exercitant to test and deepen, in the concrete living out of everyday existence, the fruit of the preceding intensive Week.

For this purpose it is obviously necessary that the intervals between the various Weeks be well planned, both as to the matter offered for the practice of prayer and of evangelical watchfulness (= examination of conscience) and in what concerns the exchange and dialogue between the one making and the one giving the Exercises as well as among the exercitants themselves, should these be more than one. Such exchange and dialogue would begin with what has *al-ready* taken place before the Lord, and open out to what has *still* to happen for and with Him (53) [7].

When I later had the idea of turning over completely from *the use of the Bible in the Exercises* to *the integration of the Exercises in the Bible* by faithfully employing the method of the *lectio divina*, I discovered that the intervals between the various Weeks became precious periods for the continuation and completion of the *lectio* of the whole of Scripture in a much more careful and deeper way that was possible within each separate Week.

2. *The stages of the integration of the Exercises in the Bible*

It is time now for me to describe concretely how I try in fact, during the four Ignatian Weeks, to integrate the Exercises into the movement of the Sacred Scriptures. For several years now I have been explaining this particular path during the week dedicated to "Sacred Scripture and the Spiritual Exercises" in the *Ignatian Course* organized by the Ignatian Centre of Spirituality; this Course is held

each year in Rome during the months of January-February, alternately in English and Italian [8].

A. *First Week*

The *First Week* is entirely taken up with a *lectio continua* of Gen 1,1-12,9.

The first two accounts of creation (1,1-2,4a; 2, 4b-25) constitute a powerful *Principle and Foundation* for the biblical narrative as a whole.

The second account in particular puts at the very basis of the rest of the biblical edifice the threefold relationship of MAN with GOD (Gen 2,7-8.15-17.18-19.21-22), MAN with WOMAN (= the *other* human being: Gen 2,20b-25) and MAN with the EARTH (Gen 2,8.15-17.19-20a). This threefold relationship represents the fundamental element of the consciousness that Israel has had, has always kept and still keeps, of its covenant with YHWH. Far from having been done away with, this consciousness has been definitively confirmed and opened out by the messianic coming of Jesus; it is strongly supported by the entire sweep of New Testament eschatology (cf. Rev 21-22; etc.).

The threefold structural dimension of man - respect for, and faithfulness to, it guarantees that a person is walking along the *Way of Life* (cf. Dt 30,15-20) - protects the exercitant from the start against any kind of spiritualism, all of which would be the direct antipodes of biblical spirituality and of the spirituality of the Exercises. For the Exercises unfold in their entirety not only in the presence of God our Lord and all His saints (58-59.151.232; etc.), but also before the whole world of history (95.102. 103.106-109.136-147; etc.) and all of creation (58.60; etc.).

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8. A first account of this course of mine can be found in: '*Lectio divina*' in the Exercises, in Various Authors, *The Word of God in the Spiritual Exercises*, CIS, Rome, 1979. pp. 79-100.
The same more extensively in: *Bibbia ed Esercizi spirituali*, pp. 50-77.

After this, Gen 3-11 provides a very rich biblical background for the spiritual experience that Ignatius calls the *First Week*.

The *three sins* - of man and of woman against God (Gen 3,1-24); of Cain against his brother (Gen 4,1-16); and of the builders of the tower of Babel against the meaning of the earth and of the progress of technical civilization (Gen 11,1-9) - cover the entire field of human sin and sinfulness. In them every exercitant can recognize what for him too has been, or could have been, the *Way of Death* (cf. Dt 30,15-20). Thus he is led to submit himself personally and freely, in the Second Exercise (55-61), to the *judgement* that the Word of the Lord pronounces on these sins; in this way he enters into the movement of contrition and of conversion.

The unchanging salvific will of the Lord, on the other hand, is already highlighted by His mercy towards Adam and Eve (Gen 3,15.20-21), and towards Cain (Gen 4,15). It is principally underscored by the order given to Noah to construct the Ark of universal salvation (Gen 6,8.14-7,16) and by the covenant made by God with *all mankind* and with *the whole earth* in the person of Noah (Gen 9,1-17).

In the *Third Exercise* the exercitant is offered a privileged way of interiorizing the lessons taught him by the Word of God, so that from the sin of the world and his own sinfulness he may draw all the benefits that the Lord's mercy offers him to enter personally into the covenant and firmly resolve on his conversion (62-63; cf. 53.61.71).

The account of the Deluge (Gen 6,1-9,17) presents a definite possibility of making a complete *repetition* on sin; above all, it describes at length the mysterious dynamism, as well as the spread and proliferation, of sin. Sin takes creation backwards into confusion and towards the unseemly chaos of radical disorder.

In the consequences inherent to sin - consequences in which the sinner brings harm upon himself - is revealed the *plan of the judgment and of the wrath of God* (Rom 1,18-32. Cf. Lev 26,14-46; Dt 28,15-68; etc.). This divine judgment and wrath should be taken quite seriously, as is done by Ignatius in the *fifth Exercise* (65-71), if we are to understand in all its depth the initiative of *salvation*

in history which God starts to work out with the call of Abraham to *salvation through faith* (= the *Way of the Justice of God*: cf. Rom 3, 21-31; etc.); of this Gen 12,1-9 begins to speak (cf. Heb 11,8-12,2).

A highly significant fact, to my mind, is that more than one exercitant, at the end of the First Week, experiences the desire and the need to renew his baptismal promises, even publicly.

B. *Second Week*

a. *First Part*

The method of the *lectio divina* has prompted me to divide the *Second Week* into two periods. This has also led me to an understanding of the *Ignatian parable of a human King chosen by God Himself* (92-94), which appears to me to have rich possibilities of development, even though I do not at all pretend with this to offer an exegesis that is historically faithful to the intent of Ignatius.

I give some five or six days to the First Week. After this there is as such no immediate need of a long break; so I follow it up with a *First Part* of the *Second Week*, which lasts at least seven days.

The *lectio divina* has forced me to take serious account of all that we call the *Old Testament* in the period between the *First Week* (Gen 1,1-12,9) and the *New Testament Gospel*.

In the Ignatian Exercises there is, between the First Week and the gospel contemplations, the *Exercise of the King* (91-98), which is the key contemplation as well as the methodological paradigm for the Second, Third and Fourth Weeks of the Exercises. It is also the *New Testament exercise par excellence*. A consideration of the Christological titles that Ignatius employs in this exercise would suffice to convince one of this.

But now, the fact of keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus who leads us in the race of faith and brings it to perfection (*archēgos kai teleiotēs*) urges us to contemplate as well the great multitude of witnesses that surround us on every side in this race of faith (Heb 12,1-2. Cf. 11,1-40).

Indeed, it is not possible to know Jesus Christ as the First and the Last (Rev 1,17), the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End (Rev 22,12-13) without identifying all the intermediary steps - that is, all the letters of the alphabet of God which run from the first to the last, all the names of reality which follow the Beginning and in preparatory fashion precede the End.

Ignatius himself understood, in his own way, that Jesus Christ and His New Testament call are not so much of a starting point as an event to which we must come *prepared* by a movement *a minori ad maius*. This is why he has rightly thought it necessary to *introduce* his contemplation of the Eternal King by that of an earthly King.

Now, far from inducing us to skip the preparation for the Messiah, the *lectio divina* offers us the whole *history of the covenant* (= the Old Testament) as the unfolding of that historical alphabet which makes up the Name of the Messiah Jesus, who is at once the key to understanding that alphabet and its final and complete fulfilment. Patristic exegesis, for its part, has made us used to reading all the books of the Old Testament as *sacramental signs* of the history of every Christian's personal life and of his life in the Church.

Why, then, should we so terribly impoverish the contemplation of the fulfilment that takes place in the gospels, by depriving it of the consideration of what is precisely brought to fulfilment in them? How is one to get to know the glorious Christ (that is the Christ of the Ignatian *exercise*) without contemplating Him between Moses and Elijah (cf. Lk 9,28-36; Mt 17,1-8; Mk 9,2-8; 2 Cor 4,3-6; Heb 1,1-2; 2 Pet 1,16-21)?

The new song to the Lamb - the Lamb that was sacrificed and so stands upright in the middle of the throne of God - extols in the heavenly liturgy the victorious Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, as the only one who is worthy to *open* the scroll sealed with seven seals which God holds in His right hand (Rev 5,1-14). So the New Testament is no other than Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah, the eternal King and universal Lord (95.97.98; cf. Rev 1,17-18), who offers an interpretation of the Scriptures concerning the mystery of God and of man - an interpretation not restricted to the opening of the intermediary seals

(which could well be a non-christian understanding of the Old Testament), but *carried on to the opening of the seventh and last seal.*

One recognizes the Risen Lord with paschal faith only when one listens to Him explaining along the way that *all* that is written in the *Tanakh* (= Law, Prophets and Psalms) refers after all to Him. Only then are our hearts aflame and our minds opened to understand the Scriptures: only then do our eyes recognize Him at the breaking of bread (Lk 24,13-35.44-49). I confess I would never have grasped all this but for my eight years stay in Jerusalem, in Israel.

It is my conviction, therefore, that it is not possible to introduce the exercitant to the Gospel dispensation without making him cover in some way the stages of the history of the covenant. And so, in the First Part of the Second Week, after giving a day to the *contemplation of the King* (91-98) based on Heb 12,1-2 (which concludes the preceding chapter: Heb 11,1-40), I propose a series of meditations on the Old Testament - some twenty of them - which unfold more or less in the following order:

- * Abraham and the journeying of the patriarchs.
- * The slavery in Egypt, the Passover and the Egyptian Exodus.
- * Sinai and the youth of Israel: the *People* journeying through the desert towards *God's Gift-Land* led by, and relying on, solely the *Word of YHWH* and His covenant.
- * The entry into Canaan, the conquest of the land, the period of anarchy and of the Judges.
- * The installing and foundation of a monarchy adapted to a people whose God is YHWH, and whom YHWH has chosen as His own inheritance. Saul and David (which human king more than David was chosen by God Himself? Cf. 92).
- * The institutions of the kingdom: the king, the scribes, the priests and worship; the prophets; the City (Jerusalem) and the Temple. Solomon. Canaanites and Philistines in the land of YHWH.
- * The sins of the establishment. The schism of the

twelve tribes and of the two sister kingdoms (Israel and Juda). The fall of Samaria and the Assyrian captivity. The destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple of YHWH, and the Babylonian captivity.

- * The great prophets of Israel: Elijah the Tishbite. From Carmel to Horeb. Elisha, Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah.
- * The exile: Jeremiah, Ezechiel, the Second Isaiah and the prophecy of the Servant of YHWH. The dream of a universalist Israel.
- * The return from exile: a second exodus. The birth of Judaism: the synagogue and spiritual worship. Jewish piety: prayer, almsgiving and fasting. Ezra and Nehemiah. The Third Isaiah.
- * Revealed teaching (*Torah*), the prophetic word (*Dabar*) and sapiential experience (*Ḥokmah/Sophia*): divine and human wisdom.
- * Apocalyptic literature and eschatology.
- * The clash between culture and faith, counterbalancing the sapiential movement. The wordly advancement of man and yahwist faith. The Maccabees and the war of national liberation.
- * The Psalms: prayer and poetry of Israel in all the personal and collective stages of its history.

Seven days are frankly not enough for a *lectio continua* which runs from Gen 12,10 to the last page of the Old Testament. But they suffice for an overall meditation of the historico-spiritual stages of the history of the covenant, a meditation fed by the *lectio* of particularly significant texts. In such a case, therefore, the *lectio* should have recourse to a biblical theology that remains, as far as possible, faithful to *the whole biblical narrative*, rather than to self-interested and biased bits and pieces dictated by extra-biblical or prematurely modernizing tendencies.

One can very well obviate the difficulties posed by such an *anthological reading* that takes place in the context of the Week by asking the exercitants to pursue on

their own a *lectio continua cursiva* of the *whole* Old Testament during the months (three, at least) which divide this First Part of the Second Week from its Second Part. This kind of *lectio continua cursiva* should always be done in the light of the opening *exercise* - that is, the *contemplation of the Messiah King* - and therefore in view of the messianic call personally addressed to the conscience of each exercitant. Hence it is clear how useful it is to plan for an interval of some months between the two periods of the Second Week.

My experience has confirmed for me the fact that exercitants are greatly helped by coming from the whole Old Testament to the New Testament. Is not the Old Testament, after all, God's own working out and account of the *Preparation for the Fulfilment?*

It is principally this preparation that makes it possible for the exercitant to encounter the *historical Messiah of God*, the only true Messiah (not merely the *Jesus* of history, but the *Christ* of history), such as He understood and presented Himself to His people Israel, and such as He was understood and preached as good news to Israel and to the nations by the apostles and disciples of the early Church.

Not a "Christ" fashioned by the hands of men according to patterns of earthly expectations, or ideologies or other cultural exigencies. Not a Word of God made "man in general", born of a "woman in general", but the son of Miriam of Nazareth, the Daughter of Sion; born of the race of David (Rom 1,3; 9,5; etc.); the one of whom Moses in the Torah wrote and the Prophets too (Jn 1,45; Cf. 5, 39-47); Jesus of Nazareth, Messiah of Israel and King of the Jews (cf. Jn 19, 19-22), in whose Name conversion and the forgiveness of sins should be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Lk 24,47).

This kind of *adequate* enlightening of the Christological conscience of believers is, I hold, of the greatest importance for a proper grasp of the *messianic salvation* which Christian faith and the Church are all about, and to which they are committed.

Taking the Old Testament seriously obliges one not be content with a hasty identification between Christian

historical messianism and ideological messianism - based on class and socio-political in character, in which "the people", "the poor" or "the oppressed" become automatically, on the sheer grounds of being such, the messianic people of God.

Taking the Old Testament seriously obliges one as well not to be content with a hasty identification, that is gnostic in character, between "humanity" or "man" and *people* or *son of God*, and with a consequent identification between Jesus of Nazareth and a Jesus "fulfilment of man in general", such as is frequently proposed by a "universalistic" messianism - no less ideological - which is much more philosophical and psychological than *historical* in character.

Taking the Old Testament seriously as the *history* of *messianic salvation for all men* makes it impossible to substitute it simplistically by other cultural and religious traditions; such substitution, in seeking to bypass the orientation given to history by God (from Jerusalem even to the ends of the earth), would tend to make of the Gospel of Jesus the natural outlet of all human cultures and values.

I cannot, of course, here develop these and similar points; but it is not difficult to understand that *on this crucial issue of the historical messianism of Jesus Christ* turn the controversies concerning the theologies of liberation, as do also the confrontations between the various humanisms, the problems of the inculturation of the faith, and even the clash among the various forms of Hebrew messianism, etc.

b. *Second Part*

The *Second Part* of the *Second Week* generally covers nine days and consists of a *lectio continua* of the Gospel according to Luke, which seems to me to be best suited to the needs of one making the thirty-days Exercises for the first time. For Lk is *the Gospel of the path of Jesus-Visitation of YHWH and of His following* (cf. Lk 1,68-79; 7, 16; 10,1-12; and the whole section of the going up to Jerusalem: 9,51-19,46), as it is also *the Gospel of Jesus-Sword*

of YHWH, *sign of contradiction*, which pierces the heart of His Land-Mother, laying bare the thoughts of many hearts (cf. Lk 2,34-35, and the appearance of so many pairs of persons who are set in contrast to each other by the coming of Jesus; Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman; Martha and Mary; the well-known rich man and the Twelve; Zachaeus and Jerusalem...right up to the two criminals crucified with Jesus).

What is of capital importance in this *lectio continua* of the third Gospel is *the programmatic messianic discourse of Jesus in the synagogue of His home-town Nazareth*. It fits in admirably with the second part of the Exercise of the King at the beginning of the Second Week of the Exercises (95-98; cf. Lk 4,14-30).

Then the account of the temptations of Jesus (Lk 4, 1-13) - and especially that of all His successive *discernments* between *two wisdoms* and *two ways* (cf. the theme of the Sword of YHWH which runs through the land, which I have mentioned above. Cf. Ez 14,17-18; etc.) - makes it possible to discover on every page, thus offering many providential *repetitions*, the whole extraordinary force of the Ignatian meditation of the two standards (135-148. Cf. 164-168).

In my little book *Bibbia ed Esercizi spirituali* (pp. 63-65) I have hinted at a way of *contemplating the consciousness* (or the heart) of Jesus, which I propose in the form of a *repetition-application of senses* at the end of each day of the Second, Third and Fourth Weeks. It entails penetrating beyond the gospel words and deeds of Jesus to His *consciousness and freedom as Son*, thus letting oneself be influenced by and imbued with it under the action of the Spirit, in order to be shaped to and identified with it.

I attribute very great importance to this *exercise*, as it is the *spiritual* exercise par excellence. Indeed, it is the *Spirit of the Son* who cries "Abba" in our hearts (Gal 4,6. Cf. Rom 8,14-17), and who works out in us the plan of the Father, viz., that *we be shaped and moulded to the image of the Son*, so that He might be the eldest of many brothers (Rom 8,29).

To let the freedom of Jesus, Master and historical Messiah, *freely, out of love* and through a prolonged and

devoted contemplation of His person, condition and inspire and determine *my own freedom as disciple and follower of Jesus* is the best and most efficacious means I can use to prepare myself for that *correct and good choice or decision* that is the peak of the Second Week and the goal of all the Exercises (164-189. Cf. also 214.248).

During this Second Part of the Second Week I am able to cover from ten to fifteen chapters of the Third Gospel. The break between the Second and Third-Fourth Weeks will allow the exercitants to complete this *lectio-meditatio* right up to chapter 21. From it each one of them will have picked up the interpretation clues that make his *oratio-contemplatio* fruitful. What in fact is important is, as Ignatius observes, to offer to the exercitant a way of proceeding and a method of meditating or contemplating the events of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel (162.238).

C. *Third and Fourth Weeks*

Normally I propose the *Third and Fourth Weeks* together to signify concretely the unity of the paschal mystery, focal point and centre of New Testament conversion and of the whole of Christian existence.

I assign six days to each of these two peak moments of the itinerary of the Exercises, but in the six days given to the Fourth Week are included the last two set aside for the *Contemplation to attain love* (230-237).

The *lectio continua* for these two Weeks is provided by the four gospel accounts (almost synoptic) of the Passion and by the four sequences (not synoptic) of the Gospels of the Resurrection. The *narrative of the Supper* in particular - that is, the anticipated sacramental celebration of the Passion - is a precious help to contemplate the workings of the *freedom of Jesus*, which will then prove to be inspiration and support for *the exercitant's freedom in his choice or election*. Ignatius himself seems to have accorded great importance to this particular Supper account in the gospel narrative (190-198.209.289).

The *Fourth Week* introduces the final stage of the exercitant's journey: the actual present condition of the Christian, *his paschal-baptismal existence within the Church of the New Testament.*

The import of the four Gospels of the Resurrection (= the *Forty Days* of Ac 1,3 between the Resurrection and the Ascension) is that of a *school of paschal faith*, helping us to learn how to *remain faithful* to (literally "*persevere*" in: Ac 2,42; 13,43; etc.) the risen condition in union with Christ (cf. Col 3,1-4), who is the Consoler of the Church and of individual believers (224), ceaselessly bestowing on them the Comforter Spirit.

Particularly helpful, I think, are the final contemplations of the concluding sections of the four Gospels (Mt 28,16-20; Mk 16,14-20; Lk 24,44-53; Jn 21,1-23. Cf. Ac 1,1-11) seen as four icons or frescoes. By means of these the four *different* gospel compositions convey to us *one and the same* message (which is also Luke's message in the Acts of the Apostles and that of the Book of Revelation): namely, where we can today find the Risen Jesus and what He is doing; how we can enter into relationship with Him: how we fulfil, and remain faithful to, His mission; how we are to live through the present trials, waiting and preparing ourselves for His glorious return. In a word, it all amounts to the Gospel of the period of the Church.

The attempt of catechesis to work out a concordance of these four concluding gospel accounts, by arranging them in chronological sequence, is doomed to failure. What is worse, such an attempt diminishes considerably the spiritual power contained in each of these accounts. Far more fruitful is the contemplation - suggested by the *history of composition* (*Redaktionsgeschichte*) - of the four concluding sections seen as the culminating summit of four great cathedrals of very different styles, four cathedrals constructed to celebrate one and the same mystery.

The *Contemplation to attain love* (230-237) in each one of its four points presents once again the fruit proper to each of the four Weeks. But this time they are contemplated together, all unified and geared to supporting the exercitant's vision of faith, so that he may see and find God in all things and all things in Him - today, tomorrow

and until the final and definitive meeting with God-who-is-Love (1 Jn 4,8.16), with Him who is, who was and is to come (Rev 1,4.8; etc.).

This is the closing word of the Ignatian Exercises, as it is also the closing word of the Scriptures: "The Spirit and the Bride say: 'Come!'. And let everyone who listens answer: 'Come!'..." (Rev 22,17.20).

III. THE BIBLE AND SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

I have never understood the integration of the Spiritual Exercises in the Bible, which I have so far described, as a biblical catechesis. I know full well, as I have already mentioned (page 69 above), that the core of the Exercises is not *didactics of the Word* but the *discernment of the Spirit*, which after all is the essence of New Testament worship (cf. Rom 12,1-2; Phil 3,3; Col 1,9-12; Heb 13,10-16.21; 1 Pet 1,14-16; 2,1-10; etc.).

Personally, besides directing the Exercises, I give much of my activity to both the *academic* and the *catechetical* teaching of Scripture; I am well aware of the different nature of the three activities as also of their distinct methodologies. In the context of the Exercises, the presentation of biblical *history* is not an end in itself. It merely introduces the exercitant into what is in effect the *indispensable horizon for every good and authentic spiritual discernment*.

Spiritual discernment is not a type of exercise that is a psychological analysis of the human psyche, but an *exercise that is an attentive listening to the workings of the divine Pneuma in the human psyche*, so as to gather up the manifestation of God's will concerning persons in the orientation of their lives for salvation, and for the mission which the Lord entrusts to them in the salvific history of the world (1.21; etc. Cf. 1 Cor 2,1-16; James 3,13-18; etc.).

It is all about *listening to the non-written Word of God*, which is being uttered everywhere in the Church and in the world, even today, within individual men and women

and within communities, and which is revealed through the inner enlightenment and the drawing force experienced in the depths of conscience.

This Word is present in no other person than the one to whom God is speaking *here and now*. It is not to be found lodged in the Sacred Scriptures. It is not known beforehand and with certainty by any representative of authority or by any other spiritual person. It is incumbent solely on the individual man or woman in question - and this as a most pleasing task - to keep attentive to this Word, to sift its genuine movements from those that are not so, to search through the night for the Beloved of his/her heart (Song of Songs 3,1).

The voice and the action of the Spirit resonate continually within the consciences of persons - at times powerfully (175), at other times more discreetly and quietly (176.177). The field to which this Word extends is the limitless region of all that is *contingent* in the realm of the good (cf. 165.166.170.177.353.365; etc.).

But, in his thirty days of Exercises, Ignatius teaches us that man does not *ordinarily* know the very concrete and contingent will of God for him - from one moment to another, instinctively and in the often ambiguous and mixed-up run of everyday life - without a free decision on his part to enter into and live precisely in a continuing condition of spiritual discernment.

Ignatius understood very well, and took seriously, the fact that spiritual discernment supposes and entails that every disciple of Jesus, every New Testament believer can and should have a profoundly real immediate experience of God in his conscience (15.155.180.184.329.330.338; etc.). It is the kind of experience of God that K. RAHNER calls "non-objectivated", i.e., without a conceptual object [9].

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9. Cf. especially *Das Dynamische in der Kirche* (Quaestiones Disputatae, 5), Basel-Freiburg-Wien, 1958, pp. 74-148; and *Rede des Ignatius von Loyola an einen Jesuiten von heute*, in *Ignatius von Loyola*, mit einem Essay von Karl Rahner, einer historischen Einführung von Paul Imhof SJ, 52 Farbildern von Helmuth Nils Loose and 42 Stichen der Ignatius-Biographie von 1609, Frei-

Schematically, according to Ignatius, the state of discernment comprises structurally three principal steps:

a. The greatest possible purification and withdrawal from every personal sinful act, as well as from every inordinate affection, habit or inclination and from every form or vestige of worldliness (1.21.62.63; etc.).

b. The sustained meditation and contemplation of the world of God, such as it has been communicated to us by His written Word - that is, by Sacred Scripture. To help him arrive at a deeply personal and unique decision as response to God, Ignatius engages the exercitant in continuous meditation throughout the day on the biblical and gospel texts and events, following a method of prayer in which one has rightly been able to recognize an authentic Ignatian version of the tradition of the *Lectio divina* [10]. This *lectio* is the most apt context within which the exercitant could and should exercise spiritual discernment according to the rules set out for such discernment - rules which, we all know, constitute the formal backbone of the Exercises (313-370; cf. 210-217).

The *lectio divina* is, in fact, *sacramental* not merely in what concerns the specific *efficacy* of the *written Word of God* in the one who reads it with obedient faith to make it penetrate his heart (*pia lectio* [11]). It is also *sacramental* inasmuch as it establishes a condition of *contemporaneity* between the written Word of God, as it has resonated down the ages and through the history and cultures of the past, and the Word of God as it resonates *today* in the Church (the present-day ecclesial significance

./ . burg-Basel-Wien, 1978, pp. 9-38. Cf. also *Bibbia ed Esercizi spirituali*, pp. 11-14.

10. Cf. F.ROSSI de CASPERIS, '*Lectio divina*' e orazione ignaziana, p. 14; D.M. STANLEY, *Contemplation of the Gospel, Ignatius Loyola and the Contemporary Christian*, in *Theological Studies* 29 (1968) 417-433.

11. Cf. Vatican Council II, Constitution DEI VERBUM, on divine revelation, chap. VI, n.25.

of the Word) and, in and through the Church, becomes *the interior and individual Word* (present-day personal significance of the Word) that God, *through the action of His Spirit*, causes to resonate here and now in the heart of the one who is reading the Word [12].

Just as it has now become impossible, ontologically speaking, to encounter the true God, YHWH of the First Covenant, except in Jesus who is the final and definitive incarnate Word of the Father, so too, ontologically speaking, my encounter with the Word which God addresses to me in the Church today takes place within the Word which from Abraham to Jesus and on to the last apostle He addressed in history to Israel and, through it, to all the nations.

With a view to seeking and finding God's personal will for me, what is more important than placing before me the particular *object* about which I wish to make a choice (178) is the contextual background, the *world* as it were, the atmosphere and the *horizon* within which I previously and freely situate and keep myself (my *precomprehension*, so to speak) in order to make my decision-*election*.

In order to choose not what I want - such as I *de facto* already am - but what *God wants of me* (cf. Mt 26, 38-39.42.44; Mk 14,33-36.39; Lk 22,41-42. Cf. Jn 12,27-28), I need previously a *conversion of the horizon of my knowledge and of my life*. I shall have to shift myself to, live and move as freely as I possibly can within, the world of God contemplated in its widest possible sweep.

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12. In this understanding of the necessary previous *present-day ecclesial significance* of the Word of God, which alone makes possible and sacramentally effective the *present-day personal significance* of the Word in the heart of every individual believer, lies the difference, as L. BOUYER explains very well, between the best Protestant spirituality and Catholic spirituality. This latter in its turn preserves and carries to perfection the most authentic Jewish spirituality. Cf. *Parola, Chiesa e Sacramenti nel Protestantismo e nel Cattolicesimo*, Brescia, 1962, pp. 20-26. See also the same author's *Introduzione alla vita spirituale*, Torino, 1965, pp. 23-30.

For this I need to enter, by means of the Scriptures, into the Word of God as into a *world* where I mean to dwell habitually and forever [13].

To choose in such a way as to make real for me, here and now, the covenant of the people of God - biblical and Christian faith incorporates me into this people (Ac 2, 41-47; 5,14; 11,24) - I have to return to Sinai with the whole people of God, climb up Mount Horeb, and relive the memory of the whole history of the covenant.

On this condition alone will the movements which I experience in my consciousness and in my liberty be able to reveal to me that *the will of God has become my will* and that my freedom has been liberated in God [14].

c. The third structural step of a state of spiritual discernment will consist precisely of the careful examination of the interior spiritual (not merely psychic) states of the person; watchful attention to the alternations of consolations and desolations, to the reactions of conscience, to the sensitive movements of the person's freedom, to the attractions of the Spirit, etc. (cf. 135.169-189.210-217.313-370; etc.). All this with the *aid* - but only with the aid (!) - of "the one who gives the Exercises", viz., of a brother or sister gifted with the charism of the "*ayuda espiritual*" (spiritual help) for other persons. It is precisely this ministry of "*ayuda espiritual*" that is the vocation of the Society of Jesus.

It is quite clear, then, that Sacred Scripture plays a role of decisive importance in spiritual discernment. To be sure that what I am experiencing within me is the work and movement of God's Spirit, I should already from the start be permanently and *wholly orientated towards God alone* (15.23.169.179.184; etc.). Now this is done following the lead of the Word of God, journeying along from Abraham even unto Jesus. This is done when one places oneself, with as open and broad a vista as possible, before the wide sweep of God's Holy Land, in the midst of God's

13. *Bibbia ed Esercizi spirituali*, pp. 34-42.

14. *Bibbia ed Esercizi spirituali*, pp. 14-17.

people, and as a most devoted follower of Jesus, Messiah of Israel and universal Lord (104. Cf. 91-98).

In this way I shall have approached and assembled all the necessary and sufficient elements that would make it possible for the Spirit of God to reveal to me, and make me experience, where I stand and, above all, *who* I am called to be here and now. All that now remains to be done is to entrust myself completely to Him.

It would still be necessary to add that this plunging into the Word is what most effectively brings about purification from sin and from its roots, which I have already talked about. Indeed, faith is what purifies the heart (Ac 15,9; Eph 3,14-19; Col 1,21-23; etc.). Breathing the atmosphere of the Land of God succeeds in freeing one of the seductions of all other idolatrous climes and contexts [15].

CONCLUSION

Something should still be said about the so-called "Exercises" of *eight*, or *five*, or *three* days. The method of *Lectio divina* can be profitably applied even to these. Indeed, it was in such "Exercises" that I began to discover that a biblical text (a book of the Bible or part of it) - when read, meditated and prayed over in continuous fashion for a certain number of days - gradually ends up by revealing the entire dynamics of the Word and of the Spirit - which, after all, are the very dynamics of the Ignatian

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15. On the subject of "Parola di Dio e discernimento spirituale" ("The Word of God and spiritual discernment") I read two papers recently (July 4 and 5, 1984) at the XII National Meeting of the FIES (Federazione Italiana Esercizi Spirituali), held at Rocca di Papa. The theme of the Meeting was: "*Signore, che io veda!*" (Lk 18,41). *Il discernimento spirituale del cristiano oggi*. My two papers will be published in the Proceedings of this National Meeting.

Exercises [16] - even if one does not always necessarily follow the precise order and sequence of that text.

After twenty-five years of searching and of attempts made, these are my personal experiences and the conclusions I have reached. I share them simply because I have been asked to; I do so with a deep awareness of the unpretentiousness of the path that I propose.

The ways of the Spirit in the Church of God and of His Son are many and manifold; they are all ways to freedom. Spiritual Exercises of whatever type - whether Ignatian or not, whether guided by me or by others - are not a necessary means for salvation. Nor are they meant for all persons, nor suitable for just anyone at all at any and every stage of that person's spiritual development (cf. 18.19).

In the pluralism of paths along which the Spirit of God draws and leads persons to follow Jesus, I believe there is place as well for the path that I follow, and propose, and have here explained. I do not in the least pretend that this my path is the only one, not even that it is the best way of giving or of making Spiritual Exercises. Nor do I pretend that it is the only, or the best, way of giving or making the Ignatian Exercises.

My own experience on this subject is limited and relative; but I may not, and should not, side-step this experience of mine. I do not particularly like to lose myself and my time in sterile discussions; but if someone, on reading these notes, should feel inspired to correct me on some point, or to offer me some useful suggestion, or even just to encourage me on the path I have undertaken, I shall be grateful to him.

16. Cf. *Bibbia ed Esercizi spirituali*, pp. 75-77.