



Application of the Senses

A Rediscovered
Contemplation

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Introduction	5
Praying with the Senses	8
The Fundamentals of Application of the Senses	12
The Application of the Senses in the Spiritual Exercises	16
Contributions to the Study of the Application of the Senses	20
The Importance of the Application of the Senses	31

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Introduction

Praying with the senses is a practice proposed by Saint Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises. The benefit of knowing, developing, and practicing this way of praying is evident from many centuries of Christian spiritual tradition. A great many authors have studied in depth the use of the senses in prayer, and they have discovered how the spiritual senses can be used in coordination with the bodily senses.

During the four weeks of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius proposes three ways of praying related to the senses (in a table at the end of this introductory chapter). The first way is when we pray directly “on the five senses of the body” [238.2, 247, 248] or when we pray imitating Christ’s senses [248.1] and Our Lady’s [248.2].

The second way is praying with what Saint Ignatius calls the senses “of the imagination,” which provide us with a composition of place that may consist of either visible things [47.2] or invisible things [47.5]. This second form of prayer lends itself to both meditation [66-70] and contemplation [102-119].

Finally, the third form of senses-related prayer begins in the second week of the Exercises; it consists of reflecting at the end of each day on the subjects contemplated throughout the day. This reflection is done with the help of the abovementioned senses of the imagination. This last way of praying Saint Ignatius calls “applying the senses,”¹ which the *Latin version* of the Spiritual Exercises translates as *applicatio sen-*

1. The Latin translation of the Exercises uses the phrase “application of the senses,” but the original Spanish text has *traer los sentidos* [“bringing the senses”] and *pasar los cinco sentidos* [“passing the five senses”], which are genuinely Ignatian expressions and express the saint’s thought best. This work therefore avoids the Latin noun phrase, “the bringing of the senses,” which today seems a forced or ambiguous construction, and uses instead the simple verb form “bring the senses.”

suum. In English this phrase has become “application of the senses.” It is recognized as one of the peak forms of prayer in the Exercises.

These three ways of praying recommended by Ignatius are part of the varied set of spiritual operations [1.2] that contribute to the twofold purpose of the Spiritual Exercises: removing all disordered affections and seeking and finding the will of God [1.3-4]. Although it is very important to know how to pray in various ways, the specific practice of “applying the senses” can facilitate our access to a light-giving, wisdom-filled journey through the last sensory frontier, reaching to the depths of our soul, near the “non-path” to God.

This booklet invites readers to explore the world of the spirit, enter into the heart of spirituality, and delve into the phenomenology of the senses and their absence, while contemplating the manifestation of God in their lives. Those who study this text will journey through a fascinating part of the history of Christian thought and mystical and spiritual theology, and they will do so from an ecumenical perspective. References to works, texts, and authors in this particular journey are subject to the inescapable arbitrariness present in all such choices. Just as there are indisputable personages from patristics, medieval thought, and 20th-century theology, so also there are anthropological and philosophical thinkers who do not initially appear to be clear defenders of Christian thought.

The first two forms of praying with the senses enable us to practice “application of the senses.” Given the right conditions, a great many spiritual fruits are obtained by this prayer, and these move us toward a sustained spiritual practice. For this reason, the contents of this booklet will benefit those doing the Exercises, those accompanying them, and everyone who seeks a concrete, sensitive, and natural path of encounter with the Lord.

Methods of praying in the Spiritual Exercises that are related to the bodily senses

- 1st Method Praying on the five senses of the body, as described in SpEx 238-243 [SpEx 247-248]
- 1.1. on one's own senses [SpEx 238 247]
 - 1.2. on those of Christ or Our Lady [SpEx 248]
-

- 2nd Method Praying with the senses of the imagination, using a composition of place
- 2.1. on visible things [SpEx 47.2]
 - 2.2. on invisible things [SpEx 47.5]
 - 2.3. with meditation [SpEx 66-70]
 - 2.4. with contemplation [SpEx 102-119]
-

- 3rd Method Application of the senses, or drawing on the senses, or passing the senses of the imagination over previous contemplations, and reflecting on oneself [SpEx 121-125, 132-134, 159-161]
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Praying with the Senses

Saint Augustine said that the steps taken by the body can bring you closer to the steps taken by love in all its forms. And this is what the bodily senses do: they bring us closer to the world and to spiritual intimacy, and ultimately they bring us closer to God. In an itinerary of spiritual searching, the bodily senses act as a system of revolving doors through which we enter the world and the world enters us. This complex mechanism can function superficially and externally, but it can also operate in a deeply interior way.

The bodily senses provide us experience of the world around us and facilitate self-knowledge. They also offer us access to the spiritual operations taking place within us, thanks to the spiritual senses, which lead us, spiral-like, into another way of seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and touching. They bring us closer to full knowledge of the manifestation of God within us. Given our awareness of the importance of both the bodily and the spiritual senses, we quite rightly ask what we mean when we talk about the senses, and what is their ultimate purpose.

The Bodily and the Spiritual Senses

The bodily sense of sight allows us to perform two very different actions: seeing and looking. When seeing, we observe the world; when looking, we examine it. These two actions can coincide, but they do not necessarily go together: we can see without looking, and we can look without seeing. For its part, spiritual sight activates our inner gaze, which in turn reveals everyday reality in such a way that we acquire a new and deeper understanding of things and are able to reshape our inner selves differently.

Like the eye, the ear also has a double function. Hearing refers to the simple act of perceiving a sound, while listening involves attentiveness. Although listening is a conscious, attentive act of hearing, we can also listen without hearing, just as we can hear without listening. When our spiritual hearing is opened by the Spirit and tunes itself in silence, we perceive the soul's movements and those that manifest God.

The sense of taste is related to the acts of eating and drinking, on which our physical life directly depends. Christian spirituality relates this bodily life closely with its interior counterpart, the spiritual life. This is made clear by the close relationship between the Latin words for flavor (*sapor*), knowledge (*sapere*), and wisdom (*sapientia*). These words invite us to savor the movements of the soul even as they open the soul to spiritual knowledge and discernment.

The olfactory organ, or its part, has its biological roots very deep within the brain, thus ensuring a register of sensations close to the unconscious. Smell allows us to discern all kinds of presences, it guides us in space and time, and it is uniquely able to evoke ideas, sensations, emotions, and movements of the spirit. If a single scent is capable of returning us to an apparently forgotten scene, it should not be surprising that tradition exhorts us to spread the fragrance of Christ everywhere (cf. 2 Cor 2:14) and that Saint Ignatius invites us to "smell the fragrance and taste the infinite sweetness and charm" of God [124].

Touch provides us with physical access to the contingent, tangible universe that surrounds us. By touching or being touched we unconsciously move from the external, peripheral world toward one we perceive interiorly and consciously. Interior touch connects our outer being with our inner being and does so directly and naturally. The gospels show the spiritual relevance of touch with its accounts of healing (cf. Mk 1:31), anointing (cf. Lk 7:37-38), unbelief (cf. Jn 20:25-29), and even betrayal (cf. Mk 14:45). We also experience touch on a more ordinary, everyday level. If something as simple as a kiss can naturally and spontaneously involve our five bodily and five spiritual senses, then we can understand why talking about the senses is so important and at the same time so sensitive. In the end, the bodily and the spiritual senses unify and naturally transcend us, almost without our knowing how.

Praying with the Senses in Ancient Times

The first written records of humanity reveal the different functions of the bodily senses. These sensory operations involve perceptions and thoughts that go beyond space and time, becoming intimations of transcendence or incipient forms of praying with the senses. Based on oral tradition and Sumerian mythology, the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh (?-4700 BC) is the oldest written poem found to date. It recounts the adven-

tures of a king who goes on a journey of initiation that is not only physical, but also interior. The journey shows how the bodily senses transfer their sensory function to the affective field.² Similarly, the long Homeric poem, the *Odyssey*, praises human wisdom but is also full of references to the bodily senses that help readers to grow and mature³ by opening them to new dimensions beyond what is visible, tangible, and somatic.

Biblical texts that have been transmitted and meditated on for centuries contain the identifying patrimony and written memory of the Jewish people. These biblical stories about God and transcendence, written with intentions and mentalities far removed from those of today, show the different ways in which people pray with the senses. In the book of Genesis (cf. Gen 9:16), sight evokes memories that have a strong symbolic charge,⁴ and hearing senses the presence of the Lord, before whom one recognizes oneself as a sinner.⁵ A blessing addressed to the people of Israel in the book of Numbers (cf. Num 6:2-27)⁶ will be adopted years later by Saint Francis of Assisi as an act of thanksgiving. In Isaiah (cf. Is 35:4-7a)⁷ the bodily senses open fully as they contemplate the blossoming of the desert through which the Israelites will pass as they return from exile, a central theme of second Isaiah. The book of Job, a poetic narrative from the sixth century BC, impugns human efforts (cf. Job 28:9) and venerates the Lord as the true path of wisdom (cf. Job 28:23).

The third part of the Hebrew Bible includes a psalter with one hundred and fifty poems, some of which (cf. Pss 131, 133, and 139) show how praying can give the bodily senses a glimpse of transcendence. The post-exilic Psalm 131 (130) is uttered by someone who prays with great trust in God; his eyes are on God and he feels like a child in his mother's lap. The wisdom figure in Psalm 133 (132) speaks of the salu-

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2. ANONYMOUS (1992). *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Madrid: Tecnos, p. 159: "Touch this man so that he wakes up, so that he returns safe and sound along the path that led him here."
 3. HOMER (2016). *La Odisea*, Madrid: Gredos, p. 293: "I spoke thus, and their hearts were broken."
 4. Gen 9:16: "When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."
 5. Gen 3:8: "They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden."
 6. Numbers 6:22-27: "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace."
 7. Is 35:4-7a: "Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.' Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray."

tations of those who enter a house and are received with graciousness. The perfume of the room, pleasing to the sense of smell, is said to be as soothing and refreshing as the dew of Mount Hermon; it plays the role of a kind older friend who does not take advantage of his privilege. In this psalm, the spiritual sense of sight leads the psalmist to contemplate how God beholds with pleasure the harmonious coexistence of brothers and sisters, so that the visitor is feels drawn to imitate them and remain in the house. Psalm 139 (138) is a hymn with didactic and wisdom reflections on how God penetrates the work of his creation with his gaze, listens to every word, and surrounds human beings everywhere with power and strength, just as air and light do.

The Fundamentals of Application of the Senses

Application of the senses is not original with Saint Ignatius; it is rooted in a Christian tradition that goes back to the earliest times.

The Beginning is in Origen

A major part of the theoretical foundations of the “application of the senses” can be found in Origen (184-251 AD), who used allegorical and systematic exegesis to create his doctrine of the five spiritual senses. However, Origen uses terminology that is imprecise in his controversy with the philosopher Celsus, a staunch defender of the idea that Christians perceived God through the bodily senses.

Origen based his thought on two quotes from the book of Proverbs (Prov 2:5⁸ and Prov 3:5⁹) and a third from the letter to the Hebrews (Heb 5:14).¹⁰ Using these texts, he elaborated for the first time in the history of Christian thought a reflection on all the sensory organs and their functions. Written in the form of a *lectio divina*, his reflection designates by analogy the sensory faculties that are proper to the Spirit. Origen understood the spiritual senses as powers of the soul¹¹: we have spiritual sight to contemplate heavenly visions, spiritual hearing to distinguish angelic voices, spiritual taste to savor the divine bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (cf. Jn 6:33), spiritual smell to inhale the pleasant aroma of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 2:15), and spiritual touch to caress the divine word with one’s hands (cf. 1 Jn 1:1).

8. Prov 2:5: “Then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.”

9. Prov 3:5: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.”

10. Heb 5:14: “Solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.”

11. Cf. MARÉCHAL, Joseph (1937). “Un essai de méditation orienté vers la contemplation” in *Études sur la psychologie des mystiques II*. Brussels: Edition universelle, pp. 365-382.

Origen held that the doctrine of the spiritual senses becomes more clear to us when we take note of persons who develop those senses. It will therefore be more evident to us the more we keep Christ at the center of our prayer and use the Holy Scriptures as a source of inspiration and light. This 3rd-century Christian thinker also used the path of opposites to reaffirm this idea, recommending that we observe people who cannot use their spiritual senses because their natural faculties of sight, hearing, and smell are impaired. The grace of God and personal exercise are essential for the establishment of their full functionality. Thanks to Origen's doctrine, we can explain the prophetic inspiration and the depth of vision of prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel, and we can appreciate the sublime instances of biblical mysticism, such as Moses' visions of God and Paul's visions of heaven.

The Continuation of Origen's Work

In the 4th century Evagrius Ponticus, inspired by the doctrines of his teacher Origen, spoke of the spiritual senses as an aid to spiritual discernment. For Evagrius, just as the bodily senses perceive sensible things, the spiritual senses perform the difficult task of penetrating objects and discerning their nonphysical aspects. Spiritual sight recognizes the existence of things, spiritual hearing understands their deeper meaning, spiritual touch gives reassurance of life, and spiritual taste and smell provide an affective dimension. According to Evagrius, the spiritual senses can help spiritual discernment because their activity is a form of spiritual perception.

For Diadochos of Photiki,¹² a 5th-century ascetic, the spiritual senses give experiential knowledge of God's indwelling in the soul and facilitate perception of divine consolation. Besides mentioning the phenomenon of consolation, something that Saint Ignatius stresses in the Exercises [316], Diadochos introduced new concepts into his discussion of the senses, different from the ones that had been used until then. He spoke, for example, of "the eyes of the spirit," "divine light," and "illumination."

Saint Gregory of Nyssa, a 4th-century church father, incorporated a theory of the five spiritual senses into his interpretation of the *Song of Songs*. Finally, Saint Augustine (354-430 AD), the great spiritual teacher of Christianity's first centuries, followed Origen's reasoning about the five spiritual senses and eloquently expressed his own intuitions about the depth and interiority they can reach.¹³

12. DIADOCHOS OF PHOTIKI (1981). *Els cents consells del pare Diàdoc*, Barcelona: Claret.

13. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, Confessions I, 3: "Tu autem eres intimior intimo meo et superior summo meo" ["You are more inward to me than my most inward part and higher than my highest."]

Further Advances in the Middle Ages

The rule of Saint Benedict is a 6th century document that describes a form of monastic life. Its 73 chapters contain legislative and doctrinal prescriptions relating to the bodily and the spiritual senses. Quite remarkable is the seventh chapter, which describes humility in terms of the twelve-step ladder of Jacob's dream (cf. Gen 28:12). The first step refers to the sense of spiritual sight, which invites us to keep always before our eyes not material objects but immaterial ones, such as fear of God, because God always observes us as he looks down from heaven. The sense of spiritual touch is mentioned in the fourth step, where Benedict recommends that the monks embrace patience as a theological virtue, sincerely believing that they are the least and the vilest of persons. The fifth and the eleventh steps also treat of humility, relating the bodily ear to the spiritual one. According to the fifth step, monks should reveal to their abbot, by humble admission, any evil thoughts that come into their hearts or any evil deeds done by them in secret; in this way they are obliged to hear their faults with their own ears. The eleventh step advises the monks to speak softly, humbly, gravely, with few and prudent words, and without laughter or outbursts of voice.

We would like to highlight two more steps that uniquely combine the bodily and the spiritual senses. The eighth step reminds the monks that they should do only what they see their elders doing, and the twelfth step encourages them to practice humility not only in their hearts but also in their bodies, making it manifest to others. One follower of the Benedictine rule, Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), evinced a didactic rather than an ecstatic type mysticism when she spoke of having visions while in a waking state. She never entered into ecstasy or had hallucinations or dreams, but with allegorical language she explained how her spiritual senses gave her the feeling and knowledge of being pierced by God. During her visions, she heard a voice telling her what her inner eyes were seeing, and she felt herself immersed in radiant light as she contemplated with open eyes.

Finally, Saint Bonaventure (1221-1274) further developed the foundations laid by Origen by relating the five spiritual senses to grace and to the human acts of intellect and will. Bonaventure believed that praying to God with the spiritual senses represented the highest degree of perfection achievable because it was an act of contemplation that had God as its object. This 13th-century Franciscan singled out two spiritual senses especially; one was spiritual taste, which allows the human soul to take satisfaction in the experience of God's grace, and the other was spiritual sight, which offers satisfaction to acts of the intellect.¹⁴ Bonaventure's doctrine of the five spiritual senses,

14. Cf. RAHNER, Karl (1933). "La doctrine des sens spirituels au Moyen âge, en particulier chez saint Bonaventure" in *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 14, pp. 263-299.

like Origen's, directs them more toward "knowing" and "feeling" one's relationship with God than toward an immediate intellectual vision of God in the world. But the greatest contribution his thought made to this field was that of relating each spiritual sense to the person of Christ. Spiritual sight perceives the beauty of Christ as a burst of light; spiritual hearing captures Christ as the living word; spiritual smell breathes in the inspired word of the Son of God; spiritual taste detects the sweetness of the divine presence; and spiritual touch feels the sublime softness of the Incarnate One. Reading this Christology of the spiritual senses, we can understand how Bonaventure created a highly sensitive spiritual itinerary that was accompanied by five elements: splendor, harmony, perfume, sweetness, and softness.

The Application of the Senses in the Spiritual Exercises

The first annotations in the book of the Spiritual Exercises were written by Saint Ignatius at the beginning of his conversion in Loyola, when he first began to observe the spiritual movements within him. The final draft of the Spiritual Exercises can therefore be considered a true self-portrait of Ignatius. It makes clear the ways and means that God used to elevate his soul,¹⁵ and it shows they correspond to spiritual operations that can occur in any person.

“Annotations”

The first annotation in the Exercises [1] has two parts that make this idea very clear. The first part indicates the purpose of the Exercises, which is “to seek and find the divine will in the disposition of one’s life” [1.4]. The second part explains the type of activities that lead to this end: “every way of examining the conscience, of meditating, of contemplating, of vocal or mental prayer, and of other spiritual activities” [1.2].

The sheer depth of this spiritual proposal allows us to understand why Ignatius begins the text of the Exercises with twenty practical and relevant counsels aimed at awakening the mind and helping retreatants to feel and savor the movements of their soul [1-20]. These recommendations, which Ignatius calls “Annotations,” invite those making the Exercises to directly feel and savor their spiritual activities [2.4] and to fully sense their interior movements [12.2]. The prayers and exercises [16.4] are aimed at helping them experience the indwelling of God [15.4]. Ignatius makes

15. DE LA PALMA, Luis (1967). *Camino espiritual*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, p. 433.

an emphatic link between spiritual matters [215.1] and the feelings one experiences. That is perhaps why the verb “to feel” appears 32 times in the text of the Exercises, often accompanied by the verb “to know.”¹⁶

Three Ways to Pray with the Senses

At various points in the Exercises we find different forms of praying with the senses, and these lead us progressively to the application of the senses. The first way is simple and is introduced as an initial way of praying [247.2]; it proposes praying directly on “the five bodily senses” [238.2, 247, 248]. The soul is urged to team up with the senses and to take advantage of them, but no precise form of prayer is specified [238.3]; by performing this exercise “the spirit rests a bit” [239.1] and considers “where I am going and for what” [239.2]. In this initial spiritual exercise, the saint suggests that we imitate Christ and Our Lady in the use they make of their senses [248.1, 248.2].

The Latin translation of the Exercises uses the term *applicatio sensuum*¹⁷ to describe a way of praying reserved for the end of the day; a primitive form of it can be found in the first week of the Exercises, but it is fully developed only from the second week on. During the first week Ignatius introduces this form discreetly, not giving it a proper title but simply indicating that it is a meditation [65-72]. Advancing a little further in a progressive spiritual initiation, still in the first week, Ignatius proposes a second way of praying; with the help of the interior or spiritual senses, one applies “the imagination” [47.3] to a concrete object, such as the one proposed in the meditation on hell [66-70]. One is asked to see the fires with the sight of the imagination [66], to hear the wailing with the sense of hearing [67], to smell the sulphur with the sense of smell [68], to taste the bitterness with the sense of taste [69], and to touch the flames with the sense of touch [70]. It should be noted that this exercise, as well as the time devoted to the application of the senses, is to be done an hour before supper [72.2].

A third way of praying also uses the senses of the imagination [121.2], but now the matter to be contemplated is all that has happened and everything that has been contemplated in the course of the day [101, 110]. The “application of the senses” is not proposed to us explicitly until the second week [121-125], but then it continues until

16. [SpEx 313.1-2]: “Rules to aid us toward perceiving and then understanding, at least to some extent, the various motions which are caused in the soul: the good motions that they may be received, and the bad, that they may be rejected. These rules are more suitable for the First Week.” The expression “the senses of the body,” which is purely Ignatian, appears in the annotations and in the explanation of the first way of praying, which is on the five bodily senses [18.7, 238.2, 247.1-2].

17. We variously use the expressions “application of the senses,” “bringing the senses,” or “passing the five senses.” See note 1.

the end of the Exercises, helping to prolong the repetitions in which the retreatants seek to savor again whatever was previously contemplated.

Bringing the Senses

Starting in the second week, we are asked to pray with each of the five senses as we consider the matter proper to the different contemplations [121-126].¹⁸ It is worth noting the different kinds of prayer with the senses: during the first and second contemplations, at the beginning of the day, prayer is done point by point [106-108, 114-116], but the prayer before supper is done by using the five senses, or what is properly called “applying the senses” [121-125, 128.2, 129.3]. In the first two contemplations, the senses are to be used only briefly, but in the prayer before supper, the retreatants should exert less effort and experience greater affective intensity in prayer. The prayer should consist of various spiritual activities, such as “seeing the persons” [122], “hearing what they are saying” [123], “smelling” [124], and “embracing and kissing” [125]. In a setting where one is progressing in spirituality and depth, it should not be surprising that the prayer at the end of each day consists of *bringing the senses* [121].

Every day from the second week on, the saint reserves space for the “applying the senses.” On the second day there are two contemplations, one on the presentation of the temple [268] and the other on the flight into Egypt [269]; there are also “two repetitions and an application of the five senses to them” [132.2]. (The possibility is offered of just one contemplation, but still using the five senses [131.1,2].) For persons with a more willing spirit, Ignatius recommends [133.2] “repetition at the time of Vespers and application of the senses before supper.” Applying the senses at the end of each day extends from the third to the sixth day of the second week [134, 136, 149, 159] [161.1] and from the seventh to the twelfth day [274, 275, 278, 280, 285, 287 and 288]. Retreatants are allowed to lengthen or shorten the time spent in the second week [162].

During the third week the same cadence is maintained. On first day [204.2] “the senses will be applied to the two contemplations before supper,” and the same instruction is given from the second to the fifth day [208.1,2,3,6,7]. Finally, the instructions for the fourth week are similar [226.5]: “In the mysteries of the resurrection, [...] the retreatant can be guided by the procedure used in the week on the Passion in re-

18. [SpEx 122] “By the sign of my imagination I will see the persons, meditating and contemplating in detail all the circumstances around them.” [123] “By my hearing I will listen to what they are saying or might be saying.” [124] “I will smell the fragrance and taste the infinite sweetness and charm of the Divinity, of the soul, of its virtues, and of everything there.” [125] “Using the sense of touch, I will, so to speak, embrace and kiss the places where the persons walk or sit.”

gard to the repetitions and application of the five senses.” Ignatius also recommends “applying the five senses to the three exercises of the day, noticing and dwelling reflectively on the principal places where one experiences greater interior motions and spiritual relish” [227.3]. In short, all through the Exercises retreatants are asked to maintain a cadence that promotes a rich spiritual climate.

Contributions to the Study of the Application of the Senses

Since the time of Ignatius, the theory and practice of the application of the senses have been developed by a number of authors who have helped to deepen the meaning of the practice.

Juan Alfonso de Polanco (1517-1571)¹⁹

Theologian and faithful secretary of Ignatius, Polanco wrote one of the best and most complete directories of the Spiritual Exercises. His psychologically penetrating text, rich in insight and spiritual depth, prepared the way for the official directory that would be published years later. Convinced that it was necessary to do the Exercises with intensity, he described in detail the “application of the senses,” which he interpreted at two levels, though not everyone in the Society agreed with him. He posited that certain imaginary senses provided the foundations for an application of the senses that was more typical of meditation and could be used with persons who were less spiritually advanced. But he also thought that there were superior intellectual senses that should be proposed to persons more advanced in the contemplative life. According to Polanco, proposing one way or the other would depend on the discretion of the person accompanying the retreatant.

19. *Directorios de Ejercicios (1540-1599)*. Translation, notes, and study by Miguel Lop Sebastià, SJ (1984), Bilbao and Santander: Ediciones Mensajero-Sal Terrae, pp. 154-155.

Jerome Nadal (1507-1508)

Famous for having persuaded Saint Ignatius to narrate his spiritual journey, Nadal recognized the existence of five spiritual senses corresponding to the five external senses, and he recommended practicing spiritual elevation by “applying the senses” and seeking the highest lights in all things. He insisted that there is no darkness in God’s law and that we can always see clearly, despite being continually tempted through the senses.

Interpreting the story of the healing of the man born blind (cf. Jn 9), Nadal taught that Christ came not only to remove sins and human imperfections, but also to strengthen our natural faculties, such as memory and intelligence. He recommended that asking through prayer for the purification of the bodily senses so that they become vehicles for penetration into the interior life. He also advised against identifying with material things because of the burden of sinful corruption they will eventually bring upon persons. Nadal considered it important to be aware of the fruits that are gathered interiorly when using the spiritual senses. He counseled that we stop and rest gently whenever we come upon such fruits, whether it is at some point in the prayer or upon receiving an answer to a request we have made. Nadal invites us to realize the grace of the Exercises by welcoming the inspirations we receive every day in our soul and by putting them into practice so that they bear fruit.

The Directory of Exercises of 1599

Number 156 of the official directory²⁰ shows how understanding of the “application of the senses” suffers when it is presented as an inferior exercise more suitable for meditation. It reads as follows:

3. The difference between application of the senses and meditation. Application of the senses is different from meditation in that meditation is more intellectual and engages more in reasoning. Meditation is loftier because it reasons about the causes and effects of the mysteries and seeks in them the attributes of God, such as goodness, wisdom, charity, etc. Application of the senses, on the other hand, does not reason; it simply dwells on things in its own manner, enjoying and delighting in them with spiritual benefit.

20. *Directorios de Ejercicios (1540-1599)*. *Op.cit.*, p. 358.

Number 157 of the same directory of 1599 speaks of the twofold utility of the application of the senses:

4. The utility of the application of the senses is twofold. Sometimes, when the soul is unable to consider things that are more profound, it can gradually dispose and raise itself to a higher level by dwelling on them with the senses. At other times, when the soul is already burning with devotion through its knowledge of those lofty mysteries, it can descend later to sensible things and in everything find consolation and fruit because of the abundance of love. For love makes us greatly appreciate even the most insignificant things; it can make even the inclinations of a person's head a matter of love and consolation.

Luis de la Puente (1554-1624)²¹

This notable writer and spiritual director left no document that speaks directly of the “application of the senses,” but he taught that the imagination is a great help in prayer because it provides images of the objects on which we meditate and it focuses our attention, thus saving us from distraction. For mental prayer he recommends using vocal prayer and powers such as the imagination, which places before the soul what it wants to meditate on, as if it were really present. De la Puente remarks, nonetheless, that highly imaginative people should be warned that they may be deluded if they come to think that their imagination is revelation, or that the images they create for themselves are the very things on which they should meditate.

Regarding the use of the bodily senses, Luis de la Puente offers no norms because so much depends on how each person relates to the senses. Some persons may feel better with their eyes closed while others enjoy opening them and looking at the sky or focusing on an image. Some persons may feel disturbed if they hear sounds while praying, but the spirits of others are inflamed by listening to songs or religious music. In any case, persons should choose whatever most contributes to their tranquility and devotion.

According to Luis de la Puente, God's sometimes communicates first through spiritual sight, by shedding a kind of light so sublime that it leaves the soul enlightened and perfected. This state is accompanied by spiritual joy, and it provides spiritual pleasure and enjoyment because of the novelty of the divine things seen. A

21. DE LA PUENTE, Luis (1935). *Meditaciones de los misterios de nuestra Santa Fe*. Madrid: Apostolado de la Prensa, pp. 31-61.

second way God communicates is through spiritual hearing, as when God, speaking within the soul, inspires it with dynamic and effective interior words similar to those heard with the bodily ear. In this way persons are taught some truth or discover God's will so effectively that they earnestly desire to fulfill it; their soul is joyfully, confidently, and passionately oriented toward God's will. The third way refers to spiritual smell. This divine manifestation infuses the soul with a spiritual fragrance so lovely that it consoles the heart and encourages it to continue searching until it reaches its Beloved, as intimated by the Song of Songs (cf. Song 3:6)²² and by Paul in Romans (cf. Rom 12:12)²³ and Second Corinthians (cf. 2 Cor 2:14-16).²⁴ The fourth way God communicates is through spiritual taste, as when God treats the soul to such savory fervor for spiritual affairs that the things of the flesh seem to have, by comparison, an unpleasant taste. Just as foods have many flavors, so the Lord gives consolation in a great variety of ways (cf. Ps 34,9).²⁵ The manna in the desert had the flavors of all foods (cf. Wis 19,20),²⁶ and David thought the wisdom of God sweeter than honey from the honeycomb (cf. Ps 19,10-11).²⁷ After savoring such sweetness, no tongue can declare it because it surpasses by far everything our natural sense of taste is able to capture.

Finally, the fifth way of God's communication is through spiritual touch, by which God touches the innermost recesses of our heart with his loving inspirations. The Lord approaches the soul with a gentleness that can be explained only by using the words of the Song of Songs. Embracing us interiorly with his strong arms, God gifts us with his presence and with great signs of peace and friendship, engaging us in intimate conversations and leading us to higher "anagogical" realms.²⁸

22. Song of Songs 3:6: "What is that coming up from the wilderness, like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of the merchant?"

23. Rom 12:12: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer."

24. 2 Cor 2:14-16: "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life."

25. Ps 34:9: "O fear the Lord, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want."

26. Wis 16:21: "For your sustenance manifested your sweetness toward your children; and the bread, ministering to the desire of the one who took it, was changed to suit everyone's liking."

27. Ps 19:9-10: "The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb."

28. The word "anagogical" derives from the Greek *anagoge*, which means "raising up." When applied to biblical texts, the term refers them to a heavenly reality.

Luis de la Palma (1560-1641)

According to the theologian Luis de la Palma,²⁹ the book of the Exercises not only teaches us to seek God in all things, but also shows us the best way to find him, namely, by contemplating after meditating. This ordering is significant because, while meditation searches and asks after the truth of things and stops to consider persons, contemplation enjoys what meditation has found, pondering it with great simplicity and seeking God in everything.

Thus, contemplation functions very similarly to the way the senses work: each sense enjoys quite directly the object it has present before it, without work or speech. Just as eyes enjoy light or a scene of fields or the stars of heavens, just as ears enjoy softly tuned music, and just as taste enjoys delicious food, and all without any type of work or speech, but each sense enjoying the object it has before it, so does our understanding enjoy the knowledge of certain truths. These truths are immediately present to the understanding as if it were seeing them with its eyes, tasting them with its tongue, or touching them with its hands.

This conception makes it clear why the saint of Loyola recommends that the last hour of prayer on many days of the Exercises be devoted to applying the senses to earlier contemplations. Ignatius speaks not of the five bodily senses but of the senses of the imagination [121] and of understanding. The task of these is to go back over the contemplations without any speech or work, that is, with the same ease with which the physical senses work on the objects they have present before them. A clear example is found in the second week: the fifth contemplation of the first day places us in a scene where the soul, lifted above the senses, feels spiritual things as if it saw, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched them. In the third and fourth weeks of the Exercises, Ignatius uses a different mystagogy, prescribing one contemplation at midnight and another in the morning, followed by two repetitions on the points that aroused the most feelings, and then concluding with a triple colloquy.

This way of contemplating shows that the senses of the imagination make points for prayer unnecessary. By tranquilly processing spiritual things and deepening prior contemplations, this use of the spiritual senses lifts us to a high summit from which to pray. Such prayer is totally natural, like a mother with a child in her arms, who has no need to give speeches or offer arguments about the happiness she experiences.

29. DE LA PALMA, Luis (1967). *Obras del Padre Luis de la Palma. Camino espiritual*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, pp. 384-390.

Ignasi Casanovas (1872-1936)³⁰

Casanovas recognizes that the artful design of this little book of Ignatius allows all human faculties and powers to contribute to attaining holiness. First among these powers are the external senses, of which he especially mentions sight and the two coarser senses prone to disorder, taste and touch; he says nothing about hearing and smell.

Casanovas affirms that, besides the external senses, there are internal senses that have a powerful influence on the soul. He places great stress on the creative imagination, which the saint incorporates into all meditations and contemplations; it is an internal gaze that penetrates more deeply than the external gaze of the eyes. Its first task is to provide the composition of the place by creating a clear image of the scene to be contemplated; like a cinematographic projection, it should be rich in detail and open to suggestions that increase devotion. Retreatants should not view the scene as something that happened long ago and far away, but as something happening here and now, a scene into which they can enter and lovingly take part. Casanovas points out that many retreatants lack the ability to create such representations, or their visual imagination may be less developed than their auditory one, which acts as an inner ear and hears what people are saying. That is precisely what the Exercises propose for the contemplation on the Incarnation, in which retreatants are told to listen to the words spoken by the archangel and Our Lady, to hear the turbulent conversations of human beings, and to be attentive to the redemptive voices of the Holy Trinity [107].

When it seems that Ignatius has exhausted every technical possibility for developing the spiritual life, the Exercises go still a step further. According to Casanovas, Ignatius wants to set the internal senses of the soul in motion so that they grow accustomed to experiencing spiritual things and fully enjoying the intimate delights of the spirit, which are far superior in purity and sublimity than what the external senses can perceive. In the same way that the Principle and Foundation seeks to inculcate indifference and to situate humans properly before God [23], the “application of the senses” brings us closer to God so that we can “smell the fragrance and taste the infinite sweetness and charm of the Divinity” [124.1]. Casanovas observes that at the end of the day, the time proposed for this contemplation, the senses often spontaneously raise our eyes to heaven as we fall asleep, but that even then we should remember that it is God alone who enters, exits, and causes in our souls all kinds of holy effects without a preceding cause [330].

30. CASANOVAS, Ignasi (1931). *Introducció als Exercicis Espirituals de sant Ignasi de Loiola, III: Teoria i preparació*, Barcelona: Foment de Pietat, pp. 194-222.

Erich Przywara (1889-1972)³¹

Przywara understands the Exercises in the context of the great mystics and theologians of the 16th century.³² He views the Exercises as having an internal arrangement similar to the liturgy of the hours, where Matins are the first exercise and Lauds are the second; Prime, Terce, and Sext correspond to the third exercise or the Mass; None and Vespers correspond to the fourth exercise; and finally, Compline corresponds to the “application of the senses.”

Noting that the Exercises propose three ways of praying—meditation, contemplation, and “application of the senses”—Przywara considers it important that the last way of praying begins in the second week, with the contemplations on the Incarnation and the Nativity. After doing these exercises with the Incarnation and the childhood of Christ, retreatants find it easier to accompany the Lord later, when he is an adult, and during the time of the election.

Przywara understands the Nativity as the day of poverty, a mystery that we must see [114.1], observe, contemplate [114.2], and consider [116.1]. It is an unprecedented birth in which God, in whom all things subsist, suffers separation from a mother and experiences all the risk inherent in birth itself. The first point of the exercise is to see the persons as if they were present [114.2], and the second is to observe and consider what they are saying and to draw some profit from it [115]. Przywara notes, though, that, while we should be hearing praises and hallelujahs, nothing is heard. What is most significant in this prayer is that by listening to this strange silence of nothingness, we are led to a new birth in Christ.

The third and fourth contemplations of the first day are repetitions, but the fifth asks retreatants to apply their senses of the imagination to the first and second contemplations [121.2]. This application of the senses allows retreatants to acquire spiritual knowledge by reflecting interiorly on the contemplations and drawing profit from them. Przywara sees this reflection as a series of contrasts: we should contrast [122] the poverty into which God is born and the poverty that corresponds to us; we should contrast [123] the muteness of God and the destiny of his kingdom with the anguishing silence of always letting me hear myself; we should smell and taste [124] in order to sense the beautiful delicacy of the mystery of impoverishment, becoming annihilated so as to arrive at an overwhelming exhalation, with a taste on the tongue like the “all in all” of nothingness. It is at this moment, feeling absolutely nothing, that

31. PRZYWARA, Erich (1964). *Deus semper major. Theologie der exerzitien*, Munich: Verlag-Herold-Wein.

32. Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), Saint Teresa of Jesus (1515-1582), and Saint John of the Cross (1542-1591).

we are masters of everything (cf. 2 Cor 6:10).³³ The fourth and final point is to touch the places where these persons walk and sit [125] and to embrace them with a kiss of love for this poor annihilation that brings us everything, that allows everything, and that conquers everything. Precisely in this way and precisely for this reason, we impoverish ourselves to the total impoverishment of a simple little touch.

Fridolin Marxer (1925-2009)³⁴

According to Fridolin Marxer, praying and meditating with the inner senses [124] introduces us to the most interior part of our being, the silent chambers of the heart where we feel closest to God and even feel united with him. Through spiritual sight, God illuminates the intellect with a light so sublime that one who receives it feels like a second Moses beholding an essentially invisible God with physical eyes. Through spiritual hearing, God directs his exhortations and inspirations to our inner ear so that his impulses and words penetrate our ordinary religious life. When sensing these things, we do not make the mistake of perceiving them as simple metaphors, but recognize them as extremely important. God communicates also through the spiritual sense of smell, filling the heart with a fragrance so sweet that one rises up and goes forth to seek the one from whom the fragrance flows. The blessing received through smell creates such a state of sweetness, security, and holiness that one can traverse more than a thousand difficulties without resting.

Through spiritual taste, God allows the soul to savor the things of the spirit in a way that makes material things seem insipid. It should not surprise us that the loss of taste for earthly things can happen to beginners in the spiritual life and even to sinners, as was the case with the convalescent Ignatius in his ancestral home in Loyola. The fifth way in which God communicates with us and makes himself known is through spiritual touch. When God caresses the center of the heart, the soul feels itself so close to God that it cannot explain what is happening to it.

In a further step, Marxer sees applying the senses as a way of praying that concentrates on what is most essential in spirituality, and here visualization is especially important. This form of praying, like most of the forms proposed by Ignatius, leads to an encounter with God that proves its authenticity in service to others. This is because Ignatian prayer has the ultimate finality and the practical destination of eliminating disorder and discovering the divine will.

33. 2 Cor 6:9-10: "We are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

34. MARXER, Fridolin (1963). *Die inneren geistlichen Sinne, Ein beitrag zur deutung ignatianischer mystik*, Freiburg: Herder, pp. 38-47.

Marxer cautions that the “application of the senses” is not achieved by free fantasy or by some kind of mysterious religiosity that the senses view with surprise. The grace of this way of praying lies in its specificity. It should be seen as the loving contemplation and the affective intuition that are part of every true spiritual itinerary. It is the greatest spiritual act of which we are capable, one from which many people can “derive some benefit” [122] by “reflecting³⁵ on themselves” [123]. Marxer considers the “application of senses” to be a prayer of “return to oneself” that is “made for oneself.” In a way, it is similar to contemplation to obtain love [230-237].

Applying the senses is a special form of contemplation. To apply the senses, retreatants do not need any mental activity at all. The night of the senses or the night of the spirit, considered a necessary step for devotees of prayer, is not an Ignatian concept. To the contrary, we cannot deny that the world of ideas and the operation of the formative imagination create a wide space inside the soul. According to the instructions left by the saint, when it comes to practicing the Exercises, the contribution of the imagination—through “application of the senses”—resembles a dance with which a festive occasion begins. And we can assume, as Polanco suggested in his interpretation of the “application of the senses,” that observing and listening to the persons and embracing and kissing the sacred places are of great value for retreatants. The role of the imagination is not only detecting the object but also transcending it, so that we come to smell and taste the divinity and the humanity of Christ himself. Applying the senses brings into play a higher reason, a *superior ratio*, whenever we do a repetition using the five external senses [247] and relating them internally to the imagination.

We therefore find two levels of depth: superficially, this type of prayer facilitates the shift from merely external experience of the material world to an experience that is more imaginative and interior. The real significance of praying on the more superficial plane is in the immediacy and the sensitivity with which the bodily senses react. At the deeper level, the “application of the senses” allows us to achieve a fully spiritual form of prayer. The fruit of this latter is a direct, integral, perceptible, and tangible feeling of perceiving, learning, and understanding reality. Praying at this higher level renders the received sensation fertile and thus creates an interior language with spiritual content in the form of symbolic images. In this way prayer becomes a creative parable and enriches the spiritual life of the individual.

35. The original text of the Exercises uses the phrase “reflitiendo en si mismo.”

François Marty (1904-1994)³⁶

Marty considers Ignatius's book of the Exercises to a form of *lectio divina* that has become *lectio evangelica* insofar as it allows retreatants to feel and savor things interiorly without accumulating knowledge [2.4]. What is most satisfying in this type of *lectio* is not knowing a great deal but feeling and savoring things interiorly [2.5] as God instructs us. Ignatius wants retreatants not so much to gain empirical knowledge as to develop “an interior taste” and a “spiritual relish” that will bring them closer to the inner meaning of things.

The Exercises of Ignatius are a tool for feeling and savoring things interiorly; doing the Exercises steadily develops a spiritual interiority that is reinforced by applying the senses. The “application of the senses” is part of a series of repetitions that succeed one another as consolations and desolations come and go. But the repetitions of the material are not done out of inertia. Rather, at the close of each day the “application of the senses” makes the repetitions into a spiritual tool that insistently promotes the interior echo and converts it into a new attitude of life that is more Ignatian. This way of praying should be considered as appropriate for all the Exercises: it is an essential road map that retreatants should use to progress interiorly on the spiritual path toward the Lord.

During the first week, the Exercises combine certain biblical passages with meditations related to the faculties of memory, intelligence, and will. The second and subsequent weeks, in contrast, are more focused on meditating on and contemplating the Gospel, thus creating an environment more favorable to receptivity. The practice of reflecting on oneself to draw some profit from it first appears in the Exercises [106-108] precisely during the first contemplation of the second week (and subsequently during the second contemplation). Drawing some profit from applying the five senses of the imagination also appears for the first time at this point [121]. The senses are thus applied in a way that immerses the repetitions in consolations and desolations. The “application of the senses” plays the role of lifting the repetitions toward the infinite in a way that allows the new Ignatian style of life to be formed.

All of this is brought about by beholding the persons [122], by contemplating carefully what they are doing, and by observing what is visible and what is invisible. A visible element, such as drawing water near the manger of Bethlehem, can be contemplated through imaginative representations. Sin would be an example of the kind of invisible element that can be contemplated.

36. MARTY, François. (2005). *Sentir et goûter. Les sens dans les «Exercices spirituels» de Saint Ignace*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf.

We use spiritual hearing to understand the words spoken in the Gospel [123], and spiritual sight to see what people are doing. We then use smell and taste [124] and finally touch [125]. Marty sees the Exercises as promoting movement from outward experience toward inward experience in a way that amplifies what the senses have received. This happens thanks to what Ignatius calls “reflecting on myself,” an expression he uses nine times³⁷ in the points of the first two days of the second and third weeks. Curiously, the only time Ignatius speaks of the sense of imagination is when introducing the application of the senses on the first day of the second week [121,2]. He does this in the context of the composition of place, which provides an imaginative framework for prayer: the Exercises contain twelve texts indicating the composition of place; they are brief, except for the first, which is a little longer.³⁸

According to Marty, applying the five senses appears to be a road map that guides us toward what is essential in spiritual development. The most important thing to see on this map is whether retreatants are making progress in the right direction, that is, whether they are interiorly conforming to structures that allow them to observe first persons, then words, and finally deeds. In this way “applying the senses” assures us that retreatant is being directed first of all toward the humanity of the Lord, then toward his words, and finally toward reflecting Christ as a faithful disciple.

37. SpEx 114.3, 115, 123, 124.2, 194.1, 234.3, 235.3, 236.2, and 237.2.

38. SpEx 47.1,3,5; 55.3; 65.3; 91.3; 103.1; 112.1; 138.1; 151.1; 192.1; and 232.

The Importance of the Application of the Senses

The fact that Ignatius, in three of the four weeks of the Exercises, recommends one hour of contemplation using "application of the senses" at the end of each day indicates the great importance of this practice and warns us about the danger of neglecting or deforming it.

The "Application of Senses" As a Key to the Vault of the Exercises

The Spiritual Exercises teach us that all the senses available to human nature are objects of grace and should be considered privileged tools for the spiritual life. Drawing on his experience and knowledge, Ignatius integrated the senses so effectively and transversally into the course of the exercises that fully two-thirds of the annotations in the book refer in some way to the senses. We must therefore consider this form of contemplation as an essential part of spirituality and a major conceptual framework for understanding Ignatian spirituality and gaining the spiritual fruits of the Exercises.

The "application of the senses" at the end of each day of spiritual exercise allows retreatants to reflect on themselves and to transcend themselves interiorly [121-125, 132-134, 159-161]. As retreatants feel and savor things interiorly during this final exercise of the day, the senses are transcended and surpassed [2]. All the senses are fully opened and stretched beyond their usual function so that, assisted and accompanied by grace, they gain access to spiritual knowledge of God's manifestation: They meditate a radical degree of gratuitousness and peace, a *no way* to God.

When a ray of light from the sun passes through a prism, it is shown to be a mixture of all the colors of the visible spectrum. In like manner, "application of the senses" allows us to taste and savor, in a profuse and infused way, the full spectrum

of the Spirit's movements during our journey through the Exercises. It becomes, in effect, the key to a physical and spiritual vault.

Due to its abundant and pervasive presence in the Exercises, "application of the senses" is an important key to the vault of the Exercises. This is the case even though the scant original wording and the ambivalent content provoke speculation and make it difficult to formulate a theory that interprets the practice adequately. As a result, it is up to the retreatants and their directors to discover and discern the spiritual treasures to which the exercise gives access, as Polanco makes clear.

The "Application of Senses" As *Progressio Interior*

In the "application of the senses" Ignatius invites retreatants to seek an interior integration of everything they have prayed about during the day. This prayer at the end of the day gives retreatants spiritual access to ways of maturing, and it helps them to discern God's will. In view of this, it is good for both retreatants and those guiding them to be fully aware of what is being grasped in this type of meta-contemplation; it should be seen as an indicator of an interior itinerary. In fact, within the dynamic of the Exercises, we should always be very attentive to the discoveries that derive from this way of praying.

Thus, over low heat and with an even cadence, the Spirit's movement is perceived interiorly in an active, relational way. The retreatant is invited to make a slow *progressio interior*, just as a teacher does with a student and as God did with Ignatius in Manresa. It is similar to when we contemplate a painting. We first observe all the figures the painting contains, one by one, paying close attention to where they are situated, what shape and color they have, and what light they receive. Each detail in the painting has a different degree of importance, depending on its relation to each person. Next, we view the painting as a composite, with all its figures, shapes, and colors dancing with the light and the shadow. In this way the work of art takes on new dimensions, which vary according to the various ways that each person perceives, feels, and savors it interiorly. Finally, once we have contemplated the particular objects and their place in the painting, we can savor the work as a whole. It is then that the piece and its creator are fully appreciated in the lofty realms of art. This is the time for "applying the senses."

In this way the bodily and the spiritual senses work closely together, unable to distinguish their respective functions or the transcendence of some aspects over others. As when a prism is pierced by natural light, they create a new and expansive interior space with a generously amplified sensitivity. Like a prism, the painting reveals itself and its creator differently to each person, depending on how the person feels

and savors it interiorly. The “application of the senses” creates space for one’s own spiritual identity and a new spiritual status. By awakening the spiritual life, it creates a future with an inexhaustible source of inner life.

This way of praying turns the Exercises into a *lectio evangelica* that opens the way to feeling and savoring things interiorly; they become a *non-path* leading beyond what already happens in contemplations and repetitions. So much is this the case that the continued exercise and repeated application of the senses bring about a transformation of one’s life, as the constitution *Lumen Gentium* expresses well when it states that by receiving the body and blood of Christ “we become what we receive.”

The “Application of the Senses” As a Form of *Meta-Prayer*

This Ignatian form of praying gives great prominence to the very topical issue of the senses. In recent years, much study has been done in academia and in society more generally about affections, emotions, and feelings. Everything related to the senses and prayer has acquired greater relevance because this defining dimension of our human nature is being understood as something vital for understanding and solving social problems.

Hugo Rahner spoke of the existence of a *meta-history* that allows for the coinciding of the intentions and actions of two persons who neither know one another nor associate together. In other words, it would be like a person who prays before a religious icon with a simple candle but has never been to Taizé or known that ecumenical space. In like manner, if we combine everything we have said so far about the application of the senses, we can say that we are dealing with a form a *meta-prayer*; it is like a springboard that helps us to assimilate the morsels of wisdom contained in the revealed texts. When Christian faith is considered in the light of this *meta-history*, we find that praying with the senses propels the motors of a small revolution within our hearts. This revolution empowers us to speak a new language using the concrete images coming from our physical and spiritual senses, and these renew us like a new Easter outside of the Easter season.

Due to its ancient roots and the fertile ground in which it has grown, this way of praying gives our spirituality natural breathing space beyond sensory experience. Striving to transcend the senses is salutary for us because of our biological nature and the always unfinished state of our spirituality. In fact, the experience of transcendence that is very present in other religious traditions offers complete freedom to those who pray by helping them to articulate their own language of faith and by illuminating their existential path with new meaning. It is for this reason that the “application of the senses” is an important element of our ecumenical Christian identity.

Rediscovering the “Application of the Senses”

This way of praying is beneficial when the environment provides favorable conditions for the spiritual continuity, progress, and intensity inspired by the Exercises. That is why the best way to pray by “applying the senses” is when one is making the Exercises for the whole month, but it can also be effective in Exercises that last only eight days. The three needs mentioned above can also be met—and be even more present—when making the Exercises in ordinary life, as well as in environments of profound spiritual experience or in the spiritual activities derived from them.

In reality, this is an agreeable way of praying that is adaptable to many contexts where spirituality is regularly practiced. The personal, economic, social, religious, and health conditions of the person praying should not be impediments; perhaps the only factors needing to be considered are being of a certain age and having the necessary perseverance. We can pray with the senses while our eyes are open or closed; we need not wear any particular type of clothing or move in a certain way; nor is it necessary to create an unusual environment with shades of light or darkness, special music, or a particular scent. We do not have to worry about the position we adopt (sitting, standing, arms crossed, lying on the bed or on the floor); we need not be concerned about the objects around us, the others who see us, the building where we are, or the geography that surrounds us.

It should be noted that our corporal dimension acquires every greater importance in our spiritual path, especially as Ignatius explains it in his book of the Exercises. This dimension takes on special relevance now that we are living in an era of technological development that creates massive amounts of data relating to images, sounds, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence. Without any doubt, combining these technological tools with the body’s potential and the spiritual use of our senses can do much to improve our life and our inner growth. However, as history has shown us countless times, inappropriate management of the senses, with or without the participation of technology, can have a devastating effect on people.

In the first half of the 21ST century, we are witnessing the emergence of a new form of mystagogical pastoral care, based on the conscientious use of all our natural senses and their constant application to our daily lives. This new mystagogy can improve our personal knowledge and can facilitate bodily integrity, interiorization, spirituality, prayer, and commitment to the world and to ecclesial life. All these are moving in the direction favored by the Spiritual Exercises and the various ways of doing them.

Praying by “applying the senses” leads us deep into our soul on a lucid and wise journey that facilitates access to the last sensory frontier before finding the *non-path* to God. This makes “application of the senses” a superb spiritual tool for serv-

ing both individual and collective needs. Moreover, besides inspiring our personal lives, it can contribute to the much needed spiritual re-encounter of the world's great religions in an environment of interreligious searching.

'Guides', with this word Ignatius Loyola modestly expresses his great desire to help others. It is under this motto connoting service and simplicity that Cristianisme i Justícia and its Escuela Ignaciana de Espiritualidad-EIDES (Ignatian School of Spirituality) offers this series of materials.

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