





STUDIES

IN
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

Scripture and the Exercises

*Moving from the Gospels and Psalms
to Exodus and Proverbs*

RICHARD J. CLIFFORD, S.J.

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31/1 JANUARY 1999

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For your information . . .

By the time you receive this January issue of *STUDIES*, the visit of Pope John Paul II to Saint Louis at the end of the month will have been part of your television and newspaper news. What you might not know is that as part of the celebration Saint Louis University sponsored a national conference on the thought of Pope John Paul II. The conference included ten speakers as varied as Avery Dulles, S.J., on John Paul II and theology, George Weigel on John Paul II and the priority of culture, Helen Alvare on John Paul II and the gospel of life, and Carl Bernstein (of Woodward and Bernstein Watergate fame and author of a biography of the Pope) on John Paul II and the fall of Communism. The proceedings of the conference have already been published in book form, *A Celebration of the Thought of John Paul II* (xviii + 223 pages, \$15.00). The first edition sold out almost immediately and the second printing is now available. The book can be ordered from the Saint Louis University Press, O'Donnell Hall, 3663 Lindell Blvd., Saint Louis, MO 63108.

As editor of *STUDIES*, I would, of course, like to think that every issue of this periodical excites interest and enjoys a widespread readership. A survey conducted some years ago among those who receive *STUDIES* was very encouraging, but even more encouraging was the response that Jesuits from one coast to the other have sent us by one means or other concerning the recent issue of *STUDIES* by Clement Petrik, S.J., "Being Sent: A Personal Reflection on Jesuit Governance in Changing Times." Among those who lived as Jesuits through the 1960s, '70s and '80s, the reaction has been "He told the story as it really happened, and he described the issues that had to be faced, some of which are with us still." Among those who more recently entered the Society, the reaction in general has been "Oh, so that's the way it was! Now I understand better a lot of the things I've heard older Jesuits talk about."

To turn from reading a book to seeing a movie, if you have seen *The Man in the Iron Mask*, a film that appeared not too long ago, I suspect you will be surprised to find early on that Aramis, one of the three Musketeers, portrayed by Jeremy Irons, is the Jesuit general! And you may wonder how he achieved such a position in the Society. Those who read "Sources" in the September 1996 issue of *STUDIES* will know the answer to that. Turn to your trusty back issue, and you will find there an excerpt from Alexander Dumas's *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, in English, *The Man in the Iron Mask*, the sequel to *The Three Musketeers*. It presents the ridiculous scenario in which the dying Jesuit general chooses the man who will succeed him and hands on his power to "the one who furnishes such an important secret that the courts of Europe will forever be subjected to the order." It is nineteenth-century romantic fiction at its zenith—or perhaps at its nadir—but it makes for fascinating reading.

Good news about another book, this one published by the Institute of Jesuit Sources. *Hearts on Fire: Praying with Jesuits*, collected and edited by Michael

Harter, S.J., has been one of our best-sellers. In little over five years since its publication in 1993, we have sold almost forty thousand copies. Soon its influence will be even more widespread: a Spanish translation is in the works.

This installment of "For Your Information" has been almost all about books. Do present-day Jesuits still read books with any frequency? The editor of another Jesuit journal asked that question. We Jesuits probably do have to read the piles of papers and letters and perhaps journals dealing with our various specializations, and most of us probably read the daily newspapers and perhaps the weekly news magazines. But do we do any serious reading (not just detective stories and westerns) in the area of current affairs, good fiction, history, biography, theology, spiritual reading? What do you think? STUDIES always welcomes letters to the editor; maybe you have something to say in a letter on this subject.

Of course, someone has to write a book before anyone can read it. It seems that the "someones" who as Catholics are writing on religious subjects may become fewer and fewer if the chill wind of suspicion from Rome continues to blow. The most recent victim of suspicion is Jacques Dupuis, S.J., because of his most recent book, *A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis). Father Dupuis has taught for almost forty years in India and at the Gregorian University in Rome and is one of the editors of Neuner-Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, a book used worldwide for twenty-five years in schools and departments of theology. He has always had a reputation for careful theologizing, scrupulous concern for scholarship, and respect for the teachings of the Church.

I have not yet read the book and I am not commenting here on its contents. Rather, a few words ought to be said on the process by which it is being judged. Recently the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, giving Fr. Dupuis no information on his accuser and appointing his so-called defenders itself without even consulting him, presented him with a list of particulars, "an official document of accusations [and] . . . a long list of questions on alleged positions of my book." He was forbidden to disclose both the text of the documents and the responses that he was to provide to the congregation within three months. Quite significantly and quite unusually, when word of the Vatican action got out, the archbishop of Calcutta wrote and made public a letter of support to Dupuis. Even more unusual, Cardinal Franz Koenig, the retired archbishop of Vienna and one of the Church's most active and respected participants in ecumenical activities and discussions of religious pluralism, wrote an article (published in *The Tablet* on December 16, 1998) in defense and praise of both Fr. Dupuis and his book.

No one acquainted with and accustomed to the common principles of justice in today's world could consider even minimally just what the congregation has done in acting as prosecutor, jury, and judge, as it regularly does—all the while proceeding in total secrecy. Actions of this nature discourage serious research and publication and discredit the Church in the eyes of its own members and of people of goodwill outside the Church who want to think the best of it. The Church cannot credibly speak of justice unless it is itself not only truly just but also clearly seen to be so in its procedures.

Sometimes one hears the defense put forward that the members of the Roman congregations are good men, only seeking to defend the faith. That may well

be, but it does not prevent them from doing serious harm to individuals and to the Church by the way they act. To take only one all-too-well-known example, one need only think with pain of what happened when, in part upon the advice of a good—indeed, a sainted—man who in other respects is a personal hero of mine, Robert Cardinal Bellarmine, the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office for the Inquisition into and the Rooting out of Heretical Depravity (to give its then official name) judged the heliocentric theory of Copernicus and Galileo to be “philosophically foolish and formally heretical.” The congregation was wrong on that count, dead wrong. It rooted out no depravity; it helped tear out by the roots what had up to that time been a fruitful relationship of religion and science. There are too many other instances when such condemnations were also wrong, to the ultimate detriment of both scholarship and piety. Well, you may have something to say in a letter to the editor on this subject too.

John W. Padberg, S.J.
Editor

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
THE BOOK OF EXODUS	3
Exodus I, 4	
Exodus II, 5	
Exodus III, 5	
Exodus and the Spiritual Exercises, 7	
THE BOOK OF PROVERBS AND THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES	9
The Desire to Seek God and Wisdom above All Things	10
Temptation and the Need of Discernment	14
The Dramatization of the Moral Life as the Two Ways	16
Alertness to Hidden Divine Action in the World (Contemplation in Action)	17
Deliberately Elliptical Sayings, 18	
Paradox, 20	
Irony, 21	
Satire, 21	
APPENDIXES	23
SOURCES: <i>The Making of Stanislaus Warszewicki's Vocation</i>	26

SCRIPTURE AND THE EXERCISES

Moving from the Gospels and Psalms to Exodus and Proverbs

Introduction

Anyone who has made the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola has probably done so with a Bible in one hand. The contemplations on the life of Christ direct the retreatant to read the Gospels, and most retreatants have their favorite psalms. But what about the rest of the Bible? The Bible is more than the Psalms and the Gospels.

I would like to introduce my readers and potential retreatants to two other wonderfully provocative books of the Bible—Exodus and Proverbs. The Book of Exodus invites us to link one's personal call to holiness with the call to holiness of the holy community Israel, thus providing a corporate dimension to the Spiritual Exercises. Proverbs aims to elicit the desire for wisdom above all other things, to teach discernment, and to alert the mind to a hidden dimension of God's world. To use these books does not mean primarily to borrow their theology, for neither is a book of ideas. Exodus is a narrative of Israel's origin; Proverbs is a collection of exhortations and aphorisms. The books speak best when they are allowed to be particular. One way to respect their particularity is to practice the art of *lectio divina* (divine reading).

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Reading plays an extraordinary role in Judaism and Christianity. In Israel, words were a privileged means of encountering the Lord. Israel was forbidden the most common means known to antiquity of encountering the deity—images—and so words took on a special importance as a way of meeting God. Stories, laws, and teachings were written down and handed on. The written word played an enormously important role especially in the Second Temple period (515 B.C.–A.D. 70). Early Christianity took its origins from Judaism and continued to observe its custom of reading the Scriptures in public worship and private meditation.

The Christian Latin term for the private meditative reading of Scripture is *lectio divina* (divine reading), the adjective “divine” referring to the object of reading—the *divine* word.¹ By the late second century A. D., the custom had taken root among Christians and was especially developed in early monasticism.

Before the arrival of printing, people normally read aloud. A homey illustration of the practice is rule 48 of the Rule of St. Benedict, which directs the monks to rest in bed after dinner: “However, should anyone desire to read, he should do so without disturbing his brothers.” The normal way—reading aloud—would have disturbed others in the dormitory. Dom Jean Leclerq terms the custom “acoustical reading,” for *legere* (reading) included *audire* (hearing). Reading was not considered an operation separate from speaking. It was “sensual” in that it was attuned to sound. Further, the nonavailability of manuscripts invited memorization, which also encouraged articulation.

Reading was the first stage in a process of prayer that was current in the early Christian centuries. People would repeat the words of the Scriptures with their lips, in a sense making the body itself enter the process. The next stage after the *lectio divina* was the reflective pondering of the text, *meditatio* (meditation). Such meditation fostered simultaneous movement of the will, called *oratio* (prayer). The simplification of all these acts into a kind of rest before the Lord was called *contemplatio*. *Lectio divina* thus was “an unfettered and peaceful reading, requiring nonetheless effort toward reflection, *meditatio*, issuing naturally in prayer, *oratio*.”²

¹ J. Rouse, H. J. Sieben, and A. Boland, “*Lectio divina* et lecture spirituelle,” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976), vol. 9, cols. 470–510, esp. cols. 470–87; Jean Leclerq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (New York: Fordham University, 1961); Mario Masini, *Lectio Divina: An Ancient Prayer That Is Ever New* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1998); M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

² Rouse, “*Lectio divina*,” col. 470.

With new technologies of production and the widespread distribution of books during the Renaissance and Reformation, *lectio divina* turned into “spiritual reading.” Today abundant books and periodicals invite speed reading. Such reading neglects sound and renders memorizing unnecessary. For using the Bible in prayer, however, old-fashioned is best. Because “the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe” (Deut. 30:14), one has to stay with the biblical text, reading it unhurriedly, muttering it aloud, and committing at least some phrases to memory. Exodus and Proverbs, each in its own way, provide inspired words appropriate to those who make the Exercises.

The Book of Exodus

God’s call to Christians is at once personal and communal. The Spiritual Exercises engage one’s unique self, but always in relation to the holy community and its mission. Concern with community can be hard to achieve in intense personal prayer, but it is indispensable for a good retreat. We begin this essay, then, with the Book of Exodus, that most community-shaping of all biblical books, with its story of Israel’s going out from Pharaoh’s Egypt and entering the Lord’s Canaan. As we shall see, there is a remarkable correlation between the exodus and the purpose of the Spiritual Exercises.

The exodus is an event of the late thirteenth century B.C. (the date scholars usually assign). The exodus is not only an event, however; it became an organizing principle in the Christian Bible, providing a pattern of meaning. The pattern is formed by repetitions, cross-references, and grand analogies. Later biblical authors looked back to the thirteenth-century exodus as an analogy for the regathering and rebuilding after the sixth-century Babylonian exile, which they interpreted as a new exodus and conquest. New Testament writers, though their language is often indirect, portrayed the work of Jesus in terms of a renewed exodus.

The original thirteenth-century event—a group leaving an oppressive master (Pharaoh) in a particular place (Egypt) to journey through the wilderness to Canaan, there to serve the true God—became a metaphor for any event in which a community leaves a false master for its true one.³

³ The word “exodus” is misleading as a complete description. The event encompasses not only the departure from Egypt (and from service to the “god” of Egypt) but also the entry into God’s land (and service to the God of this land).

Three moments in biblical history, then, were interpreted in terms of the exodus: the exodus from Egypt in the thirteenth century B.C., the exile and restoration of the sixth century B.C., and the ministry of Jesus in the first century A.D. The moments can be called Exodus I, II, and III. The three stories of liberation from a false god or power so that the people can worship their true God provide a memorable image for a retreat. But first, a word must be said about the three exodus events.

- *Exodus I*

The Book of Exodus tells the story of Israel's escape from Pharaoh's Egypt and entry into the Lord's land, Mount Sinai. From a literary point of view, the exodus is the center of the Pentateuch, for the stories of the ancestors in Genesis 12–50 prefigure, in individuals and families, the emergence of all Israel described in the Book of Exodus. Leviticus and Numbers consist largely of legal material associated with Sinai. Numbers (from 10:10) resumes the journey to Canaan begun in Egypt, narrating events that occurred from the eighth to the twelfth "station" in the twelve-station itinerary that is part of the literary structure of Exodus-Numbers. Deuteronomy consists of four speeches by Moses to an Israel that has completed its journey and stands in Moab poised to enter the Promised Land.

What happens in the Book of Exodus? The word "exodus" is shorthand for several events inextricably linked: the victory of the Lord over Pharaoh, the encounter of the Lord with the Hebrews at Sinai that resulted in the Covenant, the appointment of Moses as leader, the building of the Tabernacle allowing God to dwell with his people, and the journey from Egypt to Sinai and from Sinai to Canaan in twelve "stations." Essentially, all the actions make up one event—the formation of Israel as the Lord's particular people. A dispirited group become the people Israel in that they acquire a God and his house (namely, the Tabernacle), a leader (Moses), a land (Canaan, prefigured by Sinai), and national traditions (which were both narrative and legal). Thus the Book of Exodus is the founding story of Israel.⁴

⁴ The exodus is narrated in other books beside Exodus; for example, Psalms 44, 77, 78, 80, 89, 105, 106, 114, 135, 136, and 149. Biblical language about the exodus ranges from historical (or history-like) to mythic or "suprahistoric," for the Bible (unlike modern thinkers) does not distinguish nature and history in a dichotomous way. The language describing the exodus is usually historical in the prose of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It is suprahistoric (or mythic) in some poetry; for example, when the Lord,

- *Exodus II*

In the late seventh and early sixth century B.C., Israel was shattered by the Babylonian empire. Jerusalem was sacked, the Temple was burned, and many people were deported to Babylonia. Babylon in its turn fell before the Persian empire and the Babylonian Captivity (587–539 B.C.) ended. The restoration of Israel was interpreted by several prophets as a new exodus through analogy with the exodus of the thirteenth century.

Exodus as a model for an event in the future had already been suggested by the prophet Hosea in the eighth century B.C. He expressed the hope that God would lead a recalcitrant Israel into the wilderness and “redo” the exodus in such a way that Israel would stay loyal to the Lord (Hos. 2:16f.; English versions 2:14f.). Jeremiah used the exodus analogy in his chapters 30 and 31. Ezekiel speaks explicitly of a new exodus only in chapter 20, but his chapters 33–48 depict restoration as a single complex phenomenon—a gathering of the exiles, victory over ultimate evil (chaps. 38f.), and building a new Jerusalem (chaps. 40–48), so that one can say the exodus pattern is there.

Second Isaiah is the premier poet of the new exodus. He invites Israel to leave Babylon and interprets the journey from Babylon to Zion through the wilderness as a new exodus, replacing the old journey from Egypt to Canaan through the sea as the national story. The prophet uses both historic and suprahistoric language to describe one and the same event: the exodus is both an “historic” road through the wilderness and a “mythic” defeat of chaotic sterility represented by the wilderness, just as the original exodus was an “historic” way through the sea and a “mythic” defeat of the chaotic sea. Only so could the comprehensive nature of the event be expressed. In Second Isaiah’s radical viewpoint, Israel had ceased to exist in the Exile because it was no longer gathered before the Lord in Zion. Israel had, therefore, to be refounded, and the refounding was to be done by performing the act by which the people had become Israel in the first place. They must redo the exodus—leave Egypt/Babylon and enter Canaan/Zion. Thus the original exodus became an analogy for the great resurrection of Israel in the sixth century B.C.

- *Exodus III*

The presence of the new exodus in the New Testament is easily overlooked, for references to it are often indirect. If one looks for the words

portrayed as a storm god, uses the weapons of wind, rain, lightening, and thunder against his enemies, as in Exodus 15 and Psalms 77, 89, and 114.

“exodus,” “manna,” or “Moses,” one will be disappointed. It is the Qumran texts (Dead Sea Scrolls) from an apocalyptic sect partly contemporaneous with earliest Christianity that have sensitized scholars to seeing the work of Jesus as a new exodus. The Qumran sectarians interpreted events of the immediate future on the model of the exodus. Their texts enable us to see that the exodus functioned for early Christian writers as it did for the exilic prophets—as a grand analogy for interpreting the work of Jesus. Jesus defeats evil and gathers Israel into a new community.

References to the exodus in the New Testament are subtle. The first chapter of the Gospel of Mark provides a good example.⁵ “The beginning of the gospel” (Mark 1:1) blends Exod. 23:20 and Isa. 40:1-5: “Behold I am sending my messenger ahead of you. A voice of one crying out in the desert.” Mark uses themes associated with Isa. 40:1-5 according to the exegesis of the time: the return of the exiles at the end of days in tandem with spiritual renewal and indeed with renewal of the cōsmos itself. The wilderness motif in Mark 6:31f., 35 (compare Exod. 18:21 and Num. 27:17) refers to the second exodus at the end of days. Mark mixes historical and mythological language: “The divine warrior’s triumphant march through the wilderness is also the historical return of Israel to Zion.”⁶ “The way of the Lord” is understood in a Deutero-Isaian sense as “the highway along which God himself moves as the invisible but powerfully present comforter of the afflicted, liberator of captives, and enlightener of the blind.”⁷

Allusions to Exodus also occur in other New Testament books. In the portrait of John the Baptist, the great precursor, the evangelist alludes to the exodus in the themes of the voice crying in the wilderness and the theme of the way of the Lord. Matthew and Luke interpret the temptations of Jesus in the light of the exodus. The sojourn in the desert lasts forty days. Jesus is guided by the spirit as Israel was guided by the column of fire. Israel rebelled against God’s command over bread, whereas Jesus subordinates bread to the word of God. Israel demanded signs, whereas, instead of worshipping a thing (golden calf), Jesus refuses to tempt God. Jesus confesses God alone; he is the perfect realization of Israel.

Paul considers Jesus as the paschal victim immolated for us (1 Cor. 5:7); in the wonders of the exodus, he discovers the spiritual realities represented by Christ (1 Cor. 10:1-6). The First Letter of Peter alludes to the

⁵ The following paragraph owes much to Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 12-47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

exodus in explaining the blood of the lamb, the call of Christians, the symbol of light, Christians as a new people, and Christians' procession toward their homeland.

The Gospel of John in a sense is wholly an interpretation of the exodus: the paschal lamb, the bread from heaven, water flowing from Christ, the healing of those who look upon the crucified one, the "passage" toward the Father, the Pasch. In the Book of Revelation, Christians journey toward the new Jerusalem.

Why is the exodus such a powerful event and organizing principle? The answer is that it describes the formation of God's people. The exodus in the Book of Exodus is a twofold movement: it is not simply a *going out* from Egypt but also a *going in* to the land of Canaan. The freedom in the book is not only "freedom from" the false god but also "freedom for" the true God; not only an exposing of the false claims of Pharaoh but the revelation of the true God. The exodus is more than individuals choosing the right God, however. As the people choose the right God, they become a people. The Book of Exodus tells about this community-forming event.

Though the exodus was a communal experience, it had an effect on the private prayer of the Hebrew Bible. One can easily imagine individuals praying the psalms of individual lament with an eye on the national exodus.⁸ In the genre of lament, an individual calls to God to be saved from oppression and brought near to him. As a motive for God to act, the psalmist cites God's promise to be a savior. Praying these psalms allowed individuals to align their personal experience with the great event of the people's history.

- *Exodus and the Spiritual Exercises*

The exodus is relevant to the Spiritual Exercises because the Exercises are also about liberation from oppression and service of God. Biblical writers did not hesitate to call an exodus the acts of God that formed, reformed, or transformed the community.⁹ The exodus is not only the historical founding or refounding event of the holy community, however. It also expresses its essence. The holy community can almost be defined as a people once enslaved to false and oppressive "gods," but now freed and

⁸ Individual laments or petitions are the most common genre in the Psalter. Some notable examples of individual laments are Psalms 3, 4, 12, 13, 22, 31, 39, 42-43, 57, 69, and 139.

⁹ After using the concept of Exodus I, II, and III in my teaching over many years, I came across similar terminology in Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988; 1st. ed. 1971). Our uses are independent.

gathered by God into a community. Having seen their former “gods” unmasked, the former slaves are invited to be God’s people. The famous “eagles’ wings” passage in Exodus expresses the point with masterly rhetoric.

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians [unmasking and destroying Pharaoh in Egypt], and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself [the journey from Egypt to Sinai]. Now, therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. (19:4–6)

Moses tells the story in order to elicit a decision from the people. Will you agree to be the people of the Lord who has just freed you from Pharaoh? You have to choose the Lord to be your God. In Christianity, members of the Church are perennially called to leave false service and enter into true worship or service. The exodus as the story of the Church contains an imperative. You have seen what I have done for you; now be my people on earth. Entering into the service of the true God is the never ending *task* of the Church.

Two New Testament passages beautifully develop the concept of exodus as task as well as deed.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light [to be God’s people]. (1 Pet. 2:9)

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. . . . But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:1–7; compare with Col. 2:6–14)

According to the text from Ephesians, Christians once served a false god or value and now, freed from bondage to it, are called to be with Christ.

The aspect of the exodus story most relevant to the Spiritual Exercises is the movement from a state of service to Pharaoh in Egypt to a state of service to the Lord in Canaan. In the Exercises retreatants are invited to make a choice about who is lord of their lives. To serve the Lord means leaving something previously regarded as absolute. Individual members of the holy people take part in the drama of the people. Like Israel of old, each retreatant must first “go out” before he or she can “come in,” must first reject one thing before embracing another.

The exodus drama casts fresh light upon the First Week. The very term “spiritual exercises” shows that the retreat is concerned with acting and making choices, much like the challenging words after the exodus from Egypt: “Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples” (Exod. 19:6). The people’s agreement to be the Lord’s people rather than Pharaoh’s entailed great struggle. The Israelites, even after they had chosen the Lord, soon murmured against Moses’ leadership and criticized their daily bread, the manna. In the course of their journey, they needed to reaffirm their original choice. In the *Exercises*, the annotations make clear that temptations will be the lot of the exercitant (nos. 7–10, 12f.).

St. Ignatius assigns great importance to the exercitants’ personal history of sin, so that they will never forget where they came from and what were the deceptions that once entangled them. Ignatius’s history of personal sin functions somewhat like the confession “we were slaves in Egypt” (for example, Deut. 6:21; 1 Sam. 2:27). It remembers the “then” to understand better the “now.” In the colloquy of the Meditation on Hell, St. Ignatius recommends that retreatants consider what God *has done* for them (personal history), setting the stage for retreatants to ask, “What *ought I do* for Christ?” This seems to me similar to the dialectic in the “eagles’ wings” passages cited above, when the people were asked to remember what God had done for them: “You have seen what *I did* to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice . . .”

Retreatants who see the relation of the Exercises to the formation of the Church will have a clearer idea of Ignatius’s vision than those who regard the Exercises only as a means to grow personally. The Exercises are primarily an opportunity for individual Christians to acknowledge their past “gods” and to respond unreservedly to the true God who calls them to be members of the holy people, the Church. (For practical directions on using the Book of Exodus in prayer, see Appendix 1.)

The Book of Proverbs and the Spiritual Exercises

By contrast with the Book of Exodus, Proverbs is probably the last biblical book many people would ever consider using with the Spiritual Exercises. According to a popular interpretation, Proverbs upholds the status quo by assuming that God always rewards the (conventionally) good, punishes the wicked, and does not consider the suffering of the innocent. This interpretation regards Proverbs as a congeries of hundreds of two-line sayings, few of them rising above banality. Such a reading is a

caricature, of course, but it is widespread. As those who have actually read the book recognize, however, Proverbs infused its own wit, style, and keen observation into the stock of concise sayings and instructions inherited from neighboring cultures.¹⁰ It is not a book of theological ideas, but a manual for a happy and blessed life. Its instructions in chapters 1–9 awaken in readers a desire for wisdom and guide them to acquire it. Its concise sayings in chapters 10–31 are perfectly succinct; not a word can be altered. They require pondering and meditation in the manner of a Zen koan.

As a manual that helps people respond to God in the world, Proverbs shares many themes with the *Spiritual Exercises* and with Ignatian spirituality generally. These themes include (1) the desire for God and the need to seek God above other things; (2) a realistic awareness of the obstacles to the quest, namely, temptations; (3) dramatization of the moral life as two ways, the way of truth and the way of falsehood; and (4) alertness to hidden divine action in the world (contemplation in action). For each of these themes, Proverbs has similar themes that can complement the Ignatian insight with language and imagery.

The Desire to Seek God and Wisdom above All Things

The *Exercises* are concerned with helping people seek the *unum necessarium*, a concern that Ignatius makes very clear from the beginning. The first line in the Principle and Foundation states that human beings are created for one thing only—to praise, reverence, and serve God; the last line of the Principle and Foundation states, “[W]e ought to desire and choose only that which is more conducive to the end for which we are created.”¹¹ Framed by these two statements of the *end* of human beings are Ignatius’s teachings on the *relative* importance of created things and the need of indifference with regard to other “seekings.” Though the Principle and Foundation seems static on first reading, virtually every clause is about *seeking* one’s proper end: “by means of *doing* this,” “to help them in *the pursuit of the end*,” “to use those things . . . toward *our end*,” “to *attain this*,” “to *seek* health rather than sickness,” “to *desire and choose* only that which is more conducive to *the end*”). Ignatius prioritizes goods and helps the retreatant become free enough to desire and choose the one necessary thing.

¹⁰ There has been a renewal of scholarly interest in the wisdom literature over the last three decades. Protestant interest, dampened somewhat by neoorthodoxy, was awakened largely by Gerhard von Rad’s brilliant retrieval in 1970, *Wisdom in Israel*.

¹¹ *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, trans. and ed. George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), no. 23.7. All citations from the *Exercises* are from this source.

Moreover, Ignatius's concern with desiring is shown by his insistence in the meditations that individuals hold before their eyes that which they desire, *id quod volo*.

The ten lectures and the wisdom poems of Proverbs 1-9 similarly urge a single-minded quest for one thing above all else—wisdom. Since wisdom had different connotations in the ancient Near Eastern world than it does in our modern world, a word of explanation is necessary. Ancient wisdom was practical rather than theoretical; it enabled people to function effectively; it enabled a jeweler to set stones, a king to give judgment, a woman to resolve difficult situations. Wisdom was mediated. It belonged by right to the gods, who graciously granted it to the human race in the form of culture and crafts that enabled those who possessed it to live at a human rather than animal level of existence and thus be more useful servants to the gods.¹² In neighboring cultures, especially in Mesopotamia, heavenly wisdom was mediated to the human race through divine and semidivine figures; in the chain of transmission, human participation gradually increased. At the end of the line were earthly authorities such as the king, the school, and the scribe.

In Proverbs, the earthly authorities through which wisdom was mediated to human beings were the king (for example, 16:10), scribal writings (for instance, 1:6), and the head of the household, the father (for example, 4:1).¹³ Proverbs went beyond the tradition in one important respect: it focuses on wisdom itself, reifying and personifying it. Especially in the wisdom poems (1:20-33; 8; 9:1-6, 11), its personification of wisdom is uniquely intense and sustained. Wisdom, appearing in the form of a beautiful woman seeking companions and disciples, embodies the knowledge that God wants people to have. The most famous instruction, chapter 8, uses the erotic language of the time, such as seeking and finding or waiting at the door of the beloved.¹⁴ The instructions draw a parallel between finding a wife (or life companion) and finding wisdom.¹⁵ Those who accept her

¹² Some ancient Near Eastern creation accounts depicted the creation of the human race in two stages: stage 1, in which the race led an existence not much better than did the animals; and stage 2, in which humankind possessed culture (for instance, kingship, the alphabet) and crafts (for example, weaving) and lived at a human level.

¹³ Prov. 1:8 and 6:20 also mention the mother.

¹⁴ Roland E. Murphy, "Wisdom and Eros in Proverbs 1-9," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 600-603.

¹⁵ Young men were the implied readers of most wisdom instructions in antiquity, but Proverbs expands that limited readership by including the old and already wise (1:5). Further, Proverbs is now part of the Bible, which envisages as its readers all Israel, that is, all men and women.

become friends of God, who grants “life” in highly concrete and this-worldly forms.

Proverbs 2 is a good example of the quest for wisdom and the conferral of her benefits. The father invites his son to memorize his teaching (verse 2, the teaching method of the time) and put it into practice.¹⁶ Putting the father’s words into practice allows wisdom to enter the very being of the son and become an inner principle.

The poem is acrostic. Key words in the first half (verses 1–11) begin with the first letter of the alphabet, *aleph*, and in the second (vv. 12–22) with the middle letter, *lamed*. Because the poem is one vast sentence, its logic is visible even in partial quotation.

- ¹ My son, if (*aleph*) you accept my words,
 store up my commands within you . . .
- ⁵ then (*aleph*) you will understand revering the Lord,
 you will find knowledge of God;
- ⁶ for the Lord gives wisdom,
 from his mouth come knowledge and insight . . .
- ¹¹ prudence will safeguard you,
 insight will protect you,
- ¹² saving (*lamed*) you from the evil way,
 from the man who speaks falsehoods . . .
- ¹⁶ saving (*lamed*) you from the foreign woman,
 from the stranger who uses smooth words . . .
- ²⁰ Thus (*lamed*) you will walk on the way of the good,
 keep to the paths of the righteous.

The logic is clear: *if* you search for wisdom, *then* the Lord/Wisdom will *protect you, save you from . . .* (vv. 12–19) *so that you may walk . . .* (vv. 20–22).

How might this poem support the Ignatian tradition? Proverbs’ exhortation to pursue wisdom above all else is analogous to the Ignatian statement in the Principle and Foundation of the *Exercises* that praising, reverencing, and serving God is the end of human beings. In talking about the end, Ignatius uses the language of desire and choice. One purpose of the Spiritual Exercises is to call forth great desires. Proverbs 2 says that all other things come to the one who pursues wisdom above all else. Proverbs 2 may thus be a poem for retreatants who want to dwell on the opening exercises on the end for which we are created and the *relative* importance of everything else.

¹⁶ The mother is mentioned with the father in 1:8 and 6:20.

Prov. 4:1-9 is another instruction designed to awaken a desire for wisdom; it uses tender father-son language. The father recalls his “discipline” or training received from his own father: “When I was a son with my father, / the tender and beloved son of my mother, / he taught me and said to me: ‘Let your heart hold on to my words; / guard my commandments and live.’” Having heeded his own father, the father can be a model of the blessings of wisdom to his present hearers.

What is remarkable about this little poem (apart from its exceptional tenderness) is the subtle shift in the meaning of wisdom as instruction to wisdom as inner principle. The father’s “wisdom,” which had been the *object* of the son’s search in verses 4f., ceases to be mentioned after verse 5. With verse 6, wisdom itself becomes an active agent and the *subject* rather than the object of the verbs (vv. 6, 8f.): “Do not turn away from her and she will guard you; / love her and she will exalt you” (v. 6). After verse 5, the father is no longer mentioned and Wisdom is an agent in her own right. The lesson: heeding the words of one’s teacher puts one in touch with wisdom, who will bestow her gifts of safety, honor, and wealth (vv. 6, 8f.).

Another instruction relevant to the quest appears in 3:1-12. It is essentially a series of six four-line exhortations, in which the second two lines mention the reward or benefit of fulfilling the duty commanded in the first two lines. Verses 9-10 afford an example:

⁹Honor the Lord with your wealth
with the first-fruits of your crops,
¹⁰and your barns will be filled with grain,
your vats will overflow with wine.

The instruction does not merely restate *do ut des* (I give so you can give to me); for the preceding chapters in Proverbs clearly enough stated the difficulties of serving God that this instruction can underline the benefits of the search for wisdom. Also, the last quatrain in the series breaks the exhortation-reward scheme, implying perhaps that being the Lord’s “son” or disciple does not automatically bring unalloyed bliss. The Lord’s tutelage can be stern, but one can trust his father’s love.

¹¹My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord,
do not disdain his correction,
¹²for anyone he loves he reproves,
like a father the son whom he favors.

The peak of personification in Proverbs and its most influential chapter is chapter 8. Appearing in the busiest part of the city, Wisdom addresses everyone, singling out the inexperienced and the foolish (vv. 1-5).

She assures her audience she is worthy of trust (vv. 6–11), promises riches, honor, and governing skill to those who heed her (vv. 12–21), and ascribes her authority to her unique position with the Lord at creation (vv. 22–31). She concludes by urging her hearers to wait at her door as disciples (vv. 32–36). The poem is the most majestic and revealing portrait of personified Wisdom found in this book.

The portrait of Wisdom in this chapter has had enormous influence on the Fourth Gospel.¹⁷ John presents Jesus as incarnate wisdom descended from on high to offer life and truth to human beings. As Wisdom was with God from the beginning, even before the earth (Prov. 8:22f.), so Jesus is the Word from the beginning (John 1:1, 17:5). Like Wisdom, who shows human beings how to walk in the way that leads to life (Prov. 2:20–22, 3:13–26, 8:32–35), Jesus shows the true way. Jesus' long discourses are like Woman Wisdom's (Prov. 1:20–33; 8). She invites people to partake of her banquet, where the food and drink symbolize life and closeness to God (Prov. 9:1–6, 11). Jesus does the same: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35). As Wisdom seeks friends (Prov. 1:20f.; 8:1–4), so Jesus recruits disciples (John 1:36–38, 43). When they meditate on the life of Christ, modern prayers can use the image of wisdom as an emissary from God instructing people in the true way.

Temptation and the Need of Discernment

It hardly needs demonstration that St. Ignatius saw the quest for God as a drama in which good and evil are in conflict. The title and the first introductory explanation in the *Exercises* assign the name "spiritual exercises" to any means of "preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself from all its disordered affections." Ignatius is wary of retreatants who are too serene, who are "not being moved one way or another by different spirits" (introductory explanation 6); the director should ask questions about their fidelity to prayer. According to annotations 7–10, temptations are inevitable. The Rules for the Discernment of Spirits speak repeatedly of "the evil one" (First Week, nos. 2, 12–14; Second Week, nos. 1, 4–7). Furthermore, temptations may resemble what one is earnestly seeking. Rule 44 of the Discernment of Spirits for the First Week recognizes that "it is characteristic of the evil angel, who takes on the appearance of an angel of light, to enter by going along the same way as the devout soul."

¹⁷ For a good discussion of wisdom themes in John, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, Anchor Bible no. 29 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), I:cxxii–cxv; and Appendix II, "The Word."

Proverbs reckons with temptation and seduction from its very first scene (1:8-19), which sets the tone for subsequent chapters. A young man stands at the threshold of his home as his parents warn him of the dangers that lurk outside. It is a liminal situation and means perhaps that he is leaving his parents' house to found his own. Founding a house (which may include finding a wife) is an important metaphor in the book.

The parents' words are negative, warning rather than praising. They worry that men will invite him to join their gang ("Come with us, we will set an ambush for blood. . . . Throw in your lot with us, we will all have one purse"). What the parents fear is that their son will take the wrong way ("My son, do not walk on the way with them"). The men's "way" is bound to be frustrated, they assert, for the world is constructed "in justice and wisdom"; that is, it will recoil on evil doers ("they are setting an ambush for their own blood").¹⁸

The parents warn their son to expect temptation. He must expect to encounter contrary voices offering companionship and "blessings," in this case the esteem of others (the violent men) and wealth (the loot).

Temptations beset the seeker. In this passage (and in 2:12-15 and 4:10-19), men are the tempters. The most famous tempter in Proverbs, however, is the woman (2:16-19; 5; 6:20-35; 7; and 9:13-18). She is the female counterpart to the deceitful men. Proverbs warns not so much against her sexual seduction as her verbal seduction. As the violent men recruit the youth to walk on their path, so she offers easy companionship and an attractive way of life.

Proverbs' picture of seduction has several implications for modern Ignatian spirituality. First, the temptation is not to commit a single action, but to pursue an alternate way of life. The deceptive woman and the men in Proverbs presume that the just God is not active in the world: life is random, not controlled by a divine purpose that rewards the virtuous and punishes the wicked. They are ignorant, for they do not know their way is doomed. The father (or teacher), on the other hand, knows and tries to teach his son (or disciple) that the world is created "in wisdom"; one can trust it.

¹⁸ The parents' metaphor in 1:17, "for it would not make sense for a net to be held high in the sight of a winged creature," has baffled readers from at least the first century A.D. A Hebrew copyist imported verse 16 from Isa. 59:7 as an alternate explanation. The best explanation of verse 17 is that God does not hold up to the view of the wicked the net that is set to entrap them. Divine retribution ("a net") operates invisibly.

A second implication is that the fraudulent offer looks like the real offer. Temptations mimic the real thing; discernment is required to tell the difference. The seducers appear under the aspect of good. They offer “life,” but only the aftereffects will show whether their claim was true.

The third implication for modern readers is that the one great remedy for the wiles of the seductive woman is the pursuit of the “right woman”—wisdom. In Proverbs 2, the remedy is pursuing wisdom above all; in chapter 5, the best defense against the adulterous woman is appreciating one’s own wife; in chapter 6, the best protection is following the wise counsel of the parents; in chapter 7, the remedy is to court Woman Wisdom and say to her, “You are my sister” (the language of love), and in chapter 9 it is to attend Wisdom’s banquet. In other words, the best defense against the wiles of Folly is a positive act—pursuing wisdom.

The Dramatization of the Moral Life as the Two Ways

The *Spiritual Exercises* help people to make choices about a way of life. Its title contains the phrase “ordering one’s life,” and its annotations presume one wants to persevere in a way of life. The analogue in Proverbs is that one’s actions place one on a way that has its own inherent dynamic or “destiny.” In the book’s view, there are only two ways a person can walk—the way of the wicked and the way of the righteous. One’s fundamental option, which is shown in habitual actions, puts one on a path. The path is not a permanent state, for one can get on and off it. As long as one stays on a path, however, one is subject to its destiny or fate.

Prov. 4:10–19 is the clearest instruction to take the right way. It instructs by praising one way and contemning the other.

¹¹Let me point out to you the way of wisdom,
help you walk on straight paths. . . .

¹⁴Do not go on the path of the wicked!
Do not walk in the way of malefactors! . . .

¹⁸But the path of the righteous is like the radiant sun,
shining ever more brightly until midday.

¹⁹The way of the wicked is like thick darkness;
they are not aware of what they stumble over.

In other passages, acquiring wisdom begins with memorizing and practicing and ends with a gift—wisdom and its benefits. This poem differs slightly: the climax is “the way of the righteous.” Keeping the words places the disciples on the right path. “Way” functions like wisdom elsewhere in

Proverbs: the right (straight) way enjoys the protection of God. One must stay on it. Hence the urgent exhortations of verses 14f.

Verses 18f. develop the metaphor of the two ways and the characterization by the metaphors of light and darkness. The path of the righteous shines with the brightest possible light, so those who travel on it need never worry about *unseen* perils. The way of the wicked, however, is dark and those who walk on it stumble. The two ways, and the light and darkness that accompanies each, will be developed in later literature, as in the children of darkness and the children of light found in the Qumran and Johannine writings. An example is John 8:1: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of the world."

Alertness to Hidden Divine Action in the World (Contemplation in Action)

One of the most notable features of Ignatian spirituality is its concern with finding God in daily life. The Contemplation to Attain Love is an elaborate exercise to alert one to the dynamic presence of God and respond to the divine majesty. In three successive "points," the retreatant considers how God dwells in creatures—labors and works "for me" in all creatures—and how all good things descend from above.

Proverbs too assumes the Lord is present and active in the world. The divine name YHWH (the Lord) occurs eighty-seven times in the book and "God" (*Elohim*) occurs four times. The book also speaks of divine activity indirectly without mentioning God's name (for example, "Who trusts in his wealth will fall") and by using passive verbs, the so-called divine passive (for instance, "Foolish lips are rejected").¹⁹ Proverbs is keenly aware, however, that wisdom is hidden; it is not obvious and can easily be missed. The book therefore tries to sensitize people to what ordinarily escapes their eyes. To do this it resorts abundantly to concise sayings, which form the bulk of chapters 10–31.

The concise sayings or "proverbs" of Proverbs can be looked on as the "workbook" to the more theoretical instructions of chapters 1–9.²⁰ They

¹⁹ "Fool" in Proverbs means someone who rejects wisdom and perversely follows an evil course of action. It has to do with judgment and action rather than with erudition and insight.

²⁰ The saying in Proverbs is not a proverb in a modern sense, which is often defined as a concise statement of an apparent truth that has currency among the people. ("Apparent" refers to a proverb's having to be performed or applied to a particular

offer the student statements to ponder. They make use of paradox, irony, satire, wordplay, and striking statements of ordinary experience. The sayings imitate life, which also is full of paradox, ironies, and humorous situations. By “solving” elliptical sayings, one can perhaps “solve” the puzzles of life.

Ours, alas, is not an aphoristic age. Even many biblical scholars are not sympathetic to these sayings and judge them to be trite. They tend to regard them as compressed doctrine and neglect their rhetoric. Such “doctrinalization” of the aphorisms strips form away to get at content. And the content, when separated from form, often seems banal. Some modern translations reflect this assumption; they favor paraphrase that removes ambiguities. Two English translations are happy exceptions: *Tanakh*, the translation of the Jewish Publication Society of America, and the New American Bible, sponsored by the American Catholic Bishops. They generally appreciate the wit and economy of the sayings and do not overexplain.

What does an aphorism do? First, it does *not* communicate information. The great eighteenth-century English aphorist Samuel Johnson said it best: “Men more frequently require to be reminded than informed.”²¹ Aphorisms help people to see things in a new light, so that they can make a decision or take a course of action. Another aphorism of Johnson (this one about Alexander Pope) is pertinent: “New things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new.”²² The sayings provide a perspective; they are about vision and action.

Here are examples of the sayings arranged according to general (and inevitably overlapping) categories. Readers may want to try their hand at interpreting them before looking at my interpretation.

- *Deliberately Elliptical Sayings*

Who guards his mouth safeguards his throat;
who opens wide his lips will suffer ruin. (13:3)

Hebrew *nepesh* is, literally, “throat,” the moist breathing core of a person, the part of the body where physical life is most palpable; it is also the most vulnerable part. By metonymy it can mean life, self (soul). Accord-

situation.) Proverbs’ sayings were composed by royal scribes in accord with long-established standards. Proverbs found elsewhere in the Bible are usually one-liners, for example, 1 Sam. 10:12 and 24:13.

²¹ *Rambler*, no. 2, cited in Walter Jackson Bate, *Samuel Johnson* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 291.

²² Essay on Alexander Pope, in *Lives of the Poets*.

ing to the saying, in order to guard one's throat, one's core area, one's very self, you need only guard one part of it, the mouth (metonymy for words). Words are, according to Proverbs, the most personal of all human acts. Hence, the best way to safeguard one's throat is to guard one's lips, that is, to act virtuously. Such acts bring the only effective protection, that of God. To speak and act recklessly ("open wide the lips") is to endanger oneself.

A charming woman gets renown,
and ruthless men get wealth. (11:16)

Some see this adage as meaning that gentle methods such as charm acquire renown, which is more valuable than the wealth acquired by ruthless methods. Hence, charm accomplishes more than its opposite in the saying, ruthlessness. The exactly parallel syntax of each colon, however, means the statements are parallel as well, making this interpretation unlikely.

The interpretation that best respects the syntax is that wealth and honor are good things in Proverbs. Here, however, the means to acquire them are flawed. Renown attained through charm is as fleeting as the physical beauty that acquired it (compare with "charm is deceptive" in 31:30). Wealth got by aggressive and brutal action lasts only as long as one has physical strength. Lasting gifts are given, not taken.

Wealth is of no avail on a day of wrath,
but righteousness saves from death. (11:4)

At first reading, the proverb seems banal, but it is not. Wealth is useful in many dangerous situations, but not in life-or-death situations (the meaning of "day of wrath"). In mortal danger only righteousness can win the divine protection that saves from a day of wrath.

Who pursues righteousness and kindness
will find life and honor. (21:21)

The Hebrew word for "to pursue" connotes great energy and persistence. An intense pursuit comes upon something other than its original object—long and vigorous life and honor. Some things lie beyond human grasp; they must be obtained indirectly. To gain them, one must pursue virtue. "First seek the kingdom of God and its justice and all these things will be given to you" (Matt. 8:33).

The wrath of a king is like the growling of a lion,
but his favor is like dew on the grass. (19:12)

Neither dew nor a lion are under the control of an ordinary person. Watch your step around a king!



A poor person must say "please,"
but a wealthy person can be rude. (18:23)

One of many observations on the rich and the poor. Though Proverbs ridicules the sluggard, it never condemns the poor. Rather, it offers many sketches like this one, objective but sympathetic.

- *Paradox*

Human beings do not understand all the dimensions of the *theocentric* world, for the gods (or God) designed it for themselves. Common sense derived from experience by itself is not adequate to understand God's world. Hence the need for paradox, "a daring statement which unites seemingly contradictory words but which on closer examination proves to have unexpected meaning and truth."²³

Who seeks friendship conceals an offense,
but who reveals a story alienates a friend. (17:9)

The saying expresses a fairly obvious truth: friendship sometimes means remaining silent about the shortcomings ("offense") of a friend, whereas revealing a friend's faults will break up the relationship. The larger paradox is that one finds by losing and loses by finding (or revealing).

A soft answer turns back anger,
but a harsh word stirs up wrath. (15:1)

Anger is one of the great enemies of wisdom. Where words are concerned, soft is hard (that is, effective) and hard is soft (ineffective). The Hebrew word for "answer" refers to the give-and-take of conversation, not simply to question and answer.

Who returns evil for good—
evil will not depart from his house. (17:13)

Normally, one gets rid of what is unwanted by putting it somewhere else. In the case of evil, however, transferring it to one who has done us good ensures that it will stay with the perpetrator. The Hebrew word for "evil" (*rā'āh*) can mean both "evil" and "the trouble that comes from evil acts," so that the final line could read, "trouble will not depart from his house."

²³ *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1993), 876.

One person gives freely and ends up with more,
another holds back what is due and grows poorer. (11:24)

Generosity to the poor leads to more wealth, and stinting on giving makes one poorer. The paradox is also found in the New Testament; for example, "To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (Mark 4:25, Matt. 13:12, Luke 19:26).

- *Irony*

The word can be used in different senses, but one common definition is that one thing is stated but another is intended.

An evil person pursues rebellion
and a ruthless envoy is sent against him. (17:11)

Those engaged in an energetic pursuit of evil will in fact find that evil makes its way toward them.

In the heart of a wise person, wisdom remains silent,
but in the midst of fools, it makes itself known. (14:33)

Wisdom can remain silent in the heart of the wise not because it is absent but because it is so thoroughly at home, whereas among fools it must speak out because of the dissonance between fools and wisdom.

- *Satire*

The negative types in Proverbs are sometimes treated satirically. What Tony Tanner says of Jane Austen can be said of Proverbs: "Jane Austen helps to make us appreciate the value of the real thing by juxtaposing a travesty or parodic version of it."²⁴

A sluggard says: "There's a lion in the street,
there's a lion in the square!" (26:13)

What is satirized, of course, is not low energy but the refusal to act and assume responsibility.

Beat a scoffer and the simple learn a lesson;
reprove a sage and he understands. (19:25)

²⁴ *Jane Austen* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, Press, 1986), 79.

The contrasts are striking—to beat and to rebuke; the inability of the scoffer to learn even from a beating and the ability of the intelligent person to learn from the slightest gesture. The latter point is wittily and subtly made in line A: even a naive onlooker learns the lesson the scoffer being beaten does not.

Wisdom means knowing how to speak a word appropriate to the occasion (see 25:11). Anyone who does not speak rightly is an object of satire.

Who greets his neighbor in a loud voice early in the morning,
will have it reckoned to him as a curse.²⁵ (27:14)

Many sayings, however, cannot be categorized so easily. Some are simply imposing statements, remaining in the mind because they concisely state a profound truth; for example, “Rich person meets poor person— / The Lord made them both” (22:2), or “Better a serving of vegetables where love is, / than a fattened ox where hatred is” (15:16).

Other sayings are best described as “zingers,” sharp-edged statements of unfashionable truth; for example, “The horse is readied for the day of battle, / but victory belongs to the Lord” (16:33), or “Who blocks his ears from the cry of the poor / will call out but go unheard” (21:13).

As engaging as these aphorisms are, they should not be pondered by themselves, for they are prefaced by the instructions and wisdom speeches in chapters 1–9. The aphorisms are meant for readers who wish to live their lives guided by wisdom. Chapters 10–31 are exercises through which one can become alert to the divine rule in the world, a rule that can be missed so easily. They do not inform but “remind.” They remind the reader of what Ignatius intends in the *Contemplatio*: to see the divine activity in all things.

The entire book of Proverbs assumes that genuine well-being is too precious to be grasped by human effort alone: it must be given. Paradoxically, the only way to have it given is to seek wisdom, to practice virtue. The book dares to teach that the only route to lasting happiness is the pursuit of wisdom. So also the *Spiritual Exercises*, which has a simple aim for all its complexity—to enable the soul to receive divine blessings.

Together, the Books of Exodus and Proverbs can enrich the spiritual quests of people today. *Tolle et lege!*

²⁵ There is additional humor in that the Hebrew idiom “to greet” is, literally, “to bless.” An inappropriate “blessing” comes back as a curse.

Appendixes

The Book of Exodus

The Book of Exodus consists of two parts, the freeing of the slaves from Pharaoh in Egypt (chaps. 1–18) and Israel’s agreement to be the Lord’s special people at Sinai (chaps. 19–40). The two parts are closely related, because the people, once freed from serving Pharaoh (chaps. 1–18), must decide whether they will serve the Lord and be his people (chaps. 19–40). Important events of the first part include the danger to the Hebrews (1:1–2:22), the call of Moses (2:23–6:1, doubled in 6:2–7:7), the ten plagues or demonstrations of divine power (7:8–13:16), the destruction of the Egyptian army and thanksgiving (13:17–15:21), and the journey to Canaan and Sinai (15:22–18:27). Events of the second part include the making of the covenant (chaps. 19–24), the planning and building of the Dwelling for the Lord (chaps. 25–31, 35–40), and the apostasy and renewal of the covenant (chaps. 32–34). Though there are obviously different sources, there is one dramatic action: slaves who had forgotten their heritage were brought out by the Lord from bondage to Pharaoh in Egypt and invited to be the Lord’s special people before all the world. Liberation gives the Hebrews the freedom to become the people Israel; they acquire what constitutes a people in antiquity: a god (and a dwelling for him), a land, a leader, and traditions.

Those interested in texts for *lectio divina* may find the following useful: 2:23–25, divine compassion and initiative; 3:9–12, vocation of the servant Moses; 4:11f., God makes up for human limitations; 12:1f., 17, liturgical celebration of the founding of the people; 15:1–18, celebration of the victory of the Lord; 19:3–6, invitation to be the Lord’s own people; 20:1–17, the Ten Commandments; 34:6–10, forgiveness for national apostasy; 40:34, the cloud and the glory.

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The Book of Proverbs

The following outline (not necessarily the titles) represents the views of several recent specialists.

Introduction to the Book (1:1–7)

I. Collection of Wisdom Lectures and Speeches (1:8–9:18)

1. Lecture 1: The Deadly Alternative to Parental Wisdom (1:8–19)
2. Wisdom Poem 1: The Risk of Spurning Me (1:20–33)
3. Lecture 2: Seek Wisdom and Yahweh Will Keep You Safe (2:1–22)
4. Lecture 3: Trust in God Leads to Prosperity (3:1–12)
5. Interlude: Wisdom's Benefits and Prestige (3:13–20)
6. Lecture 4: Justice toward the Neighbor Brings Blessing (3:21–35)
7. Lecture 5: A Father's Example (4:1–9)
8. Lecture 6: Two Ways of Living Life (4:10–19)
9. Lecture 7: With Your Whole Being Heed My Words and Live (4:20–27)
10. Lecture 8: The Wrong and the Right Woman (5:1–23)
11. Interlude: Four Short Pieces (6:1–19)
12. Lecture 9: The Danger of Adultery (6:20–35)
13. Lecture 10: The Deceptive Woman (7:1–27)
14. Wisdom Poem 2: Become My Disciple and I Will Bless You (8:1–36)
15. Finale: The Two Women Invite Passersby to Their Banquets (9:1–6, 11, 13–18; verses 7–10 and 12 of chapter 9 are assorted sayings.)

II. Proverbs of Solomon (10:1–22:16)

III. The Words of the Wise (22:17–24:22)

IV. Further Words of the Wise (24:23–34)

V. The Proverbs of Solomon, collected by the servants of King Hezekiah (chaps. 25–29)

VI. The Words of Agur (30:1–14)

VII. Numerical Sayings (30:15–33)

VIII. The Words to Lemuel, king of Massa (31:1–9)

IX. Hymn to the Capable Wife (31:10-31)

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SOURCES

Stanislaus Warszewicki, S.J. *The Making of a Jesuit Vocation*

Stanislaus Warszewicki was born in Masovia, Poland, in 1529. As is clear from the autobiography here printed, he enjoyed great credit at the court of Sigismund Augustus, the last of the Polish kings of the Jagellonian dynasty. In fact, the King wanted to make him a bishop. Before entering the Society, he had published three works, one a eulogy of a Polish nobleman, the second a translation from Greek into Latin of the ten-volume History of Ethiopia by Heliodorus, and the third a translation into Polish of A Guide for Preachers by Luis de Granada. After entering the novitiate in Rome on November 24, 1567, he also translated into Polish Granada's Mirror of the Christian Man. Once he had completed his novitiate, he returned home, and later served as rector of the colleges in Vilnius and Lublin and superior of the mission in Sweden. Warszewicki, a companion of St. Stanislaus Kostka in the novitiate, wrote a life of Stanislaus in the year of Kostka's death. This work eventually came to be distributed throughout a good number of the provinces of the Society and was published by the Bollandists in the nineteenth century. Warszewicki died at Cracow on October 3, 1591. The original Latin text of this account was taken from Vocationum liber autobiographicus Poloniae Provinciae proprius (1574-1580), ed. Joseph Warszawski, S.J. (Rome: 1966), 311-20, and was translated by the late Martin E. Palmer, S.J.

As a child he had good inspirations and a propensity towards piety (without benefit of religious education, however); on emerging from adolescence, he studied for three years under Philip Melanchthon and, imbued with the latter's evil anti-Catholic opinions, turned Lutheran—but with the reservation that he would later delve more deeply into the holy Fathers cited by Melanchthon to see whether their teaching really supported his positions as he claimed they did.

Returning to his own country, he joined the royal court as a young man. Here he returned to the Catholic Church and went to confession to Catholic priests, but without really acknowledging the magnitude of his sin in com-

municating with heretics or properly repenting of what he had done. In fact, deep in his mind he still harbored various remnants of his errors and doubts regarding some of the Church's practices and traditions. Moreover, in the illusory hope of attaining salvation by faith alone, he lived rather loosely and, sad to say, gave himself up to fleshly passions and pleasures and to the vanities of this world.

Meanwhile, having become secretary to the King, he had two ecclesiastical dignities or prelatures conferred on him, one in the cathedral of Poznan and another in the metropolitan church of Gniezno, although he had made no effort to obtain them and was in fact

averse to an ecclesiastical career, being in minor orders only.

Finally, when the Lord's time of mercy had come and he was about thirty years old, he began reflecting on which form of life he ought to follow as most conducive to his salvation. The parable of the servant who hid his talent in the ground and was ordered to be bound hand and foot and cast into the outer darkness kept coming back to his mind. It agitated him deeply and, together with other considerations which manifested God's will to him, led him to feel a great revulsion regarding his past life and, as a first step, to renounce marriage in favor of a life of chastity, dedicating himself to the service of God. This decision was confirmed by his chancing to read at that time some things in the ancient Fathers which dispelled all his objections regarding the faith and practices of the Church. He turned quite hostile to the heretics for deceiving persons ignorant of the Fathers by appeals to their authority, and determined to work on behalf of the Catholic Church against the heretics.

He thus became a priest in 1562, at the age of 33, with the delighted approval of his father, already a senator at that time and under the impression that his son would be pursuing higher Church dignities and a career at court. But contrary to his father's expectation and to the great surprise of all who knew him, he bade farewell to the royal court and, albeit reluctantly at first, commenced delivering sermons at the behest of Archbishop James Uchanski of Gniezno, who also appointed him archdeacon of Lowicz. As he began preaching sermons to the people, a greater light gradually began to dawn on him, prompting him to wonder why, under-

taking to teach others, he failed to teach himself; and why, pronouncing condemnations against worldly pretensions and vanity, he himself was still no stranger to the world, but was amply supplied with riches, servants, and horses. This, he thought, hardly befitted a minister of the word and a man who was supposed to be an angel of the Lord of hosts. He was also troubled by scruples about his plural benefices, the perils of which he had earlier come to recognize through reading Dionysius the Carthusian. In addition, he was unable to find contentment with the way of serving God which he observed in his colleagues and which he himself was largely constrained to follow. Another factor was the death of his father, whose influence would have rendered it practically impossible for him ever to pursue perfection and leave all things.

After his father's death, he made a long journey—perhaps eighty German miles—to visit His Eminence Cardinal Hosius, the bishop of Ermland. This was merely to offer him official greetings on his return from the council at Trent. The cardinal informed him that he had just founded in Braunsberg a college of the Society of Jesus together with a chapter, and that its staff would soon be arriving.

The name of the Society of Jesus had just begun to be bruited about in Poland. Some of the letters from the Indies had been published, and these had revealed to him the remarkable fervor of these men and how the hand of God was with them. Nevertheless, he had no thought of embracing their Institute. At the time, the notion of leaving everything and extricating himself from the world still appeared to him extremely



hard and difficult, indeed, practically impossible.

Returning home, he continued to experience impulses towards a better life, gradually becoming more disposed to leave all things and enter any religious order to which it should become clear that God was calling him. He did not want to appear to be rashly forsaking the life he had been living hitherto—a life that was honorable and not without some benefit to the Church. Some Franciscans to whom he disclosed his thoughts strove to dissuade him, telling him that it was a temptation from the devil, who wanted to deflect him from the course which he was following to the great benefit of God's Church.

He also thought at times that he would like to enter a monastic order, especially the Franciscans, were it not that he had resolved to help his neighbor. The cowl at that time was a great impediment to this, for the instant heretics glimpsed one, no matter how excellent the person's message might be, they would decry it as monkish and suspect. He wished there existed a religious order with no special habit or tonsure but ordinary priestly garb, which would profess the highest perfection. He was unaware that the Society was such an order. Even though he had lived for three years in Italy, God had completely kept him ignorant of the Society, perhaps so that he would not despise them for their outward appearance, ill prepared as he then was for spiritual considerations.

Consequently, on hearing that fathers and workers of the Society had arrived at Braunsberg, he made a trip a year later to the cardinal of Ermland, and then proceeded from him to Braunsberg in order to visit them and obtain some spiritual counseling. This was in

1565. One of the men he there conversed with was Fr. Peter Fahe of holy memory, at that time a preacher. He began opening up to Fr. Fahe, telling him that he felt longings in his heart to leave all things for Christ, but that these longings were still inconclusive, the words of the prophet holding him back: "Let him who believes not make haste"—especially since he was unsure whether it was God's will and for his own and the Church's good. The father praised his longings, cautioning him not to ignore them. Regarding spiritual matters, he informed him that the Society possessed spiritual exercises which were of great help to people in any state of life and which had been used by the holy desert fathers as a key for obtaining perfection. "They are exercises," he said, "first of the purgative, then of the illuminative, and finally of the unitive way, bringing our minds to such union with God through love that we can afterwards raise them to him at any time." Hearing this he became very keen for the Exercises, asking whether they would also enable a person to discover God's will regarding his state of life. "Of course," said the father; "that is their very purpose." On hearing this, he grew even more enthusiastic. He said that he was at present impeded by domestic affairs which brooked no delay (which was the truth), but that with the Lord's help he would return to make these Exercises.

It is said that upon returning to his brethren, Fr. Fahe told some of them, "The man you just saw in the college will be one of us. He is going to be a Jesuit." They answered, "How so? He certainly gave no indication of it." He replied, "Nothing is impossible with God. You don't believe now, but you'll see."

At the beginning of the following year, 1566, he visited the cardinal a third time. On this occasion, the enemy made an effort to block and delay his journey. Just before his departure, reports arrived that Heilsberga was completely surrounded by German troops of the Duke of Mecklinburg. The news was said to be completely certain, so that he began to have doubts about making the trip. But overcoming himself, he set out, entrusting himself to God and planning to turn back if he should hear anything more definite about the danger, but otherwise to go on. As it turned out, the further he traveled the less talk he heard about these troops or about a siege of Heilsberga.

And so he reached Heilsberga safely, with no danger at all. A few days later, begging leave of the cardinal, he proceeded to Braunsberg. The provincial, Fr. Francis Sunyer, being there at the time, he asked to be given the Spiritual Exercises in the college—not with the intention of entering the Society, but for his spiritual help and in order to ascertain God’s will regarding his state of life. His request granted, he left all his baggage outside and entered the college alone to begin his Exercises before the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

He completed the First Week. During the Second Week, before reaching the election, he experienced desolations instead of consolations. He began to feel extreme anxiety regarding God’s will. Even before being given the methods of election, he started making a comparison between his present state of life and the religious state, thinking up his own refutations of objections against the religious state and reporting this to Father Rector, who was guiding his Exercises. The

latter did not reproach him, but told him to let these considerations go until later. Finally, upon the father’s departure after dinner, having nothing in his room to read except a volume of St. Bernard, he picked it up, opened it, and by God’s gracious providence happened upon a sermon about our Lord’s Passion. He started reading not at the beginning but towards the middle, where it says: “See, my soul, who he is who comes in, bearing the appearance of a king, yet at the same time that of the most despised slave.”

He continued reading, overwhelmed with shame, until he reached the following passage: “Behold, Lord Jesus, mighty and jealous, what worthy thanks can I give you—I, a man, dust and ashes, a base piece of pottery? What ought you to have done for my salvation that you did not do? From the soles of your feet to the crown of your head, you plunged wholly into the waters of suffering, in order to pull me wholly free of them—and the waters entered even unto your soul. For you allowed your own soul to be lost to death in order to restore to me my own lost soul. Yes, you have bound me with a double bond: I am your debtor both for what you gave me and for what you lost for my sake. You gave me life twice over, once in creation and once in redemption, and for this I have nought with which to repay you more justly than my life itself. But in return for the agony of your own soul, I can see no way that a human can adequately repay you. Even if I had heaven and earth and every creature therein to repay you with, still there would be no way to compensate for what I owe you. To repay you as I ought and as I can will have to be your gift, O Lord. I must love you, Lord, with my whole heart, my whole soul, my whole



strength. I must follow your footsteps—you who deigned to die for me. And how can this take place in me except by your doing? Let my soul cling to you, for on you all its strength depends. And now, Lord, my redeemer, I adore you as true God, I trust in you, I hope in you, I yearn towards you with all the longing of which I am capable. Help what is imperfect in me. I bow down before the glorious tokens of your passion, the instruments by which you wrought my salvation. In your name, O Christ, I adore the royal standard of your triumphant cross; I humbly adore and glorify your crown of thorns, your gore-redened nails, the lance plunged into your sacred side, your wounds, your blood, your death, your burial, your glorious and triumphant resurrection and glorification. For the odor of life breathes to me from them all, an aroma that gives me life. Lord, lift up my spirit from the death of sin. By these tokens guard me from Satan's wiles, so that the yoke of your commandments may be sweet to me, and the burden of the cross which you bid me bear after you may rest lightly on my shoulders."

Reading these words, he felt his heart melt. Tears flowed from his eyes, and he was bound fast by the sweet bonds of a call from God. He felt himself called and drawn by these words. Kneeling down, he offered himself to Christ, to follow his footsteps in poverty and rejection of the world.

And so, upon the father's return in the evening, he announced that he had already made up his mind to relinquish his benefices and all his worldly possessions for Christ, to serve him in poverty. The father gave him the methods of election anyway. These served to confirm him even more, especially the

method about choosing now the state of life that he would wish to have chosen when standing before the tribunal of Christ—doing now what he would then wish to have done. He realized that at that moment his wish would certainly be to have despised and rejected a thousand worlds for the name of Christ.

There was something else which made him aware of God's goodness and mercy. He recalled the following dream from when he was a boy of about eight. After a long journey, he entered a religious house, passing through winding walks and several gates, and ringing the bell to be let in. He was eventually brought to a room where a fire was burning. To the right of the fireplace, our Lady was sitting. In this room he saw several other persons seated at tables around the walls. Among them was his mother, whose name was Dorothy, already deceased at the time. Then he bowed and received our Lady's blessing. Through a dark little window opposite him, the spirit of God seemed to be blowing on him. But then he saw himself riding through the city streets in a gorgeous carriage pulled by splendid horses. A threatening finger, that seemed to be our Lady's, appeared to him in the air. The sight terrified him and immediately woke him up. He slept no more that night, continuing to think about this, almost in a daze, for the whole of the following day, walking around as if he wished to forswear the world. This childhood dream had remained indelibly branded on his soul, frequently recurring to his mind even when he was a priest.

At this moment the dream came back to him again, and the Lord showed him that it was now fulfilled. The religious house was the Braunsberg college,

formerly a monastery. It had the same winding walks, gates, and doorbell. The room to which he had dreamed he was taken was the one where he was making the Exercises, with a fireplace in the corner just as in his dream. The little window was the one opening into the church, from which he heard Mass and the recitation of the litanies. Through this window he could see on the right an altar of the Blessed Virgin, with other images of saints around the walls, including one of St. Dorothy. Moreover, it was during the octave of the Blessed Virgin that he was receiving this blessing of a vocation to follow in her Son's footsteps. He realized that God had graciously manifested this to him as a child, twenty-eight years before, showing him that this was the place where he was to draw the spirit of his divine calling—and that if he failed to respond to it and returned to the vanities of the world, the avenging hand he had seen would fall upon him.

With no further doubts about his vocation, he began to deliberate which order—assuming he had a religious vocation—he ought to enter. But this uncertainty was soon dispelled. He reasoned that the place where he had received light from God was the place where he ought to stay. In no other religious order had he received this light, even though he had consulted various other religious, but only in a college of the Society. God was therefore indicating that he wanted him in the Society of Jesus, the place where he had enlightened him with his grace. However, real-

izing what difficulties and obstacles impended from his relatives and friends, he decided to keep his decision from them as he disposed of his property, and then leave for Rome.

During the full year intervening before his departure for Rome, he was assailed by a variety of temptations and desolations. But each week on the day of his self-oblation to God, he experienced great consolation and elevation of mind towards heavenly things. This confirmed him in his decision. Finally, with the Lord's help, he severed all the bonds, assembled what money he could to give to the poor (relinquishing his patrimony to his brothers since he was prevented from doing otherwise), and made the trip to Rome. There he received the blessing of Pope Pius V; and, in the year of our Lord 1567, on the vigil of St. Catherine, under our father of holy memory Francis Borgia, superior general of the Society of Jesus, he entered the Society.

And now, this is the grace he humbly begs from the Lord: that in repayment for the Lord's many and great mercies in drawing him out of hell and saving his soul from those that go down into the pit, he might be able to serve the divine Majesty in the midst of his servants (whose footsteps he is unworthy to kiss) to his final breath, in all humility and obedience.

Stanislaus Warszewicki

(written in his own hand)

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(For prices, see inside back cover.)

- 1/1 Sheets, *Profile of the Contemporary Jesuit* (Sept. 1969)
- 1/2 Ganss, *Authentic Spiritual Exercises: History and Terminology* (Nov. 1969)
- 2/1 Burke, *Institution and Person* (Feb. 1970)
- 2/2 Futrell, *Ignatian Discernment* (Apr. 1970)
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