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Jurado, Manuel Ruiz. *Tratado de la oración mental Cristiana, ¿Métodos Cristianos de oración?* [Treatise of Christian Mental Prayer: Christian Methods of Prayer?]. Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero, 2016. 168 pp. ISBN: 978-84-271-3911-4

Reviewed by Antonio Maldonado Correa, S.J.

This book is the fruit of Ruiz Jurado's deep knowledge of and familiarity with the theory and practice of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola and the classic works of the great Masters of the Spanish *Siglo de Oro*. The author has devoted many years both in the study of these two fields and in having directed the month-long Ignatian retreat.

The *Spiritual Exercises* employs Christian mental prayer using the particular methods proposed by St. Ignatius which are presented in Jurado's book. The author explains mental prayer with great clarity, utmost accuracy, and in a very positive way. He does not dwell too much on pointing out its limitations and hazards as doing so might weaken the practice of traditional Christian prayer methods and result in their being replaced with alternatives that are more or less alien to Christian tradition.

In discussing the different aspects of spiritual direction, including dealing with the difficulties that persons today might encounter while being guided in their spiritual life, this work follows a very rich tradition within Ignatian Spirituality and connects to the famous prologue to

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the classic work of Fr. Luis de la Puente (1554–1624),[1] *Meditaciones de los misterios de nuestra santa fe* [Meditations of the Mysteries of Our Holy Faith], and to the treatise of Fr. René de Maumigny (1837–1918),[2] *Pratique de l'oraison mentale* [Practice of Mental Prayer].

The work will certainly give many persons a renewed taste for mental prayer, particularly for the Christian methods that Ignatius proposes in the *Spiritual Exercises*. It would be useful, therefore, to offer here some excerpts from the author's Foreword and Introduction:

> A new book on prayer? There are already so many! But I do hope that this one will have a special place among many books on prayer today. Many books have been published which offer points to dwell on during prayer time or themes which may be used by anyone, according to their personal taste, as a basis upon which to spend the time of prayer or spiritual reading. There are also books that have been written to accompany the meditations of those doing the *Spiritual Exercises*—books containing reflections accommodated more or less to the Ignatian schema in the *Exercises* and to the purpose of the spiritual experience intended in them.
>
> This book intends not to offer matters for prayer but to help individuals learn what Christian prayer really is and how to practice it. It has a pedagogical intention that is based on the foundation of study and experience. Of the many books on spirituality that I have written, the one which has attracted a lot of interest has been the one titled *Spiritual Discernment: Theology, History, Practice* (Madrid: BAC, 2002). I think the reason why the book fostered great interest is that not only does it prove useful for the those who want to learn something about the subject of spiritual discernment, it also helps quite a lot those who would have to teach it.

[1]He was born in Valladolid, Spain in 1554 and died there in 1624. Clement XIII declared his virtues to be heroic in 1759. His *Meditations* along with the prologue continue to be published even until today. The "Prologue" mentioned here, moreover, was made recommended reading for all Salesians by the first General Chapter of their Congregation.

[2]This work was republished in Paris in 1905 and had already reached 11 editions by 1916.

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I do not intend to offer a copious treatise about everything that can be said about prayer but rather a succinct, pedagogic, and practical guide for those who wish to learn what Christian prayer is, how to practice it, its different stages, the conditions that are demanded by it, what facilitates its normal practice, what is currently useful to know when getting acquainted with the diverse methods that may be proposed, and how to face the difficulties that the life of prayer usually entails.

What is prayer, really? … What we call prayer *stricto sensu* is "conscious communication with God in a reverent attitude of the mind." I think that this is what is intended when we pray even if our ways of praying are quite diverse and the idea of God may be confused and erroneous at times.…

Divine revelation shows us that it was God himself who took the initiative to have a dialogue with us. He created us with the capacity for establishing relationship with Him. It was His love that brought us into existence. It was He who created us in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). Our similarity with God implies that we have the capacity to understand and to love. God predestined us "before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love" (Eph. 1:4). And love means an interchange between the lover and the beloved. God, moreover, gave us the gift of sharing in his divine nature, creating us in grace which makes us holy and inviting us to be his friends.

And, when we betray God with sin, thereby going against our own dignity … [He] continues to call us and look for us (cf. Gen. 3:9). As befits a Father, God keeps on calling us: "Where are you? … Why have you done so?" His infinite and merciful love opens for us a new path of dialogue: the path of penance and reconciliation—the fruit of the redemption in Christ (John 3:16). We are offered the possibility of regeneration as adopted children in Christ, the eternal Son of the Father made man and in whom we will find redemption for our sin … (cf. Eph. 1:5–8).

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