

# In experienced hands, book helps retreatant

**A Do-It-at-Home Retreat: The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola According to the "Nineteenth Annotation,"** by Andre Ravier, SJ, trans. by Cornelius Michael Buckley, SJ; Ignatius Press, (San Francisco, 1991); 233 pages; \$11.95.

**By E. Leo McMannus**  
Guest contributor

Let me share with you some of my misgivings about reviewing this book, which was written by an experienced European spiritual writer and retreat master.

Published originally in 1989 under the title *En Retraite chez soi*, or *On Retreat at home*, it focuses especially on making a 30-day retreat.

First of all, I have never in my life made a 30-day retreat.

Second, my editor's deadline does not allow me now to test it — like a recipe — at home.

Third, even if I had the time, this is not a book that would "persuade" me to make such a retreat.

This is not the author's failure but the result of his intent: to explain in good, plain, unadorned, meat-and-potatoes prose how "to build my life on God's love." His purpose is exposition, not persuasion.

The American publisher has put a spin on the original title, suggesting the book's inclusion in the popular genre of "how-to" process themes so rife today, with titles such as *How to Succeed in Today's Economy*, *How to Be Happily Married*, *How to Lower Your Cholesterol*, and others.

This book, therefore, is for those already motivated to follow exercises intended to enable them to know God's will for them. As the one-paragraph cautionary Preface says, the book is "designed for priests, religious, and laymen who sincerely want to place themselves 'face to face' with God..."

If these individuals are willing to "put aside one or two hours of silence each day at home for a week (a month would be better), they can still make an excellent retreat."

But they should not attempt to make it alone or unaided, and here is where the title may be somewhat misleading. People must, the author writes, "place themselves under the direction of a competent spiritual guide, with whom they can converse in complete confi-

dence, one who knows the Spiritual Exercises well and who will explain to them how God is dealing with their soul and who will accompany them in their search for the true love of God."

So despite one of its blurbs, which somewhat immodestly claims that it "makes it possible for millions of Catholics to enter into the 'interior castle' of Christian mysticism," the book has some important limitations that its title would not indicate.

The book itself is divided into three parts: an introductory section (pgs. 11-56), which offers fine explanatory remarks; a concluding section (pgs. 209-233), with some extremely practical chapters; and the heart of the matter (pgs. 57-208), which follows the progress from the first to the 32-day of the retreat. (A schedule is also included for someone who can spend only eight days.)

This middle section consists of meditations on sin, from the first week (broadly understood), through the second, with its contemplation of the life of Christ, through the third week's contemplation of the Passion, and unto the fourth week's contemplation of the Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost. The process concludes with the retreatant's "basically spiritual way of looking at things" in his or her daily life.

As the author unpretentiously writes in one of his concluding chapters, "If this retreat has helped us simply to recite the Our Father with more faith in our understanding and more love in our heart, its purpose has been achieved. We are more the 'sons of God.'"

Who will profit by this book? Certainly those who have already happily experienced a 30-day retreat. Certainly, too, the most experienced themselves, the retreat masters.

It is for you, too, but only on two conditions:

- that you are sincerely interested in knowing God's will, in which, as Dante says, "is our peace."

- that you have a retreat center nearby, or a Jesuit house, or perhaps your parish office, which can put you in touch with the necessary "competent spiritual guide."

Remember, you should not attempt it with the book alone.

McMannus, a professor emeritus of English, lives in Venice, Fla.

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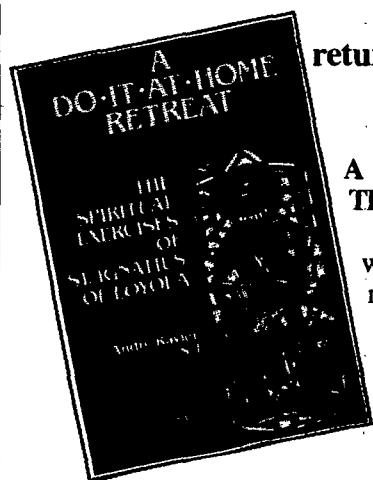
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The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

This book is a most helpful and careful guide to anyone who desires to make an Ignatian retreat but is unable to make the *Spiritual Exercises* in a normal retreat. It is designed for those who want sincerely to place themselves 'face to face' with God so as to order their lives along his loving designs. Fr. Ravier is an expert retreat master who has been giving Ignatian retreats for over 30 years. —IGNATIUS

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