

From The Ignatian Tradition

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE ONE GIVING AND FOR THE ONE RECEIVING THE EXERCISES

Achille Gagliardi

*Achille Gagliardi (1537-1607) entered the Society of Jesus in 1559, taught theology in Rome, and spent periods teaching and working pastorally in Turin, Milan, and in various other places now in Northern Italy. His Latin **Commentary on the Spiritual Exercises**, dating from the 1580s, was edited by the Belgian Jesuit, Constantin van Aken in 1882.¹*

*We can only speculate about the background of the text. It was never published in Gagliardi's lifetime; he was in some quarters a suspect figure on account of another work, the **Breve compendio di perfezione cristiana**, and of his association with 'la dama milanese', the spiritually gifted Isabella Cristina Beringaza.*

Here we reproduce part of a chapter in which Gagliardi discusses giving the Exercises, and—more briefly and perfunctorily—making them. Gagliardi strikingly elaborates Ignatian teaching on God's presence in the self and on sensitivity to individuals. At the time it was written, it may have represented a minority position in a tradition which was becoming relatively conformist. But we need to be cautious about reading late sixteenth-century Jesuit spirituality in terms of a simple conflict between 'ascetics' and 'mystics', between free spirits and authoritarian superiors. Gagliardi's career as a teacher in Rome seems to have ended because he complained to the Pope about the liberalism of the then General, Everard

¹ *Commentarii seu explanationes in Exercitia spiritualia Sancti Patri Ignatii de Loyola*, edited by Constantin van Aken (Brugge: Desclée, 1882). The passage given here is to be found on pp. 40-51.

Mercurian (often presented as a martinet and as a spiritual philistine), in regard to a fellow-teacher whose doctrine was too adventurous.²

*The chapter is set out in four loose sections. The first section is little more than a repetition of two Ignatian texts: the passage from the **Constitutions** where Ignatius recommends that Jesuits in training gradually become familiar with giving the Exercises;³ and the eighteenth Annotation, insisting that people not be given more of the Exercises than they can cope with. Then he sets out three more 'principles': flexibility; a style of teaching close to the learner's experience; and the boundaries between what the retreat-giver does and what must be left to God. Each section ends with a brief paragraph on how these principles apply for the one making the Exercises.*

The Prudent Discrimination of the One Giving—The Sincerity of the One Receiving

The second principle for the one giving the Exercises is this (assuming doctrine and their having been taken through the whole book of the Exercises): when they get down to practice, in other words to actually giving someone the Exercises, they must not be tied to the letter of what that book lays down in such a way that they maintain all these things in every case indiscriminately, constantly maintaining the same content and style. The reason is that our working with grace must be accommodated, both to the diversity of people, and to the grace itself. Moreover, when the prescriptions and rules of the book are given for us

² Gagliardi is a complex figure, and he has not been adequately studied. The standard reference works all refer to him, more or less satisfactorily: see Ignacio Iparraguirre and André Derville in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 6, cols. 53-64 (1967); Giandomenico Mucci, in the *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús*, vol. 2, pp. 1547-1548 (2001); Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, translated by William J. Young (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986 [1942]), pp. 257-258; Ignacio Iparraguirre in vol. 2 of his *Historia de los Ejercicios de San Ignacio* (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1955), pp. 39-43. A team under the leadership of André Derville has produced a French translation of the *Commentary on the Spiritual Exercises* and the *Breve compendio* (Paris: Desclée, 1996), though there are tacit omissions in the text; there is also an Italian translation of the material on discernment from the *Commentary* by Giovanni Ardledler and Giuliano Ruffo (Rome: Apostolato della Preghiera, 2000). Mario Gioia has prepared critical editions of the *Breve compendio* and of Beringaza's *Per via di annichilazione* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1996, 1994). In English, extracts from the *Commentary* have been published in *Woodstock Letters*, 46 (1917), a private publication of the Maryland Jesuits; and in the Indian journal *Ignis*, 16 (1987). Van Aken's edition worked off only one of the several extant manuscripts, and needs to be replaced with a more critical treatment.

³ *Constitutions* IV.8.5, E [508-509].

so that we can work along with this grace, it is not the case that they must all be given to everyone literally in the same way, without any distinction. They should rather be given with the greatest prudent discrimination—individuals should be given only those things which suit them. It can be established that this was the mind of Holy Father Ignatius from the fact that he leaves almost all matters to the one giving the Exercises, for them freely and authentically to change the rules, and accommodate them in line with the diversity and with the needs of those receiving them.⁴

For, *first*, Holy Father Ignatius arranges all the Exercises in four Weeks, as is clear. On this point, he adds that there is no need for each one of these to contain seven or eight days, but rather they can be cut or extended, in line with the material under consideration, with the different movements of the spirit (which—when you are dealing with many people—varies), and with the slowness or alacrity of mind, aptitude and movement on the part of the one receiving the Exercises.

Secondly, as regards whether to give them all, or a few, or more of them, he appropriately teaches that the Exercises are to be accommodated depending on the state of the one who is exercising: for instance as regards age, learning, intelligence, strength, and so on.

Thirdly, he allows that people occupied with serious business can make the Exercises over an hour and a half, and leave the rest of the day to their work. From this it follows, in this and other similar cases, that the order laid down in the book is being changed.

Fourthly, once different movements of the spirit have been noted in the one receiving, he leaves matters free: for he would prescribe ‘some spiritual exercises appropriate for that necessity of soul at the time’—in other words, different things for the difference in such need.

Fifthly, he wanted it to be open for the one giving the Exercises to add, during the purgative way, meditations about death, about sin and its punishments, about the judgment and similar things.

Sixthly, in the same place, having set out how the hours of the day are to be allocated to the various exercises, he adds: ‘this distribution of

⁴ In the paragraphs which follow, Gagliardi is drawing on Exx nn. 4, 17-19, 71-72, 130, 162, 205-206, 209, 227-229. He is using the 1548 official Latin text (Vulgate), now regarded as somehow less authentic than the Spanish version corrected in Ignatius’ own hand. However, an English translation by Pierre Wolff of the Vulgate has been published (Ligouri, MO: Triumph, 1997).

time can be increased or diminished, in line with differences of age, spirit, bodily disposition and constitution’.

Seventhly, he wanted the use of the additional directions to be varied and circumspect, in line with the differences in the mysteries that we meditate; for some require penance and others not; some sadness, others joy.

Eighthly, the Mysteries of the Life of Christ in the Second Week could be supplemented by other meditations, or else reduced, depending on the possibilities of time, and what will be useful to the person exercising themselves; then he takes the same point over into the mysteries of the Third and Fourth Weeks.

Ninthly, as regards the points in this same kind of exercise, he leaves the exercitant free to do more or fewer of them, according to what they feel will help them more.

From all this it follows that learning and knowledge in the one giving are not enough. Beyond this, they must have enough prudent discrimination to know how to accommodate the rules and the exercises in line with how people and their dispositions differ, by changing, reducing, adding, according to what they will see in the Lord to be more appropriate. *This* is the reason why Holy Father Ignatius gave a very exact explanation of everything in the whole practice—not so that we follow it for everyone, but so that we use it to draw on, take things from it, and change what it is appropriate for individuals.

Learning and knowledge are not enough

Elsewhere he rightly says that the fruit of the Exercises will not come unless a person keeps to the times, styles, and additional directions laid down. But he is talking about the one who receives, whose role is to do nothing on their own initiative, but rather to do everything following what the one giving lays down. For it is the job of the one giving to lay down in minute detail the times and styles and everything else—and this differently in line with the differences between people. This point is left to their prudent discrimination. Since none of these things are decidable in a book, he has set out the most elaborate form for everything, for the one giving the Exercises to observe to the extent that is possible. And they should change it *ad lib*, when they judge this to be worthwhile.

Thus it follows that this style of learning is difficult. For, beyond book-knowledge and one’s own experience, it requires so much prudent discrimination—which is in fact a sign of its praiseworthiness and its

high worth. But there is no lack of things that relieve this difficulty. For a certain divine gift is present, furnished by God: that of discriminating between spirits. On this we should rely, more than on any other skill or prescription. Obedience also comes to our help: a person should give themselves to this task of giving the Exercises through obedience's command, not on their own initiative. They should trust very much in the Lord, that He, commanding what He wants, will also give what He commands.⁵ Thirdly, when it is a matter of actually giving the Exercises, a person should make every effort to do what is in their power, and commit themselves without any anxiety of spirit totally to God. For the anointing of the Holy Spirit will make good whatever might be desired in the person. Therefore they should hold to the prescriptions of the book, come to understand the disposition of the one receiving and their need, and meet the necessity from the relevant provisions. If they are not able to do this on the basis of their knowledge and experience, they should gradually become familiar with things until they have acquired perfect skill: that is what doctors and skilled persons of every other sort normally do. Meanwhile they should trust in the Lord, and hope; they should do what they can without any anxiety and with a pure intention of spirit. They should understand that God will not allow the soul to be cheated of its fruit, as daily experience shows.

To this second principle for the one giving there should correspond in the one receiving a certain sincerity of spirit, enabling them to reveal in full confidence what is going on inside them, so that they can be directed, to the one giving. This is what a sick person does for the doctor with their disease. Above all they should reveal the thoughts and feelings sent by either the good or the evil spirit, so that they can be discerned: the maladies which ensue (of the passions, the affections, the trains of thought and so on) so that they can be cured; and also the good things which ensue from the good spirit, in desires, consolations, intentions and other things, so that about these the person can be illuminated and directed. All these points have been gathered from what has been continuous practice, and from various places scattered around the book. They should adhere to what is laid down—and in everything, even very small things, they should conscientiously observe the instructions of the one giving right down to the least detail.

⁵ An allusion to a famous saying recorded in Augustine's *Confessions*, book 10, c. xxix (40).

Teaching and Learning: Why and How

The third principle is about the method that the one giving the Exercises should adopt in giving the rules and prescriptions to the one receiving, and in giving instruction about everything that arises in this learning process.

For, *first*, they must teach in good order, just as is normal in other fields of learning. They give first principles, drawing other points from these in an ordered fashion, as it were architectonically. It is necessary for the one giving the Exercises to know the whole of what is to be learnt in this kind of way, since they are themselves architects. But very often this will be unsuitable for the one receiving: their spirit should not be overwhelmed or frightened off. They need just a few things—practical things—about what they are actually meant to do as it comes up. And the method should also be practical. You should be like a teacher: ‘this is to be left out’; ‘this is to be done’; ‘this is to be changed’;

***People need
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‘this is to be toned down’, and so on. Go gently and gradually, so that the person scarcely realises or notices that there is a skill involved. Be very brief, so that they can remember what you are saying, and find it easy to put it into practice. While the person is recounting and revealing what is going on for them, there is an opportunity here which can be used to give them particular instruction, encouragement and direction. For in this way, they will easily make progress, and be encouraged towards greater things. It is they who will fill out what is being said, and gently make very great progress.

These are the practical methods by which children are educated in any skill whatever. If it were done in any other way, they would be confused, overwhelmed and dispirited. The whole book proclaims this throughout. For on this account it does not keep to any sort of logical, scientific order or method, of the kind we hand on among ourselves. It assumes that the one giving has got all that. Rather, here and there, in various places, it assigns instructions for a particular point in the actual practice, beginning with more obvious things that are less to do with perfection, and suitable for the one receiving. Although this does bring about a certain confusion, it is something done by Holy Father Ignatius with great discrimination and wisdom, in order that the one giving will think about what will be useful for the one receiving. At the same time, he is also teaching the one giving how they should use the instructions

in order to educate the one receiving. Nothing should be beyond their understanding; everything should be done in its place, that is, once they have completed what has come before. This requires great experience, flexibility, and prudent discrimination if a person is to have this sort of habitual feeling for this style of teaching. What might be appropriate at a particular time should be always at their fingertips. They must not add what is not relevant, nor offer less than is required.

What must correspond to this principle in the one learning is a very great attention to what is being said: they must ponder these things, be fully docile, and be observant—as is clear from the whole book.

Observing Limits

Fourthly and finally, the one giving the Exercises should observe limits: how they should move forward with the one receiving to a specific point, and where they should stop. When he explains this matter, Holy Father Ignatius wisely teaches that the spirit of the one making the Exercises is to be disposed by the instructions and advice of the one giving; they must be enlightened and moved on as far as they are capable. But then, helped by these means, they are to deal with God themselves, immediately, and to obtain in prayer and in communion with Him the light and gifts by which they can attain and reach the goal of the Exercises: being purged of vices; becoming clearer about their own state of vocation; being made a new person by being made to shine in the virtues by God's own self through an amendment of their whole life; the perfection of the spiritual life; ascending the summit of charity and of union with God. And since this whole art consists in almost nothing beyond this principle, the most important of all, we now need to explicate it thoroughly.

First, therefore, the one giving the Exercises must—as far as their own zeal and desires are concerned—embrace everything that we have mentioned in a generous spirit. In God's presence they must help the one receiving towards all these things by their prayers, moving them forward with the greatest effort and fervour, begging for them all these good things. But in their practice, they must adopt an extreme moderation of spirit, self-control and prudence, in case they get led on by their fervour of spirit and, while they are wanting to manage everything of themselves, attain nothing.

Secondly. They should understand that the changing of the human heart, the illumination of the mind, the inflaming of the affections, the calling to any state of perfection whatever—in short the provision of the things which are sought through the Exercises—are matters for God alone. Hence they must also be entrusted to God alone, so that all these things can be brought about in the spirit of the one receiving immediately, without the activity of any human being.

It is in itself a holy deed to exhort our neighbour to taking vows, to invite them to a state of perfection, and to persuade them of these things though scriptural motives and examples. Likewise it is holy by the same means to dissuade them from vices, to stimulate them to the love of the virtues in many and effective ways, to reveal to them clearly their faults so that they can amend, to give full meditations in which both the mind and the feelings have whatever can be put forward in such material so that meditation can occur not just for one hour but for several. But because of what has just been said, all these other things are to be omitted during the time of the Exercises. For, though it can happen that a person be moved and persuaded by these things, this is nevertheless inappropriate during the Exercises themselves. For, first, we do not know what God is wanting from that soul; while, led on by our fervour, we are arbitrarily commending something higher than the person is capable of, we are often imposing on them a very serious danger and harm. Secondly, once our persuasion ceases, they will easily fall into temptation, because it was by a human spirit that they were led into changing their state of life, not by God—and they become unstable, falling into a very serious sadness of soul. When, by contrast, they are led immediately by God, they are steeped in a much greater spiritual relish, they are moved more powerfully, they become far more certain about their vocation and more steadfast in their intention. Moreover, by this way of operating, the highest action, which is God's alone, is left to God alone: we give to God what is God's.

There is no lack of spiritual books full of the treasures of the virtues, commending every possible loftiness with the highest eloquence and persuasiveness. These, however, anticipate and thus impede the things sent into us by God, because they are trying to commend the same thing to everybody at all times. Moreover, the gifts of vocation and divine inflowing are as many as there are individual souls. The highest instance of skill and prudent discrimination, therefore, consists in



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Ignatius Giving the Exercises to a Student in Paris

directing individuals' spirits so that, joined immediately to God, they may be taught by God what God wants of them individually—directing them only for this purpose and by these means.

That is what Holy Father Ignatius, the true master of this art, is seeking throughout this divine book. That is why it does not contain any erudition, why it does not offer persuasion, why it has no power to move the feelings by the strength of its eloquence. Instead it starkly, simply, puts forward very brief precepts, rules and points, through which the soul can be led to God's own self, and allow the creator in person to do all the business with the creature immediately, and the creature with the creator.

This second way is of course much more difficult than the first. For it is not so difficult to portray from the scriptures the excellence of the virtues, the ugliness of the vices, the summit of perfection, and other

such things, in such a way that the recipients are moved and persuaded. But accommodating precepts point by point to individuals, so that they can be disposed to communion with God,⁶ and attain through that union what they are seeking in very deep and difficult matters—there is no doubt that this is tough, indeed heroic.

Thirdly. It follows that the one giving the Exercises is obliged to a certain indifference of soul, to a certain balance, as Holy Father Ignatius says, regarding all states of life, vows, vocations and other such things. What is absolutely necessary is that their spirit be set on one thing only: that they desire to move the soul with which they have been entrusted to the interior disposition and readiness that enables the soul to be illuminated and directed by God, according to God's own good pleasure.

Fourthly. From this it follows that they err who want to tie those receiving the Exercises to what they have experienced within themselves, or to that to which they themselves have been called and impelled. They fail to notice that this is a plague and perversion of this art; this is to tie God down, and impose on God a law whereby God should act with another soul as God has done with theirs. Whereas very often something quite different—different from what the one giving has as a goal for themselves—is appropriate for this other soul, both because of the soul's capacity and because of the way in which the divine good pleasure works itself out. Therefore they must abstract from themselves, and, accommodating to the soul's receptivity, put forward those rules from the book that are appropriate for it.

Fifthly. They should realise that what marks this art out consists wholly in their observing the good movements of nature and grace, which are normally very diverse. When you are dealing with bodily constitutions, one illness is purged by being sweated out, another by some other means; one food suits one person, another food suits another. In the same way, an experienced spiritual doctor must move individuals forward in accord with the different motions of divine grace, and bring the soul to the point at which it can deal immediately with God. For some are led by fear; others by the way of love; others in other ways. Individuals must be moved differently, following the movements of grace, just as a doctor follows the movements of nature.

⁶ *Dei consortium*—a phrase which evokes much without making precise commitments; translation is uncertain.

Sixthly. Given that the soul needs to be prepared in the mind and the affections to deal immediately and worthily with God, it follows that the disposition of the soul which the one giving the Exercises should seek to promote in the one receiving consists in the removal of two impediments. The first of these is ignorance in the mind, removed by instruction in whatever they are to deal immediately with God about. The second is the whole range of inordinate passions, so that the person can be placed within the same balance and indifference that we have already said befits the one giving the Exercises. They should not incline more to one state of life than to another—and the same with regard to other things. The soul should present itself to God like a *tabula rasa*, so that God can impress on it whatever might be pleasing to God. There is plenty on this in the material about the Election.

Seventhly. The one giving the Exercises must look out for this above all: to overcome any difficulty and to draw the one receiving to accept and observe all that they lay down for them, until they feel that the person is disposed to receive the supernal light and instigation from God. In this, two errors are to be avoided on either side. On the one hand, there is that of the exercitant failing to observe what is laid down because of their tepidity of spirit, and therefore not feeling in their prayer any movement or instigation from the different spirits; they reach only the skin of the Exercises, without any fruit. On the other, they can be overcome, by sadness or some other similar affection, or alternatively by the temptation of the devil, and thus be inclined to what is harmful. Then it is more appropriate for them to strive towards the contrary, or at least to suspend all deliberation. Alternatively, in the fervour of their consolations they can be too headlong in their promises and vows: in these circumstances, the appropriate thing is that they should not deliberate at all; they should pull themselves together and ripen into the indifference already noted, so that later they can be illuminated by the rules for the Election.

Eighthly. Once the spirit of the one receiving the Exercises has been disposed by the one giving them, and is ready for communion with God, there follow agitations of various spirits, that is of the good and the bad; there is also the danger that they will be deceived by the devil. Therefore they need to be helped. This happens first through the rules for the discrimination of spirits, so that they are not taken in under the appearance of good. Secondly, once they have distinguished the holy inspirations from the others, we must take care that they observe them,

weigh them, and then, with the help of their own diligence and effort, become able to elicit the divine good pleasure—in other words what God wants from them—so as strenuously to pursue it. All these things will be explained practically in their proper place.

From what has been said, it is easy to gather how the one receiving the Exercises should correspond to this fourth principle. For *first*, in those respects where they are to be directed by the one giving, they should, like a small child, present themselves as easy, docile and very respectful in every way. *Secondly*, they must work hard so as to carry out what is laid down. *Thirdly*, they must be concerned about the indifference we have been mentioning, avoiding the excesses of tepidity or overhasty fervour. In their desolations, they should leave off the thoughts that the sadness suggests; in consolations, they should beware of fervour that is immature and going too quickly. *Fourthly*, they should diligently observe the different spirits as they are inspired on different occasions, and not get stuck in their consolations, but much more seek in the consolations what God is wanting from them, and what they must suffer for this purpose, so as to attain it.