

Title [21]: “Spiritual Exercises to overcome oneself and order one’s life on the basis of a decision made in freedom from any disordered affection.” This is not so much a title as a summary of the Exercises in terms of its goal – “a decision” about one’s life, i.e., an “election” – and the means to achieve this goal – “to overcome oneself and order one’s life ... from any disordered affection”.

Presupposition [22]: “That both the giver and the maker of the Spiritual Exercises may be of greater help and benefit to each other...”

The director and the retreatant have a common goal: that the retreatant find God through the Spiritual Exercises. Just as a doctor must listen to the patient in order to help her, so the director must listen to the retreatant in order to help her.

“... it should be presupposed that every good Christian must be more ready to put a good interpretation on a neighbor’s statement than to condemn it.”

This describes the mutual respect and trust which must characterize the director-retreatant relationship:

- the director: to promote a climate favorable to the retreatant’s candid disclosure of personal thoughts and feelings
- the retreatant: to trust the director and the process

Principle and Foundation [23]

This seems to have originated in the mystical illumination Ignatius experienced on the banks of the river Cardoner in Manresa: there he experienced all creation coming from God and returning to God. It suggests a cosmic vision: a looking out at the world so as see and feel and understand it – all that is and all that exists – as God might see and feel and understand it.

It can be thought of as an invitation that Ignatius extends to the retreatant: “This is where I intend to lead you on this retreat. Are you willing to come?”

It can be understood as a compendium or summary of the entire Exercises:

- principle: it contains all the conclusions which will be developed in the Exercises
- foundation: the support for the whole edifice of the spiritual life: four pillars:
 - a goal which attracts and inspires: the glory of God
 - the means to achieve this goal: using creation rightly and wisely
 - a vital preliminary attitude: interior freedom (“indifference”)
 - the norm for choice: that which is more conducive to God’s deepening life in us

For many years, the Principle and Foundation was understood as presenting moral guidelines on how a person should live and act. Thus, great emphasis was placed on developing willpower to help the person lead a good and moral life. The result was that the focus was placed on the person rather than on how God was revealing God’s self to her.

The Principle and Foundation is a meditative consideration: a pondering of creation and one’s response and merging all this in conversation with the director, thus coming to a new understanding of one’s place in creation. This presumes a certain amount of discussion. The goal is to facilitate an encounter with God carried on by means of both conversation and instruction: How do you see your life? God has created you: what does that mean for you? How do you see God and God’s action in your life? How do you see your place in the whole realm of created reality? How do you keep a balance between the presence of God in your life and the rest of created reality? ...

For all of its importance, the Principle and Foundation is simply preparatory to the process to come, rather than a moment of conversion or breakthrough in its own right. In other words, it plants seeds which with God's grace are meant to develop and flourish.

Notice that the Principle and Foundation flows directly out of the Preparation Days/Weeks in which the retreatant has immersed herself in the understanding that (1) God is most profoundly love itself and (2) she is most profoundly God's beloved.

Pre-Note: Creation is understood to be a continuous action of God, an ongoing self-expression of God – i.e., the love that is God.

Creation can thus be understood, not as God's plan, but as God's project:

- God's plan: implies a single creative act that took place once in the distant past, one in which all created reality came into being from nothing.
- God's project: implies an ongoing creative activity requiring constant improvisation and adjustment (God is always "re-calculating" à la GPS), one in which all created reality is continuously being given shape and form out of what was previously chaos (Genesis 1:2). Note: This image of God is beautifully expressed in Jeremiah 18:1-6 (God is the potter; we are the clay). Note: The dynamism of God's project presents an image of God as One who actively loves, cares for, and labors in the life of each and every person.

The End for which God Creates Us

"God creates us out of love to share his life with us forever."

- God, who is love itself, creates us so that God can love us unconditionally and share God's life with us and pour God's very self into our lives.
- God loves us, not because of who we are, but because of who God is.
- The experience of being loved by God is the fundamental Christian grace.
- The loving Creator-God is continuously creating us, continuously laboring in us, to help us achieve the fullness of life for which God created us (see Pre-Note).
- Notice that the focus here is on attraction, desires, and an evolving sense of being loved as I am, not on obligation.

The Means toward that End

"All creation is a gift of God..."

- all creation is good – "God saw how good it was" (Genesis 1:4,10,12, etc.)

...so that we might come to know God more easily and love God more readily."

- all creation reflects God's goodness and love

"Thus we should reverence all creation and..."

use it to develop ourselves as loving persons and...

not allow any part of creation to become the center of our lives."

The Problem of Choosing the Means

"In our everyday life, then, we should hold ourselves in balance ["indifferent"] before all created reality insofar as we have a choice."

- indifference: (not apathy) freedom from preference = interior freedom: utter detachment from our own agenda and from all that happens to us, an attitude that is grounded in an abiding trust (ultimately love) in God.
- indifference: not something we do or achieve but a grace we ask for and seek to develop

“Thus we should not prefer health to sickness, wealth to poverty, success to failure, a long life to a short one...”

- Note: health and sickness, riches and poverty, honor and dishonor, and the rest are simply created realities and thus have value for us only insofar as they help us develop as loving persons.

“...since everything has the potential of calling forth in us a more loving response to our life with God.”

Our One Desire: “Our only desire and our one choice should be to want and choose what better leads us to [“is more conducive to”] God’s deepening life in us.”

- discerned generosity or discerning love: an offering of oneself that is tempered by a discerned understanding of God’s response to that offering. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, the retreatant’s offering to God – “what I desire” – is always juxtaposed with God’s response to that offering – “if God should choose” ([139,147])

Final Note: The interior freedom of ‘indifference’ which allows us to find God’s love in health and sickness, wealth and poverty, and the rest is not something the retreatant can achieve through her own efforts (although the text seems to imply this); it is a gift of God’s love. It is important to recognize that the heart of the Principle and Foundation is not indifference; it is God’s love, a love experienced as overwhelming and as surpassing all other love.

“Principle and Foundation”

(adapted by David C. Robinson, S.J.)

The goal of our life is to live with you forever,
the God who loves us, and who gave us life.

Our own response of love allows your life to flow into us without limit.

All things of this world are your gifts,
presented to us so that we can know you more easily
and more readily make a return of love to you.

As a result, we appreciate and use all your gifts
insofar as they help us to develop as loving persons.
But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives,
they displace you and so hinder our growth toward our goal.

In everyday life, then, help us hold ourselves in balance
before all these created gifts insofar as we have a choice,
and are not bound by some obligation.

May we not fix our desires on health or sickness,
wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one.
For everything has the potential of calling forth in us
a deeper response to our life in you.

May our only desire and our one choice be this:
to want and to choose what better leads
to the deepening of your life in us. Amen.

First Week [21-90]

- First Week: focus is not so much on individual sins as on the mystery of evil itself
- grace: to understand sin as our loving Creator-God understands it: as frightful ingratitude on the part of the creature toward her all-loving Creator and Lord
- First Week: ultimately about God’s love and forgiveness

- Notice the setting in which the First Week is given: It flows directly out of the Principle and Foundation in which the retreatant has prayerfully pondered the truth that God has lovingly gifted us in everything “so that we might come to know God more easily and love God more readily.”

Examination of Consciousness [24-44]: a resource to keep the retreatant open to the action of the Holy Spirit, facilitate the process of liberation (the work of a lifetime), and help her integrate the graces of the Exercises into her daily life.

God, Sin and Mercy [45-72]

- the God of the First Week: a God of mercy (the entire Exercises are directed toward promoting a personal encounter with our loving God),
- but there can be no profound sense of God’s mercy without a profound sense of sin
- Sin in the Exercises is always considered in the light of God’s mercy and where the experience of this mercy leads.
- sin: frightful ingratitude toward our all-loving Creator and Lord
 - As a way of appreciating this, it can be helpful to replace “God” with someone one deeply loves: e.g., “Mom.”
 - Sin is not often thought of as thoughtlessness, self-centeredness, and ingratitude, yet that’s what sin really is.
 - Sin is not simply breaking a law or some set of rules. It is a wrong done one’s all-loving “Mom.” Sin damages a relationship.
 - It is a failure to respond with love to the love with which one’s “Mom” has so abundantly and so selflessly loved the person.
 - It’s a frightful ingratitude shown toward one’s all-loving “Mom” (God).

First Exercise: [45-54]

- The focus here is not one’s own sins, but rather the reality of sin, that tendency to sin that is part and parcel of being human.
- Ignatian meditation: Ignatius describes a form of prayer which uses “the three powers of the soul” [45]: memory, understanding, and will: One first calls to mind the subject matter of the prayer (memory), then ponders its meaning (understanding), and finally embraces it with love and desire (will). Or,
 - call to mind the subject matter (memory)
 - ponder it (understanding)
 - embrace it with love and desire (will or desires)

A closer look at Ignatian meditation, however, reveals that using one’s memory, understanding and will in prayer is essentially equivalent to *lectio divina*, which employs prayerful reading, meditation, and contemplation for the same purpose, or:

- call to mind the subject matter (prayerful reading)
- ponder it (meditation)
- embrace it with love and desire (contemplation)
- preparatory prayer [46]: that “all my intentions, actions and operations may be ordered purely to the service and praise of the Divine Majesty.” Although this presupposes a spiritual depth not found in most beginners, Ignatius wished to foster the desire or at least the desire for the desire. The preparatory prayer (along with the preludes which follow) is meant to facilitate a more reverential prayer. Ignatius considered it to be of great importance.

- composition [47]: a “becoming one with” (getting inside) the mystery: seeing and feeling and understanding it as Christ would see and feel and understand it.
- “what I want and desire” [48]: genuine desire is of great importance in Ignatian spirituality; it is meant to evoke in the retreatant great desires (or at least to plant the seed of great desires)
- “shame and confusion” [48]: the experience of the self-aware sinner in the presence of her merciful and faithful God; shame and confusion is not meant to linger but to become gratitude (Note: Guilt focuses on oneself; shame and confusion focuses on one’s relationship with the one sinned against.)
- history of sin [50-52]: meant to bring home to the retreatant, not personal sin, but the nature of sin: (a) that she is immersed in a sinful world (read the newspaper!) and, (b) as a child of Adam and Eve, equally guilty of sin.
- personal sin: “To be alive is to be addicted, and to be alive and addicted is to stand in need of grace.” (Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace*)
- “What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?” [53]: connects the retreatant with Christ and points her toward the future. Note: At this stage, Ignatius invites the retreatant to intellectual conversion – “What ought I to do for Christ?”
- “A colloquy is made, properly speaking, in the way one friend speaks to another...” [54]:
 - colloquy: a conversation
 - Note: A special intimacy exists between friends: friends like and accept one another.

Second Exercise [55-61]: essentially a repetition of the First Exercise with the focus now on the retreatant herself and her sins

- The focus is not on individual sins, but rather on the sin within the sins: the pervasive evil in one’s life. In this regard, retreatants have found it helpful to focus, not on many sins, but rather on one sin that is representative of each period being considered.
- Colloquy [61]: “to amend my life”: a moral conversion (a personal, explicitly responsible decision to turn away from sin and toward God)

Third Exercise: Repetition [62-63]

- repetition: not simply a review of a previous meditation or contemplation, but rather an affective assimilation or a deepening or more focused personalization of the retreatant’s previous interior experiences
- repetition: not only a simpler and more affective prayer but also, as some of the external structure is allowed to fall away, more Christ-centered as well.

Triple Colloquy [63]

- triple colloquy: Ignatius proposes this petition for critically important graces: here and in the pre-election meditations of the Second Week. If the retreatant finds this “too busy” (many do), it is important that she nonetheless earnestly petition God for the suggested grace.
- triple colloquy: expands the colloquy with Christ by joining the persons involved in salvation history: Mary, Christ, and the Father
- In Ignatius’ time, if a person wished to approach a very high official, she would first approach an intermediary. Then after she had won over the intermediary, the two of them would then approach the official. (Note: Christians don’t need an intermediary to approach Christ or the Father. The triple colloquy simply expresses the retreatant’s great desire to receive the grace.)
- intellectual/moral conversion ⇒ affective conversion
- Anima Christi: a prayer dating from the Middle Ages and widely known in the 16th century.

Soul of Christ, sanctify me
Body of Christ, save me
Blood of Christ, inebriate me
Water from the side of Christ, wash me
Passion of Christ, strengthen me

O good Jesus, hear me
Within your wounds hide me
Permit me not be separated from thee
From the wicked foe defend me
At the hour of my death call me
And bid me come to thee
That with your saints I may praise thee
For ever and ever. Amen.

Fourth Exercise: Summary [64]: a review of the matter in the previous three exercises

- not simply a repetition (in which the retreatant dwells only on the points in which she received greater consolation or desolation), but rather a revisiting of all the points so that the retreatant might more deeply assimilate and take to heart the graces of the previous three exercises

The Fifth Exercise [65-71]

- meditation on hell: not the starting-point of conversion, but a confirmation. It comes after the retreatant has experienced God's merciful love.
- If this meditation had begun the First Week, it would have laid a wobbly foundation for conversion.
- Now the possibility of a hell confirms the conversion in the graced fear of any separation from God and in thankfulness for God's patience and forgiveness.

Additions [73-90]

- additions: dispositions and suggestions for prayer
- They may help integrate the time outside formal prayer into the retreat experience.
- They may help involve the whole person in the retreat experience: emotions, thoughts, imagination, senses, posture, the effects of one's environment
- They need to be adapted to circumstances and persons.
- posture [76] and penance [82-87]: need to be discerned in the light of "what I desire"
- review of prayer [77]: forms part of the retreatant's preparation for further prayer; it puts her in touch with matter for 'repetition'
- penance [82-87]:
 - Ignatius' time: focus on depriving oneself of food/sleep
 - today: focus on healthier lifestyle: food/sleep/exercise