



***Enthused and Liberated
Called and Sent***

Alex Lefrank, S.J.



*Supplement Nos 50*51**
December 1998

PUBLICATION OF THE WORLD CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY
C.P. 6139-(Borgo S. Spirito, 8)-00195 Rome-ITALY
English-Spanish-French Editions
Editor: Gilles Michaud

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The Genesis of a Vocation

By Alex Lefrank, S.J.



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Foreword

One's own encounter and first experience with the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius and the impact they are having in one's own life will also influence the way in which one later offers them to others. I am grateful that I had the privilege of good teachers who introduced me to Saint Ignatius and his Exercises in their original form. This began in 1954, the year I entered the noviciate of the Society of Jesus. My fruitful confrontation and experience with the Exercises continue to the present day. Ignatius and the rich wisdom of his heritage give us enough food for thought for a lifetime. Again and again, I discover something new in this small book of the Exercises.

The Bible was another important source, from which I drew, for my work with the Exercises. Already, before being a Jesuit, I had discovered the *Holy Scriptures* as a book for a lifetime. A priest and teacher of theology in Freiburg, Germany, my hometown, had led me to this discovery. Soon after encountering the Spiritual Exercises, I discovered how much they were marked by Holy Scripture. Christ is . . . *the way, and the truth, and the life* (John 14:6) and the Exercises are a means towards Christ as my way, my truth and my life. All this made me understand Christian faith as a growth process. This fact gave rise to my interest in depth psychology where the development of a human being from infancy to maturity is dealt with.

In 1969, when I had begun to guide others through the Exercises, those I guided became my teachers. In listening to them, their experiences in their prayer times, their thoughts and feelings, their reminiscences and dreams, their afflictions and resistance, I learned to understand, even more, the process of the Exercises. Indeed, what had been a theoretical knowledge from Holy Scripture and the book of the Exercises I could now experience in the reality of human existence.

The following pages were born out of these experiences. They want to develop above all the interconnection between the *search for*

identity and a person's *vocation*. If we do not give proper attention to the relationship between the two, we can easily arrive at a situation where the spiritual search for vocation is not rooted in reality. Such a vocation will not be maintained or, when it is kept up exteriorly, it will lack an inner life and will not be a living witness.

Alex Lefrank, S.J.
Frankfurt, December 1998

Alex Lefrank, S.J. was born in 1932. After his studies of philosophy and theology, he was a promotor and vice ecclesiastical assistant for the German Christian Life Community from 1971 until 1987. During this time, he made a name for himself as a Spiritual Guide and as a guide for the Spiritual Exercises in and outside of CLC. He initiated and guided international formation courses. Since 1987, he has been a member of the Gruppe für Ignatianische Spiritualität (team for Ignatian Spirituality) GIS. This team works in German-speaking countries putting emphasis on forming and supervising guides for the Spiritual Exercises, spiritual guides, and group guides.

Introduction

One of the most painful wounds in the Church's life today is the growing abandonment of bonds or existential commitments traditionally considered definitive and irrevocable whether they relate to matrimony, religious vows or priestly ordination. What can we do when faced with such situations, when faced with this kind of 'failure'? This is a critical issue and, I believe, another is even more important: How can we stop this tendency? Many see the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius as a remedy. Ignatius himself says that they serve to *seek and find the divine will in the disposition of one's life* (Sp.Ex. 1). On the other hand, we know that not a few renounced their definitive commitments, such as religious vows or the priesthood, after first making the Spiritual Exercises. Does this mean that the Exercises had not given the help we hoped for in finding the will of God? Or, if the decisions made by the exercitant have not been lasting, do we, perhaps, need to question how they were made?

Here, we will not directly address the causes of this failure in commitment nor the problem of abandoning the commitment of one's life. Rather, in this article, we hope to demonstrate positively how the Exercises of St. Ignatius can lead us to make sound life decisions. To do this, we must first pay attention to their intrinsic dynamic. We will see it with greater clarity if we examine the Exercises with as much a psychological perspective as a biblical one. In this way, it will also be easier for us to see how the Exercises (and those who guide others through the Exercises need to pay special attention to this) are a good instrument for discerning the *divine vocation* (Sp.Ex. 172) and, consequently, for making a decision.

(A)

Enthused:

Anticipation of the whole Journey



1. Affirmations of the book of the Exercises

Ignatius considers capable of making *all the Spiritual Exercises* (Sp.Ex. 20) any person who *enters into them with great courage and generosity towards his Creator and Lord, offering Him all his will and liberty, that his Divine Majesty may make use of his person and of all he has according to His most Holy Will* (Sp.Ex. 5). It should be noted that, already, in this explanation of the initial motivation, we perceive the echo of that self-surrender which will later be included in the *contemplation to obtain love* (Sp.Ex. 230-237), the *Take, Lord, receive* . . . (Sp.Ex. 234). We could also add that the formulation of the *Principle and Foundation* (Sp.Ex. 23) already contains the fullness of the Exercises. In fact, the person who really does not want more, . . . *health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, long rather than a short life . . . desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created* (Sp.Ex. 23), has little need of them since he or she has largely achieved their objective.

If, as we have just seen, the Exercises start by defining their goal,

then we must ask ourselves to what extent these declarations advance them. In this sense, one of the Annotations destined for the Exercise guide already gives us a certain light: *If he . . . sees that the one who is receiving them is going on in consolation and with much fervor, he ought to warn him not to make any inconsiderate and hasty promise or vow . . .* (Sp.Ex. 14). This annotation is further explained in the rules for the discernment of spirits included in the *first week* (Sp.Ex. 313-327). Rules 7-11 (Sp.Ex. 320-324) warn against the danger of identifying oneself too much with the *consolation* or *desolation* which one experiences. The objective of the Exercises is not consolation but rather the *service and praise of His Divine Majesty* (Sp.Ex. 46) to which a person must order, . . . *all my intentions, actions and operations* (Sp.Ex. 46). This is what each exercitant asks at the beginning of each prayer period.

These texts about the internal attitude in the initial phase of the Exercises clearly show where Ignatius sees a special danger, i.e., in a wrong use of positive experiences. For example, this would be the case if one made far-reaching decisions basing them on such experiences (Sp.Ex. 14). On the contrary, *the persons who are going on intensely cleansing their sins and rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord . . .* (Sp.Ex. 315), make good use of these experiences. Thus, the sense of beginning the Exercises is to *start out on the journey*. To do this, one has to see the goal as well as the whole of the journey. It is particularly necessary to be motivated to set off. Only good motivation will allow us to mobilize our forces and the determination necessary to continue on to the end, whatever the difficulties to be faced.

2. Dimensions and levels of human existence

The following model of the three dimensions in which human life develops can be helpful for an even better understanding of the affirmations of the book of the Exercises. Like all models of this type, what we propose is a simplification, but this does not hinder its usefulness.

On the one hand, we live in the longitudinal dimension of time. On the other, we live in a transversal dimension containing a great multiplicity and diversity of places, things and persons. However, if our existence were limited to these two dimensions, it would be 'flat' and 'superficial' and would not be distinguished from a rock whose existence also lasts a long time (much longer than ours) although it is less diversified. Only the third dimension of being human — its depths — transforms our time into history and our space into encounter. That's why we will give more time to this third dimension of the person.

Ordinarily, perhaps almost always, we live on the level of consciousness that we can call *functional-rational*. We are busy picking up information, carrying out tasks and arranging such or such a thing according to a determined goal. An intuitive element also belongs to this level. It is always present characterized by sensorial impressions, particularly images which either fascinate or repel us. This level of life has a, more or less, marked tendency to avoid strong emotions, especially if they cause us pain and if they are accompanied by a certain aggressiveness.

A deeper level of human existence is called relational or *affective*. On this level, we feel joyfully or sadly affected by encounters and events. We no longer limit ourselves to receiving sensorial impressions and gathering information in order to consider consequences and make judgements. Rather, all those perceptions move us and question us, placing us in an attitude of searching. Our life, in the strict sense, takes place on this level.

Finally, there is a third level which can be qualified as *existential* or *personal*. It is, certainly, even less accessible to us than the one mentioned before. As a result, it is difficult to describe. However, it certainly exists since the integrated wholeness of a human being depends on it. Since this 'wholeness' is not something merely objective but closely touches personal responsibility, it must also be able to become accessible to our consciousness.

For the theme which concerns us, it is important now to see that we can make decisions on all three of these levels. Many of these

decisions are situated on the functional-rational level of our lives and our habitual behavior. Other questions, above all those most closely linked to our relationship with others, are decided on the affective level. Regarding the more important life decisions relating to our identity as persons and the sense and goal of our lives, it is easy to see that they should occur on the third and most profound level of existence if we are really to call them 'life decisions'. How can we make these decisions in a mature manner? To do this, it is essential to realize how to promote growth in this third and deeper dimension and how to let growth happen.

Certainly, the three levels that we have just outlined are not totally compartmentalized nor isolated one from the other. Yet, we could generally say that passing from one level to another does not occur without problems. As we mentioned before, it is mainly in moments of transition that reactions of defense and escape are produced. Later on we will deal with these a bit more in detail.

3. Human life as a search for identity

Having considered more deeply in the last section the profound dimension of human existence, let us examine here the longitudinal dimension, *time*. As we have already indicated, we are not dealing with mere acts and events that succeed one another, but with the fact that only through our life story do we become who we truly are. We see this with total clarity in the tiny child. In the beginning there is no 'I', and even later, as an adult, there will be difficulty answering the question: '*Who are you?*' Different responses will be given according to whether this question is being asked by an official of public administration, a supervisor, or a friend. In the measure in which we are all exposed in various encounters with others to being asked our identity, we realize that the answer is never simple. Whatever our answer, it is only true insofar as it coincides with our lives. Are we, in fact, who we want to be?

Much of what belongs to us and makes us who we are is given to us ahead of time, such as our country and place of origin, as well as our social and family conditions. We cannot choose these. The rest comes throughout our own history by means of external events and internal reactions independent of our will. Natural catastrophes, wars, illnesses, loss of those dear to us, or, in the positive sense, good climatic conditions, favorable economic situations, health etc., all have a distinct effect on the personal development of every human being without any intervention on their part. But, it does not follow that we are no more than that which is given us beforehand. There is, nonetheless, a difference according to whether we assume and accept *what fate has reserved for us* or, instead, complain about it throughout our lives.

The search for our own identity thus appears as the interior thread which maintains the longitudinal dimension of human existence. We also observe that this search has two aspects, one passive and the other active. The task of assuming and integrating into our personality what has already been given us and what the circumstances of life bring us can be called the passive aspect. The active aspect will consist in fashioning life according to our will in our confrontation with the world that surrounds us.

This double task is permanent and ends only with our death. At first sight, death appears to come from the outside provoked by some external event such as a car accident, an earthquake or the explosion of a bomb. Even when it comes from an illness, it continues being something external in spite of starting within our body itself. It's true that we suffer it, but doesn't the active structuring of life tend toward an end? Must we, as some say, continue this process arbitrarily and eternally, repeating over and over again with ever new modifications what has already been achieved? Life only makes sense when it becomes history, that is, when it does not simply go around and repeat what has already happened, but rather engenders something new and original.

This naturally raises the question of whether there is an internal rule for human life, a measure *from within*. Does the life of a human being end when the person has lived out what his/her identity contains? In what moment does this happen? How can we know it?

Numerous possibilities are open to the young. They can marry or not, remain in their land or emigrate . . . Most people are capable of carrying out many different occupations or professions. Although the field of choice may be more limited for one or another, all can choose between various possibilities. When faced with different possible options, each must make a choice to carry out one and renounce the others. Throughout their lives, they will see themselves poorer and poorer in possibilities but richer in realities. Only in this way will they gain an identity and gradually define *'who am I'* through what they have lived, suffered and decided.

From this point of view, the tendency to consider everything open and revisable turns out to be a temptation which ignores the sense of existence. We are oriented towards something definitive and are called to grow until we are converted into someone singular and unique. This is done not by constraint but rather by accepting what we have received and, using it as our starting point, deciding what we want to be. Even if this isn't enough to resolve the enigma of death, it permits us to see a relationship between death and the search for one's own identity.

4. Importance of ideals

What moves human beings through their lives are their needs, aspirations, fears, worries. Our weaknesses as human beings are obvious. If we do nothing, we die of hunger and thirst. If we don't turn towards others, we become isolated and dried up. What we experience as poverty and weakness sets our forces in motion. A whole world of necessities incites us then to go on. Beyond the vital necessities such as eating, moving, sleeping, etc., there exist other equally basic needs we call emotional: recognition by others, self-realization, physical and mental powers, tenderness, etc. Among these emotional necessities there is a certain mutual tension. For example, in a given situation the desire for recognition and the desire for self-realization can set off an interior conflict if the second implies taking a step which I know will not be approved by those around me.

In the midst of affective needs, there is a more hidden one that can be called the need to 'have value'. It is similar to that of recognition by others but it does not entirely identify with it. As a child, we first seek the image of our value, as in a mirror, in the judgement of those around us. Then (starting more or less at 12 years of age) there is a gradual transformation. It is completed, when in our relationship with the world, we discover ourselves as being transcendental, that is, as an 'ego' completely distinct and separate from all the rest of the world, an autonomous being existing in itself. From this moment on, we no longer search for the value of our 'ego' only in the judgement of others but, also, our own judgement and for our own self.

This desire to give value to oneself is above all characteristic of the adolescents, who go about *sounding out* the world in search of models in order to compare them with the images of their own values and forge ideals of human behavior which they personally want to carry out. These models incarnate their aspirations and fire them with enthusiasm helping them, thus, to create an image of themselves, undoubtedly still imprecise, yet fascinating. The desire and will which permit them to identify with this image are the source from which the sense of their own value springs forth. In this phase of life, the adolescent possesses a special capacity to respond to the stimulus generated by ideals. Nevertheless, all human beings experience in some way these impulses to go beyond themselves. Adults can and must become enthusiastic about certain values, otherwise, where will they find a positive motivation to continue the journey and be transformed? Certainly, *suffering* can also serve as motivation; when in a determined situation — an external need or an internal suffering such as depression, a profound dissatisfaction or anguish. A person suffers so much that he or she is ready to make efforts and to take any risk to change. But, in this case, a person only has a negative image of what she wants: not to be what she is right now.

The movement to go beyond oneself places individuals in conflict with the exterior world, above all with others like themselves. As a group and as a society, others are interested that I fit their 'we' without causing a nuisance or becoming a problem. If I want to belong to a group, I must adapt myself to it. It is necessary to assume a *social*

role in order not to be a nonentity. Thus, the search for our identity — through our family experiences, our experiences in school, and through the role society offers us and classifies according to a scale of values — remains essentially also determined by others.

On the threshold of adulthood, this tension grows strong. It is necessary to choose a profession to guarantee one's economic autonomy. Here, we frequently have painful conflicts between our personal inclinations and the objective possibilities. It is the same for marriage. Our own wants and desires must be in harmony with those of our future spouse. Experiences of risk and responsibility are lived in a particularly intense way at the time of this important decision.

The objective of the theme of the Spiritual Exercises is to prepare the individual, *to seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one's life for the salvation of the soul* (Sp.Ex. 1). The preceding psychological considerations are important for a better understanding and ordering of the initial phase of the Ignatian journey. They already enable us to have an idea of the natural dynamic of such experiences on the psychological level. This is especially applicable to the exercitant who is on the point of making a life or vocational decision.

5. Biblical promise and hope

The described dynamic regarding the forging of ideals is not only ingrained in us because of creation. It is nourished, above all, by the promises of biblical revelation, many of which guarantee human beings a future which goes way beyond our present state. For example, we can already perceive this in Genesis in God's promise to Abraham to give him a land and descendants (Gen. 12). The history of Israel also begins with the divine promise to liberate the people from slavery in Egypt and give them a land *of milk and honey* (Ex. 3). God promises David eternal posterity and again, in the midst of Babylonian captivity, God promises to give his chosen people a new alliance (Jer.

31) and a new exodus (Deutero-Isaiah). The New Testament also abounds in promises: not only that of a *new heaven and a new earth* for the end of time, but that of a life *in Christ* and of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, which the reader interprets — at least according to his experience — as a promise for a future. Just like the promises made to Israël in the Old Testament, these can be a cause of enthusiasm for us and can animate us in our efforts to go beyond ourselves and to rise above our present situation. This will happen, above all, if we relate them to the concrete characters and persons which both the Old and New Testament vividly describe. Moses or David, Ruth or Mary Magdalene, Paul or John — don't they fascinate us and make us enthusiastic, at least through some of their traits? Are they not ideal models to incarnate the values that we desire to have? And Jesus himself, is he not the *ideal figure*? Who can resist his charm once they have really known him?

To the biblical category of promise on the objective level, there corresponds that of hope on the subjective level. Hope is a theological virtue, a strength given by the Holy Spirit so that we may continue moving forward. The virtue of hope receives life from its encounter with the ideal models and figures of the biblical promises.

These ideal characters are continued in the saints of Church history, nearer to us in time and more understandable from the biographical point of view. For this reason, they speak more directly to us as happens, for example, with St. Anthony, abbot, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Theresa of Lisieux, St. Francis Xavier. Many saints and other great uncanonized personalities serve as models to the young, who see in them the values to which they aspire. These saints thus become concrete models for their life project.

6. Ambiguity of the pursuit of an ideal

Weighing all the positive aspects of the dynamic which we have presented, we cannot, however, ignore the problems that it poses. In fact, identifying ourselves with promises and ideals, we run the risk of

discarding or forgetting our own reality. The desire to affirm our value and the anxiety to be recognized can lead us to tend so much towards the proposed ideal that the parts of our own reality which are impossible to integrate into these aspirations can be repressed and forgotten. In this case, identification with the ideal figure is used to escape from the real world. This danger threatens us especially when our childhood conflicts with various authority figures — parents or other persons — were resolved by means of adaptation, leading to a tendency to be thoughtless of our own needs in view of the ideal. Here, the biblical message of denying ourselves and carrying our cross can be erroneously understood as the negation of our real needs, using it to justify escaping from a vital problem.

But even when the tendency toward an ideal is not so exclusive, there exists nonetheless a certain ambiguity. Even with a relatively healthy mental development, we find it difficult to avoid the temptation to deal with ourselves as we would want to be and to reject or separate the components of our personality that we experience as difficult or threatening. The different schools of depth psychology have tried to explain this phenomenon. For example, we speak of the formation of the 'persona' and the elimination of the 'shadow' (C.G.Jung) or of the so-called 'life script' that once chosen, unaware to ourselves, programs our life in a certain pattern (transactional analysis) or the mandatory 'avoidances' and 'temptations' of different personality types (Enneagram). However, what we do not integrate into the pursuit of our ideals remains and acts within us, no matter how much our conscious 'ego' refuses to recognize its presence. The decisions taken by this 'ego' disregarding part of our own reality can be problematic, since it ignores to what extent these decisions may be secretly governed by the needs and tendencies repressed in the depths of our being.

It is obvious that this truth is important for the question we are dealing with here: to know how to make life decisions that we can carry through. These decisions will be fragile in the measure in which they are influenced by our rejections and repressions. If the repressed needs come to the surface and the conscious 'ego' finally takes them seriously, it is clear that the decision based on them will be called into question. We could even say 'blessed crisis!' if it contributes, as often happens, to

the cure and health of the person in question. We can not deal here with the burning issue of facing such crises responsibly when it is a question of a definitive commitment such as matrimony or the priesthood. It is enough to point out that the crisis does not necessarily signify the breaking of the bond since, often, it is possible to find the solution and desired cure without abandoning it.

7. Consequences for beginning the Exercises

We will now try to summarize the preceding ideas and reflections. In the book of the Exercises, which served as our starting point, the correct motivation desired from the one who is making them is summed up in the words *great courage and generosity* (Sp.Ex. 5). Ignatius well knew the danger of allowing oneself to be seduced by the initial experiences and of making important decisions prematurely because of these experiences (Sp.Ex. 14 in relation to Sp.Ex. 320-324). Without frills nor detours, he presents a global vision of the project the exercitant is about to undertake (Sp.Ex. 23), proposing as the principle task a consistent orientation of one's *intentions, actions and operations . . . directed purely to the service and praise of His Divine Majesty* (Sp.Ex. 46). Only with this orientation and the corresponding indifference toward all the rest will the exercitant finally be able to find the identity that he is searching for as a believer . . . *the salvation of the soul*.

If we interpret these assertions from a more psychological viewpoint we would come to these conclusions:

① Knowing at what level of the deep dimension (cf. 2 above) the motivation and the first experiences of the exercitant take place is, at the least, an open question. It depends not a little on one's personal experiences before making the Exercises. In many cases, above all when dealing with young people, it is necessary to suppose that the 'center of gravity' of the 'ego' is situated on the level called functional-rational. The affective components pertinent to this level can well be

summarized by enthusiasm or *much fervor* mentioned by St. Ignatius (cf. Sp.Ex. 14). This consists in feeling attracted by an object which becomes present as an image and leads us to go beyond our own situation. Therefore, our enthusiasm is characterized by the tendency to move forward in the longitudinal dimension of life — time — and not so much to help us to descend to deeper levels.

② We have already seen that biblical revelation, with its promises, invites us to satisfy our longings to go beyond the state in which we find ourselves, nourishing this hope in us (cf. 5 above). From the psychological point of view, the biblical messages and characters related to these promises bring to life the dynamic of the search for identity in accordance with an ideal (cf. 3 & 4 above). This especially concerns the young who are aspiring to the accomplishment of a life project. The more this dynamic develops on the functional-rational level of enthusiasm, and the more impervious this level is to that of the deeper 'strata', the greater will be the risk that the ideals and life projects that come forth will secretly sustain the attitude of escape from our own reality both external and internal (cf. 6 above). Thus, the great importance of the warning not to make definitive commitments during this phase (Sp.Ex. 14), above all, if we are speaking of those who have little experience of life. In the book of the Exercises, enthusiasm tending to achieve great goals is oriented toward the immediate task: exercising ourselves in prayer, directing all towards our *Creator and Savior* (cf. Sp.Ex. 1; 46). It is so even in the moments when our enthusiasm is overshadowed (cf. Sp.Ex. 318-320) and *we find ourselves in the purgative life which corresponds to the Exercises of the first week* (Sp.Ex. 10).

③ Many exercitants, today, differ essentially from those the book of Exercises seems to have had in mind for commencing with the full Exercises. Often, the distinction between their ideals and the biblical promises is even greater. The rejection of some constituent elements of their own reality may also be more complicated than St. Ignatius supposed in someone beginning the exercises. In those days, this type of ascetic process was something new which — above all in their complete form — hardly made sense without great motivation. Today, the Exercises are part of more current pastoral proposals and the

exercitants' ideas about them are frequently unilateral and reduced. Motivation is a difficult theme to address when the Exercises are a part of the formation for priesthood, for pastoral ministry or as a preparation for religious profession. For all these reasons, it is almost impossible today to approach the first week as quickly as the texts suggest. In this case, we must rather have a *phase 0* or a *fundamental phase* which fills the aforementioned deficiency.

8. The era of the 'first love'

The community of Ephesus is told: *Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love* (Apoc. 2:4). Yet, it had been told before: *You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary* (Apoc. 2:3). Thus, there is something like a special gift of the beginnings. We know of it through stories relating to human love. Here, it is applied to the relationship between the community and its Lord, as a continuation of the ancient simile of the bond between two lovers, which referred to Yahweh and Israel and which may also be applied to my own relationship with my God.

In the same way, as love bursts forth spontaneously between two human beings without being planned ahead of time, so also, it is impossible to foresee in what moment of life this seed of *great courage and generosity towards my Creator and Lord* (Sp.Ex. 5) will blossom in my relationship with God. This constitutes a much desired motivation in the Exercises. Consequently, this cannot be planned ahead of time and, as it were, *from the outside*. Now, on the threshold of the adult age, there are certain decisions to be made. For example, after taking one's final exams before leaving school, the young person must decide whether or not to continue his/her studies and what to study or what professional formation to acquire. How can the Exercises serve in this case to help a person to *seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one's life for the salvation of the soul* (Sp.Ex. 1)?

What can be done when nothing spontaneous happens

comparable to a *first love*, and a person tries to make an important life decision in accordance with God's will towards the priesthood, religious vows or some other state which is a permanent commitment? Or, vice versa, don't situations sometimes occur in which the *first love* is born simply and almost imperceptibly, but our ordinary life moves forward in set ways that stop us from asking whether this love could bring forth a life decision involving a radical change of direction? In the first case, there is the danger of making the Exercises as part of a formation program without allowing any vital matters to be really touched. In the second, the Exercises are made willingly in order to nourish this tender bud of love for God but they are limited to the interior life without touching everyday life.

These may be the reasons why the Exercises are not always efficacious as an instrument for finding God's will concerning our vocation. The one who guides others through them is given the following practical advice. It is necessary to be extremely vigilant in discovering whether and to what point there is at least a desire in the exercitant for this *first love* for God. If the answer is yes, it is necessary to deepen the fundamental phase, as its aim is to make this love flourish and — with regard to important decisions eventually taken — to ferment in the exercitant the growth of this great generosity which incited the offering to God of *all his/her will and liberty, that His Divine Majesty may make use of the person and of all the person has according to God's most Holy Will* (Sp.Ex. 5).

However, without one realizing it, the *first love* can be weak. It can also be linked to the enthusiasm described above and hence be mixed with egocentric aspirations and sentiments. Nevertheless, in the measure in which it remains open to the 'you' of God and neighbor, and in which the desires of the person who loves are sincere, it will be useful as a starting point for a more far-reaching movement.

In his *Autobiography*, Ignatius describes, with great precision, the budding of his *first love* as well as his spiritual attitude at the time he decided to leave Loyola. *And he found all his consolations in these thoughts, without looking at anything interior, nor knowing what were humility, charity, patience nor human understanding* (in the Spanish

original: *discreción*) *in order neither to rule nor measure these virtues; but his whole intention was to do great exterior works without looking at any other particular circumstance because this is what the saints had done for the glory of God* (Auto. 14). Clearly, we have here this mixture of generosity and great desires fixed on exterior models, a mixture typical of the spiritual situation of those who undertake an enterprise like that of St. Ignatius.

Already, in those first steps, a life project is included. Ignatius wanted to spend the rest of his days doing penance in Jerusalem. It would be necessary for him to suffer deeper shocks and spiritual illumination to move him away from this plan and give him a knowledge of a real vocation. His painful and dangerous experiences would finally persuade him to put at the side of all those seeking God by going through the Exercises, a person to accompany them and guide them against all types of exaggerations and extravagances without, however, rejecting the initial enthusiasm.



(B)

Free to find my True Identity



1. The journey towards the depths

From the previous considerations, we can see, that to prepare ourselves for a sound life decision, it is necessary to descend to the deeper dimensions of our being. In the text of the Exercises, it does not become apparent, immediately, that the first week is to promote this descent.

If one reads the text superficially, the first week seems to lead more to an active ordering of our own lives than to a passive acceptance of the experiences and needs which had been rejected before.

This impression does not stand up under closer examination. On the contrary, it becomes evident that the book of the Exercises aims precisely at passing from the more exterior functional-rational level to the affective-relational level. When Ignatius invites us to *ask shame and confusion at myself* (Sp.Ex. 48) in the beginning exercise of the first week, he aims precisely at the resistance which hinders us from taking this step. The petition of the following exercise to obtain: *a great and intense sorrow and tears for my sins* (Sp.Ex. 55), denotes the affective experience of consternation which belongs entirely to this second level.

As for the *points* and the *colloquy* of this exercise, here, as in the fifth exercise (meditation on hell), the contents go one step further reaching the third level: *Let me finish . . . giving thanks to God our*

Lord, that he has given me life until now (Sp.Ex. 61), or referring to the souls who are in hell, *because he has not let me fall into any of these divisions, ending my life* (Sp.Ex. 71). The personal experience of sin will only be complete when we have questioned our own existence fully and in depth.

The importance of moving to the deeper levels of our being for making life decisions resides in the fact that this is the only way possible to reach the *place* where we can embrace the totality of life. Until we pass from the functional-rational level, our decisions will be limited to the functional acts and goals proper to them. A decision made on this level will not impact life in its essential coherency. This latter can only be understood and shaped on the deeper levels. At any rate, if we live on the second level, that of affective experiences, and deal with our decisions, we come into contact with and perceive our lives as webs of meaningful encounters and relationships.

But only when I consciously come in touch with the third level of my being will I be able to realize that my decisions are relevant for life in all its dimensions. Only then, am I able to commit myself as a person when deciding upon a concrete issue like marriage or profession in a religious order. Only on this level will my commitment to Jesus of Nazareth finally embrace all of me so that I am prepared to lose my life for his sake (cf. Mk 8:35). From this point, now, one can understand the importance of the first week of the Exercises for arriving at a mature decision about one's life and one's vocation. Any decisions, made without being liberated to these depth dimensions, remain extremely doubtful and risky. They will continue to be unclear as long as access to these strata are blocked.

Here, the question arises about the difference between the Spiritual Exercises and psychotherapy. If the goal of therapy is to help one to discover and accept one's own reality and to live with it, then we can say that this partly covers the object of the Exercises. The difference refers to the means used to arrive at this. In the Exercises, the main means is prayer, whereas, therapy uses other means. Beyond that, the therapist plays another role than the guide in the Exercises. To what extent the Exercises may help someone to come in touch with her/his

own depth remains an open question. It is important, however, that the guide in the Exercises refrains from trying therapeutic means without being trained for it.

2. Conversion to faith

The time has come, he said, and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news (Mk. 1:15). According to the Gospel of St. Mark, this is how Jesus began his announcement stirring consciences to teach them what God does. The immediate effect of this proclamation should be *to be converted*, that is, to be liberated from our fixation with ourselves and with what we do in order to tend toward what God offers. Thus, our basic *activity* is not the achievement of a personal ethic but, rather, the faith in which we trustingly open ourselves up to the work of God. In this way, the Kingdom of God, which is already near, enters fully into our own reality.

Paul, in particular, reflects this truly revolutionary evangelical message which touches the deepest part of our being where the important existential question of our own value and justification remains latent. Fear of not having this value is what moves us to procure it at any cost. In the synoptic Gospels, as in the writings of Paul, we see this problem, above all, in Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees whose life principles were: I have value in the face of God for what I do and when I carry out the Law. Jesus answers: *I have not come to call the righteous but sinners* (Mk. 2:17). Justification by faith inverts the terms of pharisaical justice saying: I have value before God because he loves me and thus makes me valuable.

In the book of the Exercises, the exercitant is led toward this biblical conversion mainly through the colloquies to which the exercises of the first week leads. In the repetition, these colloquies become more and more the substance of the exercitant's prayer. Is there a rational answer to the question to the crucified Lord: *How is it that he, although he is the Creator, has come . . . to die in this way for my sins* (Sp.Ex.

53)? In the face of my own sinfulness and my salvation can I do anything else but . . . *utter an exclamation of wonder and surging emotion* . . . (Sp.Ex. 60). Furthermore, the exercitant, through the experiences of desolation followed by consolation, is lead to understand that . . . *all these are a gift and grace from God our Lord* . . . (Sp.Ex. 322).

For our theme, this conversion to faith is of decisive importance. We understand that, on the one hand, the deepest yearning of a human being originates in and is roused by the theological virtue of hope in God's promises. On the other hand, however, a person's aspiration is driven by fear for one's own self-value and endangered by the tendency to escape from one's own life reality. My faith, in being justified and loved by God for my own self as I am, fights this fear and tendency. This knowing faith of God's love for me liberates me from the compulsive pressure to be different in order to be loved.

From this come decisive consequences regarding the relationship with what the models and projects of life imply. As long as we aspire to reach a determined ideal in order to feel that we are valuable and acceptable, we will not be free before this ideal. If, on the other hand, we can believe that God loves us totally, without regard to whether or not we reach our ideals, we will be free in our relationship with any ideals. Thus, we will be able to verify with greater serenity whether or not these ideals conform to our own reality and to the will of God. To express this in Ignatian language . . . only when we are convinced that God loves us and justifies us will we be 'indifferent' to all the rest, even such important things as health, riches, honors or a long life. Only confidence in divine guidance nourished by faith will permit me to be liberated from my obsession with certain ideals, leaving them to the will of God.

3. Reconciliation with ourselves

As we have already seen in the journey towards the discovery of our own true identity, we are inevitably accompanied by memories and perceptions that we have repressed and hidden. The reaction of the

exterior world to early stirrings of defiance, at times, paralyzes our will for auto-affirmation. Thus, the jeers of an adult can induce a child to repress, in the depths of his/her being, the first indications of his/her thirst for knowledge. Such experiences leave deep traumas especially a sense of guilt because, after all, one's own value is being questioned. For this reason, from the theological point of view, it is impossible to admit an experience of guilt without the hope of pardon.

However, all the experiences thus rejected or repressed remain within us. They continue to gather force within us and exercise a hidden influence on our behavior. This can well be compared to what happens with bodily wounds. When they are not completely cured, we protect them from all rough contact which limits our liberty of movement. The same happens in the sphere of the psyche. If we take such wounds with us without healing them, we will find ourselves obliged to protect them. What we do and decide will end up being partly determined by them. Obviously, this involves a notable limitation of our liberty.

Jesus came into this world to heal us and to reconcile us. He showed us the way saying: *If you keep my word, you are truly my disciples: Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free* (Jn. 8:31-32). Attentive to his word, united to him and certain of his acceptance, we can allow the repressed truths of our existence and the pain — or repentance in case of a feeling of guilt — to float to the surface little by little so that our conscious life may assume these truths. By means of this process of grace, we will be reconciled more and more with all that is within us.

In many ways and with great clarity, the Gospel indicates that this reconciliation is indispensable. The goal of the divine plan of salvation is *to reconcile to himself* [Christ] *all things* (Col.1:20). Only when we are reconciled with our own history and our brothers and sisters will we be authentically free to work as we desire.

The book of the Exercises does not speak anywhere of cures or of reconciliation. Nevertheless, it is fully situated in this context referring more than once to *disordered tendencies* (Sp.Ex. 1, 21, 169, 172) which play such an important role throughout the process. In fact, these

tendencies are the attitudes we adopt in order to compensate for our insufficiencies, our wounds and our limitations. Ordinarily, they come as much from anxieties and fears as from immoderate desires.

The relationship of all this to our life projects and our life decisions is obvious. As long as we continue to deny facing certain aspects of our lives for fear of being hurt, we will also continue to avoid contact with them in the future. For example, it is possible that a young man, who in his infancy had negative experiences with women, instinctively excludes from his present life all, more or less, close relationships with girls. In this case, any decision that puts him under the obligation of permanent celibacy could be disastrous.

4. My new identity: a beloved sinner

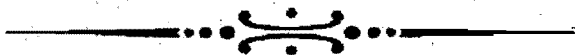
The journey towards liberation, conversion and reconciliation described in the preceding sections leads to a new identity. We will encounter and experience this when we meet the crucified Lord who, as our Creator, loves us to the extreme of having given up his life for us. In prayer and meditation, these ideas — running through the liturgy — take on an affective and existential sense. The profound anxiety of knowing whether or not I have value disappears when I meet Jesus. Even if some remnants remain, the dialogue with my Lord and Savior will be a refuge against the object of my fears. Thus, the reason for my existence remains experientially clear in a free and loving creative will of God. I know that he has *called you by your name* (Is. 43:1), that I am justified, and that my support is the love of the all-powerful God.

Nothing more important and decisive can now happen to me. My existence has enough sense if I use it to praise and thank my God, if I continue to journey with Him in the midst of earthly trivialities. I could die and, overflowing with gratitude and trust, place my life in his creating hands. I could look to the future with hope, continuing to enjoy

the favor of this God who has already given me so much proof of His mercy. There is no temerity in this certainty of reaching salvation because the foundation of my hope is God himself and the grace that comes from faith. Nevertheless, this hope still leaves room to *work out your salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil. 2:12).

If I feel loved, in spite of all my ugliness as a sinner, I can well believe that the Lord truly loves me. This enables me to be free to love, to join the Scribe who asked Jesus what was the first of all the commandments and who, upon hearing the response which indicated love, joyfully exclaimed: *Well said, teacher. You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, and with all your strength and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices* (Mk. 12:32-33). While striving to discover my authentic identity, it will be profitable to meditate on this paradox: *Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the Gospel will save it* (Mk. 8:35). Consequently, I will say to myself: I have nothing more to lose, since I no longer live for what I could lose. What I am and possess I have in order to lose it for God and my brothers and sisters.

This is of crucial importance when facing life decisions. The choice of a state of life, priesthood, religious vows, work, etc. becomes relative in the good sense, being lightened of the dead weight that they carried. This allows me to become detached from premature attachments and eventual obsessions, leaving them to the free disposition of God and to my crucial knowledge of this divine will. Only starting with this basis is it possible to make an 'election' as the author of the Exercises intends it.



(C)

Called to Follow Christ



1. Vocation to 'be Christian'

Saint Paul regularly uses the words *call*, *called* and *calling* or *vocation* in relation to the Christian as such, thus designating the way in which we come to be followers of Christ. Is it a personal act inspired by God? It has a personal character. 'God calls us and only by listening to this call and responding to it as Christians will we go on to be a part of the *community of saints*.'

When referring to the various states of life or community functions in which the individual incarnates his way of being Christian, Paul rarely uses the term 'vocation'. In these cases, he speaks of 'charisms': *...everyone has his own gift from God, one this kind and the next something different* (1 Cor. 7:7). In his grand exhortation to unity he says: *There is one Body, one Spirit, just as one hope is the goal of your calling by God* (Eph. 4:4). This language is essentially different from that which was used by the Church centuries later and is still used in our time. Today, we call vocation that which the Apostle knew by the name of charisms. Thus, we speak of 'vocation' to the priesthood and the religious life or to a particular task in the Church without thinking of using the word to denote the call to be Christian.

However, it is not only a question of words. Here, the very substance of the notion of being Christian is at stake. When Paul designates this as 'call', what matters to him is emphasizing the personal relationship implied in this concept. It is not a question primarily of a religion, of a philosophy or of belonging to a community but rather, before all and above all, of *being in Christ*. Because *Christ Jesus took hold of me* (Phil. 3:12) I am Christian. *I no longer live but Christ lives in me. Subject to the limitations of human nature, the life that I am now living I am living in faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me* (Gal. 2:20).

To *be Christian* is already equivalent to participating in the death and resurrection of Jesus as is clearly demonstrated by the following text at baptism: *You cannot have forgotten that all of us — when we were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. So by our baptism into his death we were buried with him so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life* (Rom. 6:3-4). In this way, baptism becomes an anticipation of the welcome that God reserves for us but we must also welcome God to fully experience his action in our lives. A relationship with Christ signifies a unity of destination with him which is applicable to all Christians.

2. Vocation and ideal

Speaking in this way of the Christian condition, it is easy for us to say: Yes, this ideal written by St. Paul is excellent but it remains far from the reality of being Christian. So, we must ask: Is vocation just an ideal? Does it actually confront us with an image to which we are supposed to conform without ever being able to identify with it? Won't the concept of the ideal, perhaps, be the visual correspondence of the acoustic concept of vocation?

Once again, it is not the use of words that is important here but, rather, what they denote regarding God, the world and human beings.

In the final analysis, the notion of ideal goes back to Plato's doctrine according to which the world as we know it is but a pale reflection of the original world, constituted uniquely by ideas. A pessimistic feature is hidden in this image. Our earthly life passes among shadows. At times, the light shines through but it never directly reaches us. This note of resigned pessimism adjusts itself well to what we said in the previous paragraph when speaking of the ideal. It makes us enthusiastic but we cannot reach it. Such declarations reveal frequently some of what we have lived. There was, perhaps, a time when we were fascinated and dazzled by great ideals until we were sadly forced to recognize that they were beyond our reach. If we cannot carry them out, we say that nobody has been able to and from this 'nobody has been able to', we pass without reservation to 'it cannot be' carried out.

Plato did not believe in a personal God who speaks to humanity. This is somewhat similar to what happens when we refer to the ideal of being Christian. We trust, above all, in our capacity to reach this ideal forgetting God and his grace. Are we not, then, left only with resignation and the miserable comfort of preserving the ideal at least as an image? This way of considering Christian vocation as an ideal shows that we are still very far from a conversion to faith (cf. above B 2).

Despite all that has been said, this reaction to the noted passages of St. Paul manifests an important concern. The Apostle, himself, expresses it thus: *Not that I have secured it already, not yet reached my goal, but I am still pursuing it in the attempt to take hold of the prize for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not reckon myself as having taken hold of it, I can only say that forgetting all that lies behind me, (Paul alludes here to his past zeal to apply the Jewish law, cf. Phil. 3: 4-6) and straining forward to what lies in front, I am racing towards that finishing point to win the prize of God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. So this is the way in which all of us who are mature should be thinking and if you are still thinking differently in any way, then God has yet to make this matter clear to you. Meanwhile, let us go forward from the point we have each attained* (Phil. 3:12-16).

I have quoted this long text because, using almost contradictory formulations, Paul tries to explain that the fact of being Christian consists in the tension between an 'already' and a 'not yet,' between a 'reached' and a 'reaching for.' The decisive change of direction is in the past, so to speak, and yet there is always a future. The Christians, whom Paul qualifies as 'mature', have been 'seized' by Christ but are not yet perfect . . . *from the point we have each attained* . . . says the Apostle on one hand, but then he adds *I do not reckon myself as having taken hold of it* . . . As a Christian, I reside precisely in this state of 'suspension.' I cannot 'have' my state of being one, its 'basis' is not at my disposal. Living as a Christian means surpassing myself or, said in dialectic form, responding with all my being to the 'You' of God who has called me. In this sense, being Christian is still a goal to be reached. *Christ took hold of me* but *I do not reckon myself as having taken hold of it*.

According to this; it is possible to speak of being Christian as the ideal, although we must not lose sight of the fact that it is God who calls us and that we are called to *communion* with Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9). This ideal thus loses its nuance of 'unreachable' and the trace of hopelessness it leaves in us. We can already speak of it as not something abstract and only theoretically reachable but rather, as something personal where you and I confess at the same time our faith and our lack of faith. We begin to discover the common basis of our new identity of 'beloved sinners' (cf. above B 4) and where, filled with astonishment, we rejoice that, over and over again, God continues to call us to be with Jesus.

3. Historical transformation of the concept of vocation

We will now consider, from the historical point of view, how the word *VOCATION* has changed significance. This change has a strict relationship with another. Becoming a Christian is no longer essentially the same act it was in the early days of the Church. In fact, in the beginning it constituted a personal decision taken by an individual or a

family knowing that they were taking a big risk. However, after Constantine, and still more during medieval times, the condition of being Christian was considered something normal. One was already born into the Church. Only as a Christian could one enjoy the full rights of a citizen. From this, there evidently came forth the notion of a 'Church of the People.' Each one lived in a cultural area imbued with faith and Christian ways of thinking because in the lives of the majority of persons there was no transition from non-Christian to Christian. Even when changes could occur leading to a more intense practice of faith, it did not imply passing from a pagan society to a small Christian community with its accompanying risks of persecution. Thus, the word 'vocation' did not seem applicable to these circumstances having lost the significance of being called from something exterior or being different from the ordinary.

Soon in Church history, new movements and different forms of Church life arose which demonstrated a new sense of the biblical concept of vocation. We refer all above to the religious state. Concerning biblical language in the strict sense, this new content goes back not so much to the Pauline declarations about the call of God as to the passages of the synoptic Gospels about 'following.' In them, Jesus invites his listeners to come out of their ordinary milieu in order to follow him and makes this a new way of life, even constantly moving from place to place with him. In the Gospels, we observe that there are two circles of persons surrounding Jesus, one larger, those who listen to his words and are taken care of by him but who do not follow him and the other smaller, the disciples who have abandoned, at least partially, their usual way of life to go everywhere with him and to share his fate.

A good example of this double category of Jesus' listeners is offered by a passage regarding the young rich man especially in Matthew's version where we observe a clear distinction between keeping the commandments and personally following Christ. At the words of Jesus about the observance of the commandments, the young man replies: *I have kept all these. What more do I have to do?* The text continues: *Jesus said: If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions . . . then, come follow me* (Matt. 19:21). These phrases of St. Matthew's Gospel undoubtedly contributed to differentiating between the state of 'keeping the commandments' denoting the 'ordinary'

Christian and the 'state of perfection' referring to the vows which characterize religious life. The book of the Exercises echoes this in the *preamble to consider states* (Sp.Ex. 135). We will not enter into detail here to see if this Ignatian passage resists an exegetic-critical verification. It is more important for us to discover whether or not the mentioned semantic displacement of the concept of vocation poses problems when it is a matter of recognizing our own journey in following Christ.

4. Danger of confusion

In the situation of 'Church of the People,' the faithful already have a certain familiarity with the contents of faith and the evangelical texts. All these are a part of their 'Sundays' and no radical decisions are necessary to gain access to this doctrine. On the contrary, to avoid it, we must make a special act of the will. Thus, we understand that in the moments when the Gospel message, above all the texts about following Christ, suddenly shines with a new light, the Christian who has been so touched does not immediately see the parochial community as the place to go to live out the newly gained insight. Influenced by the general confusion to regard vocation in general and the vocation to religious life or other particular forms of life as one and the same, the person in question does not delay in turning towards these specific ways of living his/her faith. This new interest in Jesus Christ and in a more intense life of faith, that is, the desire to be an 'authentic Christian' is linked directly with a specific charism or perhaps to a specific way of 'living one's 'being Christian.' This is specially true for young people who are looking for a visible and significant realization of what they are searching for.

When concrete life decisions are involved this confusion, between basic vocation and the vocation to a determined form of life, can bring serious consequences. In the internal confrontation with the object of the decision, it is possible, on the one hand, that following Christ and the relationship with Jesus, the basis of all forms of Christian life to which the soul aspires, determine everything so that we do not sufficiently consider the specific character of the way of life desired, for

example celibacy. Or, the concrete elements and features of such an option pass in first place to the point where they make us forget or lose sight of the condition preceding this form of life, that is, the Christian vocation in the strict sense. In the first case, we confuse a determined form of life with the basic vocation of being Christian. In the second, we do not recognize this or that exterior form of life as genuinely Christian, or in other words, as a concrete form of the basic Christian vocation. Both types of confusion are dangerous.

Even when, in the present situation in our part of the world, we cannot speak any longer of 'the Church of the People', undoubtedly still, the ideas and hopes of many faithful within the Church related to her continue to depend on this concept especially for what concerns the normal parish life. In fact, one expects services from the parish regarding the pastoral ministry of the sacraments, catechesis and various diaconal tasks but not for the realization of a biblical christocentrism. Thus, those who still seek a place today to practice more intensely their own Christianity following New Testament models do not hope to find it in a parish community. What interests us here is that this signifies that we still risk confusing the basic vocation of being Christian with the vocation to a determined form of carrying out this 'being Christian' even if this form is no longer limited, as it was some decades ago, to the religious or priestly state.

5. Call to follow Christ

In the framework of the Exercises, what practical effects can we derive from the preceding biblical and historical reflections about vocation?

In the first place, we can see that certain notions of the Exercises are still quite common today. They go along with the idea of vocation as conceived in the 'Church of the people' which only encourages the already described danger of confusion. According to this idea, the Weeks of the Exercises are seen as follows: the objective of the 'first

week' is the conversion of the sinner and their passage to the state of being a redeemed Christian. The 'second week' moves around a personal relationship with Christ and following him in the religious life, the priesthood or some other particular form of vocation. That's why it is said that the 'second week' must only be given to those considered ready and disposed for this specific vocation. In other words, the first week deals with the commandments, the second with the evangelical counsels. This second week starts with the meditation on the call of Christ (Sp.Ex. 91-98). There, for the first time, vocation is brought up and linked to the 'MORE' (Latin, *MAGIS*, Sp.Ex. 97), which invites us to go beyond simply 'being Christian' that is, merely 'keeping the commandments' (Sp.Ex. 135).

Here, we can easily see the semantic displacement of the idea of vocation that we spoke of earlier which is in contrast with the Pauline significance of the term. Both the 'Principle and Foundation' and the 'first week' risk losing their point: the exercitant's personal relationship with Christ. Thus, the first week turns out to be incomprehensible and inaccessible for those who have not committed grave sins during their lives and for those to whom the sentiments and colloquials, described in the book of the Exercises, might seem exaggerated and incomprehensible. This closes to them the journey towards the deep levels of consciousness. The second week, with the 'election' begun, under such circumstances, will hardly serve for something more than to renew the initial enthusiasm of the exercitant, especially when the Exercises are short and there is no room left for 'repetitions'.

If with Vatican II, we desire and must return to the biblical concept of vocation, we cannot, then, reserve this theme for the 'second week'. Rather, it is necessary to approach it from the beginning in order to develop and clarify it as we go along. In fact, our initial enthusiasm already incites us to open our hearts to the promises we have heard. The first week leads to the experience of one's own redemption. In the colloquies of this first week, the exercitant learns to have a personal relationship with his Redeemer leading to a deeper understanding of being Christian. It is obvious, then, that already in the 'Principle and Foundation' and in the 'first week' it is a question of growing in one's vocation of 'being Christian'.

On the other hand, the vocation of 'being Christian', as such, is also a theme of the second week, namely in its aspect of following Christ. Redemption and the following of Christ must not be separated as often happens.

If we closely examine the meditation on the call of Christ (Sp.Ex. 91-98) we will verify the validity of this global vision of vocation. In the parable of the *temporal king* (Sp.Ex. 91, title, and 92-94), we refer, once more, to the beginning of the exercises. In any case, this meditation must be read in the light of its author's life. We find here, once more, the ideal which animated Ignatius the 'knight' lying ill on his bed of infirmity shortly before his conversion. It is curious that Ignatius goes back to an old ideal precisely at this point of the Exercises. It demonstrates how much importance he places on the continuity of life in spite of the radicalism of his conversion and his interior transformation. The simile of the 'temporal king' thus reflects the initial phase of Ignatius' change of attitude where he substitutes Christ for the feudal lord even before experiencing a deeper interior change (cf. above, A 8). In this way, he recognizes that God can use earthly ideas for drawing a person and leading them on the journey toward vocation. Certainly, it would be sad if the meditation on the 'temporal king' did not go beyond the simple parable, that is, if it was limited to presenting Christ simply as an ideal figure. He, who has made 'the first week' thoroughly, does not stop there but, rather, really meets Christ his Redeemer and personally hears his call.

To what are we called? To follow Christ which, at the same time, means participating in his mission. This means to *Conquer all the world and all enemies* (Sp.Ex. 95). Christ says, if you would follow me you must *labor with me, following Me in the pain and also in the glory*. (cf. Sp.Ex. 95). The call is directed to *each one in particular* (Sp.Ex. 95) and Ignatius adds that *all those who have judgment and reason will offer their entire selves to the labor* (Sp.Ex. 96). Therefore, it is clear that we are all called to follow Jesus. 'Being Christian' signifies following Christ closely and taking part in his mission.

The Christian's fundamental vocation corresponds to a fundamental mission. We cannot imagine an authentic Christian who is exclusively receptive and passive. 'Being Christian', in the full sense of

the word, also supposes giving witness to one's own redemption and being involved in the Church's mission which is to work for the world's salvation.

In the 'Church of the people', this truth has often been relegated to second place. All were evangelized. There were the priests to carry out the different services especially those of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. Diaconal chores were usually assumed by religious. This situation has contributed much to the confusion described previously. Those faithful wishing to give active witness of their Christianity had to opt for a special form of life. As a 'normal' Christian, one was reduced to the passive role of listening and singing in the choir with others. Despite the simplification that we make here, and although this has not been true in every case, the general idea expressed here has impregnated and continues to thoroughly impregnate the consciousness of many persons.

6. The Ignatian *MAGIS*

What more can a person do than *offer their entire selves to the labor* (Sp.Ex. 96)? What more could be necessary than 'being Christian' when this signifies following Christ? Nevertheless, the text of the meditation on following Christ continues: *Those who wish to give greater proof of their love, and to distinguish themselves in whatever concerns the service of the eternal King and the Lord of all, will not only offer themselves entirely for the work but will act against their sensuality and carnal and worldly love, and make offerings of greater value and more importance in words such as these: ...* (here follows a prayer). I have quoted this whole text because I consider it to be of supreme importance for a good understanding of this *who will want to be more devoted*.

Two things are important for a good understanding of the Ignatian *MAGIS*.

- ① We are dealing with a desire that opens into prayer.

② This desire and this prayer are intrinsically oriented towards following Christ: *I want and desire . . . to imitate thee in bearing all injuries and all abuse and all poverty of spirit and actual poverty, too* (Sp.Ex. 98). Here, the *labor* and the *pain* of all those who offer themselves are specified and explained ahead of time.

In comparison to what all do, the *MAGIS* does not consist, then, in going beyond the mere 'offering oneself' giving something concrete of oneself. Those who want to 'distinguish' themselves also make 'offerings'. This is all the more clear when all the movement of the *MAGIS* ends in a prayer. In summary, in its essence, the Ignatian *MAGIS* does not represent something superior to that to which we are all called because we cannot go beyond following Christ.

As I see it, the Ignatian *MAGIS* is in perfect accord with what St. Paul says in his letter to the Philippians: *...forgetting all that lies behind me, and straining forward to what lies in front, I am racing toward the finishing point to win the prize of God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus* (Phil. 3:13ff). As we have already seen, the Apostle thus describes the in-between state of the Christian, a state of openness to the future (cf. C 2). Certainly, this state can be lived differently. It is possible to maintain it without any detriment to the whole surrender of oneself. But, we can also open ourselves to an ever-new sensitivity, remaining attentive in order not to ignore God's smallest invitation to move a step forward in following him. St. Ignatius' *MAGIS* refers to this sensitivity and is important in the *illuminative life which corresponds to the exercises of the second week* (Sp.Ex. 10). This sensitivity, which we can call active, prepares us to recognize the will of God.

We rightly say 'active' since it is a matter of discovering beforehand and holding out to God the interior resistances which are to be expected when following Christ begins to become reality. This attention to hard realities, before they take place, probably requires great efforts. That is undoubtedly the thought of Ignatius in the phrase: *... acting against their own sensuality and against their carnal and worldly love* (Sp.Ex. 97).

As can be seen in the remaining exercises of the second

week, the *MAGIS* of Ignatius does not imply any high-handed and insensate dashing ahead towards Christ. In fact, the meditation on the 'temporal king' is not followed by reflections on the election of a state, as we could suppose, but by meditations on the life of Jesus beginning with his incarnation and infancy. The way of praying used here, 'contemplation,' leads to a very simple familiarity with the person of Jesus starting with expressive Gospel narrations. In the repetitions, especially those of the 'application of the senses' (Sp.Ex. 121-126), we interiorize, even more, this encounter with Jesus. The sensitivity we spoke of before can thus grow as the 'spiritual senses' are awakened.

The dynamic of the *MAGIS* is a dynamic of love. It occurs within a relationship and cannot be judged from outside it. Therefore, the aim of this movement is not to form a spiritual elite who can feel themselves superior to the rest of humanity.

7. Preparing the Election

We might say that preparing the election runs on different paths which begin to converge more and more until they unite in the election itself.

The meditations on *the mysteries of the life of Christ our Lord* (Sp.Ex. 261) tend to familiarize the exercitant more and more with Christ. In this contemplative prayer, one develops a fine perception of the Lord's particular traits which will later be essential for the discernment of spirits. Though thinking is not forbidden here, we are dealing more with an intuitive and sensorial exercise which gradually grows more interior and solid until it becomes reality in a knowledge that is 'tasted and savored' difficult to express in words.

The Meditation of the Two Standards (Sp.Ex. 136-147) becomes decisive for the rest of the second week. Here, I am situated at the intersection of two forces which draw me in two opposite directions. My

decision is part of an interior conflict which goes beyond my own person and life. The dimension of salvation history with its apocalyptic aspects opens unexpectedly and I find myself caught in the middle. I recognize the great danger of being fooled and of letting myself be seduced by promising temptations; only humility and obedience allow me to resist.

All this is always in rapport with the fact of following Christ. In the book of the Exercises, we mention poverty and insults or contempt. These things and their counterparts, wealth and worldly honors, are not important for their value or lack of value in themselves but for the movement of humility or of pride that they incarnate. Concerning poverty, it is interesting to see how Ignatius links *actual* or external poverty to *spiritual poverty* (Sp.Ex. 146 and 147). Obviously, he does not hide the fact that all poverty and external rigidity carries with it the risk of favoring a certain spiritual pride when the corresponding interior movement is not truly 'spiritual'. It will only be spiritual if, as created beings, we keep alive in our consciousness the image of our total poverty.

The fourth path of personal development which leads towards the election is interior liberty around which the meditation on the *three classes of persons* rotates (Sp.Ex. 149-157). This exercise is equivalent to a test to see if we are still attached to anything and, if the answer is yes, to determine the object or objects of this attachment. Ignatius inserts a prayer here: *When we feel a tendency for or repugnance against actual poverty . . . , it is very helpful . . . to ask . . . that the Lord should choose one for actual poverty* (Sp.Ex. 157).

The internal attitude required before the election appears in all clarity in the *three ways of being humble* (Sp.Ex. 164-168). It can be identified with a 'folly of love'. It is significant that Ignatius does not speak here expressly of love, but rather, of humility and that he establishes a direct relationship between this folly as a supreme form of love or humility and the simple road of obedience to God's commandments. Once again, we realize that this spiritual development is not situated on a sophisticated and elitist level from which one can look over the shoulder of 'simple Christians'. Rather, it is a question of a

refined sensitivity towards the Beloved where all that may already be inherently contained in the simple forms of the spiritual life is unfolded more (*MAGIS*) in detail.

8. The measure of grace and the way of knowing it

The movement towards the election results from the tension between prayer that is becoming more and more passive and a dynamic love which Ignatius summarizes in the word *MAGIS*. It is very important for the election that both tendencies converge in the middle. If the process develops correctly, according to what is indicated in the book of the Exercises, the danger in this point comes rather from a love which the exercitant must have, a love that moves us always forward since it is the mature fruit of *great courage and generosity towards his Creator and Lord* (Sp.Ex. 5). In itself, this love is so grand and excessive that it can easily dazzle us and be converted suddenly into spiritual pride. There are many examples of this in Church history.

Therefore, in the movement towards the election and in making it, it is of the greatest importance that this love keep a certain distance from itself. Only then will it be able to avoid the danger of degenerating into a self made effort. In other words, *the supreme form of humble love is obedience*. In the book of the Exercises, Ignatius does not explicitly use the word 'obedience' but, after all, it is factually what is meant. Here; we have the key question: How can love directed to an infinite God know that a form of finite and material life especially corresponds to the will and indulgence of this infinite God? It is clear and obvious that we must liberate ourselves from all our 'attachments' to created things if we want to find and encounter God as our unique goal. But how can we recognize the means which are supposed to allow us to reach the goal of our lives when the distance between the goal and the means is infinite? Only if we have integrated and assumed in our movement this colossal difference between created means and infinite goals while moving towards 'election' thus experiencing an immense thirst that no material goods can calm, will we be well prepared for the election.

Ignatius expresses this same idea in more moderate terms in his repeated warnings on how to make the election: *It is necessary to keep as my aim the end for which I am created, which is to praise God our Lord and save my soul, and, this supposed, to find myself indifferent . . .* (Sp.Ex. 179).

In the dynamic of the *second week*, the disproportion of the loving impulse towards God changes into a longing to resemble Christ insulted and humiliated, also going beyond all reasonable measures (cf. Sp.Ex. 167, third grade of humility). This transformation constitutes the starting point for beginning to know the divine will, a process which is paralleled by the incarnation of our God (cf. especially Phil. 2: 5-11). This movement reaches its culminating and definitive point in the cross. Following the movement, the one making the election is animated by the desire to surrender himself and to turn towards the perspective of the cross designated in the exercises by the trio of poverty-opprobrium-humiliation. Here, too, there is a lack of proportion. What kind of poverty, of humiliations, of insults and injustices does God ask of me? Each concrete modality brings limitations and a measure. What is my measure and how can I recognize it? This is the important question that must be asked by the one preparing for 'election' with an obedient soul and not according to one's own will.

The rules for *the greater discernment of spirits . . . for the second week* correspond to this question (Sp.Ex. 328). Already, the first rule sets out the principle of that response: *It is proper to God and to His angels in their movements to give true spiritual gladness and joy . . .* (Sp.Ex. 329). The fifth rule makes clear how this basic principle can serve to know the measure of grace that is given us. It supposes that 'thoughts' are given us which propose to us an object of election which seems agreeable to God. The text insists on the interior process set in motion by a determined 'thought' both on the rational and on the affective level: *We ought to note well the course of the thoughts and if the beginning, the middle and the end is all good, inclined to all, it is a sign of the good Angel; but if in the course of the thoughts which he brings it ends in something bad, of a distracting tendency, or less good than what the soul had previously proposed to do,* [here it is a question of the sequence of thoughts with regard to the objective aspect of the

election] *or if it weakens it or disquiets or disturbs the soul, taking away its peace, tranquillity and quiet, which it had before*, [here it is a question of reacting on the affective level] *it is a clear sign that it proceeds from the evil spirit, enemy of our profit and eternal salvation* (Sp.Ex. 333).

Following this fifth point, the one who is going to make the election — remaining in the dynamic of the *MAGIS* with the intention of following Christ — will discover the measure of grace which is granted assisting the 'thoughts' that come, that is, the ideas and images which are presented as a materialization of his desires. When such thoughts do not correspond to this personal measure of grace or go beyond it, the soul, anxious to follow Christ, reacts by becoming weak, disquieted or disturbed. It is thus experienced as a sudden change of climate in which one loses *peace, tranquillity and quiet which it had before*. It is clear that this refined method only functions if the exercitants have prepared themselves for the election in the way explained in the previous section. Supposing this, Ignatius can write: *It is a clear sign . . .* (Sp.Ex. 333).

9. Following Christ, and object of the election

From what we have said, it follows that the object of the election can only be a concrete realization of following Christ. An 'object' is thus transformed into an 'object of election' insofar as it is recognized as a way, place, form, factor and circumstance in which the dynamic of following Christ is lived. Here, we must take into account the difference between following and imitation. Imitation is an external repetition of an act carried out by one's model. It will correspond psychologically to the pursuit of an ideal (cf. above A 4) and will not come from the innermost being and depths of the person. Instead, following Christ is a personal process. It is not a simple adaptation to a model but rather an authentic 'creative act' inspired, certainly by the one whom we are following, but in an autonomous way and entirely under the follower's responsibility. Seen in this light, following Christ always appears as creative. From the election is born something individually

new and original even though it is inserted into a true continuity with what preexisted.

This context can be understood theologically if we start with St. Paul's doctrine about the body of Christ and the charisms. Christ, the head, adopts us as members of his body to be present in the world, not only in a static but in an active way, acting through us, being in a certain sense multiplied through us, his Father's sons and daughters and thus continuing his creative and redemptive work in this world until the end of time. Because we are personal and not 'mechanical' instruments, our bond with the head, Christ, depends, above all, on the Holy Spirit who is the fundamental charism of the Christian. With the election, this reality is made explicit through concrete charisms which are at the same time gifts and tasks. The Spirit equips us for these tasks and invites us to carry them out.

In its texts on the election (Sp.Ex. 169-189), the book of the Exercises seems far from such wide perspectives. In explaining *about what matters an election ought to be made* (Sp.Ex. 170), Ignatius only generally defines the area of possible matters and gives some examples.

He says that the object of the election must be *indifferent or good in itself* and be allowed *within our Holy Mother, the hierarchical Church* (Sp.Ex. 170). As examples, he cites the priesthood, marriage and accepting or rejecting benefices . . . (Sp.Ex. 171). In general, it is a question of *a life or state within the limits of the Church* (Sp.Ex. 177).

Here, we are touching one of the more difficult points of the election. The point is that a link is established between an interior movement, unique and creative, and a determined situation or external institution. How can we carry out the fusion of two such different elements? There is a double danger: either the interior movement of prayer does not enter into contact with the world of objects or the one who chooses personally steps or drops out of this interior movement and continues, as before, to deal with situations and personal activities in the external world.

To get around these obstacles, Ignatius gives the following instructions: *we will begin . . . contemplating his [Jesus'] life, to*

investigate and ask in what life or state His Divine Majesty wants to be served by us (Sp.Ex. 135). There are no particular meditations that lead the exercitants to concentrate exclusively or principally on the objects of their elections. (In the *Third Time for Election*, Sp.Ex. 177-188, this is different. Here explicit exercise time is provided. In the Directories, the first and second time of election is given preference.) They will do it, rather, by focusing their attentions on Christ and his way, that is, aspiring to *imitate and be more actually like Christ our Lord* (Sp.Ex. 167). Thus, the one making the election comes to see a 'life and state' in objective realities, circumstances and institutions achieving a true incarnation from which something new comes forth. A determined form of life is transformed into his particular way of life, therefore eliminating the danger that at the last moment his interior dynamic will degenerate into simple adaptation.

10. Aspects of life, life decisions, state of life

If, after the preceding considerations, we look once more at the person seeking his/her identity, we see many domains or aspects of life where they inevitably have to make certain decisions when arriving on the threshold of adulthood. On the one hand, they must be concerned about their material existence and, for this reason, acquire goods. On the other, they must enter into relationships with their neighbors and give a concrete form to these relationships. Finally, as adults, they must take the reins of life into their own hands, taking responsibility for it and working according to their own personal criteria. These vital situations usually take shape when people arrive at the moment of which we have spoken: the election of a spouse and a profession. These decisions are extremely important because they concern a lasting state and globally fashion the future. One thus adopts a 'state of life' which will determine many other things from this point forward. That's why family situations and profession are essential features of a person's identity.

In the measure in which all this forms part of the order of creation, human beings, since their fall, run the risk of being separated

from their Creator allowing themselves to be taken over by greed, lust or the ambition for power. Thus the warning: *Do not love the world . . . Because all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world* (1 John 2:15-16). For his part, the apostle Paul advises a general reserve on our attitude before persons and things: *Let those who have wives live as though they had none . . . , and those who buy as if they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as if they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away. I want you to be free from anxieties* (1 Cor. 7:29-32).

This is a biblical formulation of what the book of Exercises calls 'indifference'. This interior liberty before persons and things is not an element already given at the beginning to we who are poor creatures. It is, rather, something that we reach through long struggle. The starting point of this fight is the human inclination — the fruit of original sin and of the history of each individual — to hold on to persons and things in an unfree manner. Then it needs a contrary movement in order to reestablish the equilibrium of 'indifference' or inner freedom. Only in this way can we love the world as free and liberated beings. The Ignatian *MAGIS* should also be understood in this sense.

Interior attitudes and movements must be incarnated in our day-to-day life if they are to become real for the human being. Consequently, in dealing with the world, it is not enough to be restrained in a purely spiritual way; this restraint must also have a material facet and prove itself in a practical act of 'letting go'. The exigencies of life and our own experiences of deprivation haunt us imposing their dictates upon us. Implicit in the whole question is whether we accept or refuse to integrate them into our lives (cf. above A 3). The movement of the Exercises towards the *MAGIS* exceeds the willingness to accept such exigencies by anticipating them actively in prayer and considering the concrete situations which can occur: real poverty, insults, etc.

What does this have to do with the life decisions to be made? It is a matter of the 'place' we seek for ourselves in life. With the *MAGIS* of the Exercises, Ignatius precisely captures the movement which has led to the formation of religious orders in history. From the ancient monks to Ignatius

himself, this came as an abandonment of the usual place of residence to go into the 'desert'. Under the impulse of a strong desire to follow Jesus both spiritually and literally and with the help of grace, there surged forth what theologians call 'religious state' or 'religious life'. A person can only start on this journey with the 'permission' of God. Otherwise, his decision will be dangerously arbitrary (cf. above, C 8). That's why, until the moment of choice, the *MAGIS* continues to be an interior movement of prayer which is concretized only in the election itself.

Therefore, we have a way of incarnating this Biblical restraint before the world which we spoke of earlier: *in the world* but not *of the world* (John 17: 9-19), as reflected in the double petitions for poverty in one of the colloquies preceding the election. The first prayer has an unconditional character: *...that I may be received under his standard; and first in the highest spiritual poverty...* The second touching on *actual poverty* depends on a condition: *...if His Divine Majesty would be served and would want to choose and receive me ...* (Sp.Ex. 147). Without expressly saying it, Ignatius refers here to the double state of... *the observance of the commandments* and of *evangelical perfection* (Sp.Ex. 135). The *observance of the commandments* is the way of following Christ without abandoning one's own insertion into the natural structures of human life: marriage, the family, private property, professional activity, free disposition of oneself. The state of 'evangelical perfection' or 'religious life', on the other hand, implies a true renunciation to be rooted in those structures. St. Ignatius adds that it is possible *to arrive at perfection* (Sp.Ex. 135) in both states. Apart from this, the Christian who embraces the religious life also uses the world, being that he not only lives in it but of it. What differentiates him from the lay person is his greater dependency and his greater surrender by means of abandoning the structures of security. Thus, the first object proposed for the election is that of the 'states of life'.

All this clearly demonstrates the strict link that Ignatius sees between the election and following Christ. The question of the natural inclinations and gifts of a person are not considered in the texts on election but this does not signify that they are to be repressed. We understand these texts well, above all the rules for the discernment of spirits, when we affirm that the natural human elements are integrated

in the experience of *consolation* (cf. Sp.Ex. 135; 316; 329). When we join the election to this experience, whose basic quality is described as *true joy* (Sp.Ex. 329) and *peace* (Sp.Ex. 333), we prevent the exercitant from abusing himself and his natural tendencies. However, these elements are not a criterion of election.

A life decision, taken in the sense of one's own inclinations and natural gifts, will only be *a sound and good election* (Sp.Ex. 178 and 184) if it is based on indifference and an orientation towards God as the supreme goal of life. In order to gain this base, the inclination and gifts must first be surrendered to God so that He may dispose of these as He wants. The two ways of making an election indicated by *the third time* aim precisely at this. Both can be understood as attempts to lead the exercitant at the last moment to indifference, that is, to the 'second manner of humility' (Sp.Ex. 166) when the movement of the 'third manner' towards the *MAGIS* of poverty and insults and of the desire to *be rated as worthless and a fool for Christ* (Sp.Ex. 167) has not yet provided its effects.

11. Following Christ and vocation to the secular state

The question of how to carry out their basic vocation remains for Christians who remain 'in the world'. Here, it is a question of using the election to give an 'active' form to following Christ in different domains of life. The professional life with its tasks and responsibilities, my chosen place of residence, my political orientations, all other commitments next to the professional life, etc. are one area of life.

Another area concerns human relationships: marriage — not in the abstract as opposed to religious life but in a relationship with a specific person — style and way of expression of the conjugal community, when to have children and how many, friendships, etc.

The third area of questions would directly concern my life with Christ: into what spiritual dynamics does Christ place us to lead us to

himself? This question of spirituality is often linked to our belonging to a community where, as a Christian, I make a certain commitment. What role should I play in the local Church? How and where will I give an active witness as a Christian? How will I live my co-responsibility as a member of the Church in my community, in the local Church, or on higher levels? What form will I give my everyday Christian life: prayer, spiritual reading, receiving the sacraments, etc.? These questions do not arise all at the same time. Frequently, we will be confronted with them through our relationship with others and in specific life situations where as Christians, who live in the midst of the world, we are challenged to give our answers. Thus, the existence of those who *live in Christ* in an attentive and sensitive way will be transformed into a permanent 'election process'.

In this context, it is strange that the book of Exercises speaks, above all, of the possession and administration of goods. The corresponding rules and annotations are also situated here in the line of the *MAGIS* so important for preparing the election. We read for example: *for the reasons already mentioned and for many others, it is always better and more secure in what touches one's person and state of life, to be more sparing and more diminished in order to draw closer to our High Priest, our model and rule, who is Christ our Lord* (Sp.Ex. 344; the rules for distributing alms, Sp.Ex. 337-344).

Taken literally, the exercises which prepare the election can present a global image of 'negation of the world' and thus seem little adapted to a lay person because they are too oriented towards religious life. This objection, however, does not aim at the essential since Ignatius presupposes a positive relationship with the gifts of creation (cf. above A 5 and A 6). On the other hand, these words of Christ apply also to the Christian lay person . . . *As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world* (John 17:18). The relationship of the lay person with the world, then, is not basically distinct from that of religious except structurally.

Today, we especially insist on the poverty inherent in following Christ and on its socio-political dimension. Therefore, it is within this dimension that we must understand and reconsider the rules and

indications of the book of the Exercises. This is already happening in many places, above all, in communities and countries of the so-called Third World and, equally, in our own communities if they are directly in contact with these countries.

The question of the concrete way of conforming our lives to Christ is of the utmost importance for the lay Christian. Thus, just as those who feel called to religious vows must ask what order or what institute they should enter so, also, the laity must ask themselves about their way of life and the community in which they can best give a material form to their following of Christ. This is of crucial importance to their following Christ. One who desires to live truly with Christ and in Christ must bring this desire to life in his daily existence. A community of faith can give support to and guide a person along the chosen path and it will also challenge and question the person. This, then, will be the next 'object of election' in view of following Christ.

12. Following Christ and vocation to the priesthood

The question regarding the essence of the priesthood and the way of living it is more complex than it seems at first sight. Its negative facet is revealed in the passionate debates which are raging around the present role of the priesthood and the conditions of admission to this state. To this is often added the situation of abandonment and isolation from which many priests suffer. That's why I will try, first of all, to break up the complexity into its single elements.

In the Latin Church, the option for the priesthood is linked to celibacy. Thus, an essential element of the priesthood is derived from the religious state. While respecting the duty of obedience to the bishop, which becomes real especially in the multiple and often varied tasks imposed by diocesan authority, the diocesan priest seems to live close to the condition of the religious state. Therefore, it is not an

exaggeration to say that the one desiring to become a priest in the Latin Church must choose to follow Christ in the 'religious state' even when he retains the right to private property and has a greater liberty in regard to his own life than if he belonged to an order. The aforementioned structural factors — not only personal — of renunciation profoundly mark his life although he does not have the community and spiritual support from which religious benefit.

Furthermore, the priest is involved in a spiritual function within the Church. When preaching, carrying out a liturgy and administering the sacraments for the Christian community, the priest is a representative of Christ, the Head of the universal Church. He has an official function which gives the faithful the right to his services. Thus, his availability is summarized by a double *for*: before Christ he is *for* the community and before the community he is *for* Christ. This implies, for the priest, a particular form of participation in the 'giving of self of Christ'. Formulated in an extreme way, it is not the man, as such, who is called for but Christ. It is not his own good that has to be considered but the good of others. To thus represent Christ is somewhat dangerous as it can lead to assuming certain roles without ever realizing oneself as a person. Priesthood may easily be sought as a substitute. A person who is considering becoming a priest, therefore, should carefully examine whether he is able to build his own identity. Preaching and the liturgy require someone who has already gone far in the discovery of his own identity and can, thus, be an authentic witness.

Thirdly, we must take into account that the various management tasks which many of the priests have to carry out bring with it a good dose of communications and of conflicts. Evidently, this is a question of personal qualities and practice. However, if also in these tasks it is a question of the following of Christ, the shadow of the cross will be there. In other periods, an ecclesiastical position or the priestly *function* could perhaps go hand in hand with appreciation, esteem and a pleasant life but, today, they are rather a source of stress since much is expected from the clergy and such expectations often imply contradictions. To accept this burden, without turning into a type of manager nor becoming an isolated and bitter man, is only possible if it has been given by the grace of God as is said in the sacrament of orders.

Even when it is true that after ordination the priest will and must grow ever more into his office throughout his whole life, he must previously familiarize himself with the difficulties and tribulations inherent in it in order to measure fully the weight of his decision, not only on the theoretical level but, also, on the affective level. Only in this way can he have a true election and know if this charism is the measure of grace that God has granted him. Again, we realize the importance of first making a choice for Jesus Christ and for a life in him before looking at the priesthood as an object of election. Only his choice for Christ and a deep personal relationship with him could be a valid motive for exposing himself to the future difficulties and burdens of priesthood. Otherwise, he runs the risk of misjudging and avoiding or even rejecting essential aspects of such a complex function because any other foundation for such a life decision is extremely fragile.

13. Ignatian Exercises and Ignatian Spirituality

A clarification is needed, nonetheless, for the correct use of the Exercises of St. Ignatius as an efficacious instrument in making life decisions. We have already seen that the Exercises initiate a determined dynamic preparing *the election*, that is, a process which, from the beginning, we have called a 'movement towards the *MAGIS*'.

The gradation involved in this *MAGIS* is a distinctive trait of Ignatian spirituality. *All for the greater glory of God* is the motto of the Society of Jesus whose Constitutions abound in comparative forms. The *General Principles* of the Christian Life Community (CLC), a lay movement inspired by the spirituality of St. Ignatius, are situated along these same lines. We could then ask: can the election, spoken of by the Exercises, have another objective at all other than to lead exercitants to recognize, as their own charism, the Ignatian way of following Jesus? In preparing intensely for the election, doesn't the exercitant identify with this 'Ignatian dynamic' to the point of not being able to go beyond it?

We have an historical proof which dissipates this misgiving. Among those who made the complete exercises during the time of their author, only a small number entered the Jesuit order. Most of them remained in the state and position they had or even entered another religious order. This historic reality demonstrates that the Exercises can be more than only a means for *the election*. The Exercises are a means for seeking and finding God's will and the vocation for one's life whatever this vocation may be. But their dynamic, in particular the dynamic of the second week, can be chosen as charism for one's own life. For one who has done so, the Exercises are not only a means to be used in a sporadic way or even with regularity to seek a way but, rather, as a source of renewal for one's own way of life. A way of life that essentially consists in the *movement of the MAGIS*.

This distinction between the Exercises as an instrument and the Exercises as a way of life is important, above all, for those guiding others through them leaving the door open to a flexibility of use and helping them avoid the temptation to influence the exercitant improperly. The exercitant, then, can be tranquil knowing beforehand that using the Ignatian Exercises as an instrument of finding one's own vocation does not mean having to aim at a specific vocation.



(D)

Sent as a Member of the Body of Christ



1. Mission within the Church

The Church does not seem to play an important role in the process of the exercises. The book mentions it relatively little and, as some say, only in passing. Thus, the rules for *the true sentiment which we ought to have in the Church militant* (Sp.Ex. 352-370) give the impression of being no more than an appendix. This way of seeing, however, is radically transformed when we read these rules in the light of St. Ignatius' life and actions. Only then do we see clearly the importance of the Church in the spiritual journey opened up by the Exercises.

Regarding the theme we are considering, this importance is doubled. First of all, before making a life decision, the exercitant has to have a basically positive attitude towards ecclesiastical authorities and all authority. The book of the Exercises does not directly deal with this problem but a positive attitude towards ecclesial authority is presupposed in the observations on keeping the precepts of the Church. As demonstrated by Ignatius' life and some of his 'annotations', above all, the reference to fear of man (Sp.Ex. 9), this attitude is in no way a blind dependence improper in an adult.

Secondly, the election, itself, 'also appears in a new light. From the outset, we only see in it the search for the divine will. In this sense, Ignatius goes so far as to dare to desire *that the Creator and Lord Himself should communicate Himself to His devout soul* and asks the Exercise guide, representative of the Church in this case, that he not interfere in the internal debates of the exercitant until *standing in the centre like a balance*, [the guide of the Exercises] *leave the Creator to act immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord* (Cf. Sp.Ex. 15). This line of thought awakened not a few misgivings in Ignatius' time because many thought that the author of the Exercises desired to keep the Church and its authorities on the margin of decisive spiritual events. Precisely to silence the reproaches made to him that he had joined the group of those who, contrary to Church teachings, believed only in the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he decided to add to the Exercises the rules for thinking with the Church. In the thirteenth rule, he links the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit to incorporation in and personal adhesion to the Church: *believing that between Christ our Lord, the Bridegroom and the Church, His Bride, there is the same Spirit which governs and directs us for the salvation of our souls* (Sp.Ex. 365).

The comment that the election must be *within our Holy Mother the hierarchical Church* (Sp.Ex. 170, 177) thus takes on another significance. We are not dealing with a, more or less, obvious or astute addition. Ignatius aims here at an essential aspect of the election: given that following Christ is not a simple imitation but a 'creative making present of Christ himself' in and through the one who follows him, it is essential to join this step to the Church, the Body of Christ.

This perspective already becomes apparent in the call of the *temporal king*. When Ignatius has Christ say: *It is My Will to conquer all the world and all enemies* (Sp.Ex. 95), he thus designates the mission and raison d'être of the Church. At this point, the whole journey towards the election is situated in the context of the Body of Christ. This becomes even clearer in the meditation on the *two standards* where we read: *To consider how the Lord of all the world chooses so many persons — Apostles, Disciples, etc. — and sends them through all the world spreading His sacred doctrine through all states and conditions of*

persons (Sp.Ex. 145). Following Christ thus signifies incorporation into the community of those who participate in Christ's mission.

This leads to an important consequence for the process of election: it has to be confirmed by the Church. This can happen in many distinct ways. It is often carried out silently, so to speak, when the whole process is structured and takes its place within the life of the Church. Nonetheless, there are also forms of following which require the express approbation of the ecclesial authority to become reality. For example, no one can enter into a religious congregation, receive Holy Orders, exercise a ministry or carry out a public function in the Church without having been called and sent for this by the competent authority. The words *called and sent* indicate that the corresponding juridical act has a profound significance because, thanks to it, we effect the insertion into the Body of Christ which we spoke of earlier.

In this respect, a task is also incumbent on the Exercise guide. Naturally, it is not the guide's place to anticipate the judgement of the ecclesial authority, but it can happen that during the stage of election, the guide must help the exercitant to understand when he/she has reached the point of going beyond 'the limits of the Church'. While it is true that the guide must be careful not to present these limits in an too restrictive interpretation, it is no less true that in the light of proven theological knowledge of these, the guide must show them to the exercitant. It is here that the guide represents the ecclesiastical authority.

Only when the one making the election submits to the Church's approbation will the election be completed. Only then will the one making the election be completely incarnated in this human and social reality which, in consequence of the incarnation of Christ, is in the world.

2. The law of the grain of wheat

The Gospel makes it clear that participation in Jesus' mission is a source of conflict and persecution. Jesus, Himself, experienced the

deep pain of seeing that those who delivered him to the cross were precisely the Jews, the ones to whom his message was first addressed. Thus, the person who decides to follow Jesus in a concrete way will hardly be astonished if 'those outside' do not understand his/her election, but, suffering from misunderstandings, criticism, even rejection from within the Church itself is a different matter. As long as the exercitant meets only passive resistance here, it may not be so difficult for him to handle. But, if the ecclesial authority does not allow him to continue working according to his election and, in spite of every effort to explain matters this prohibition is not lifted, the person finds himself caught between two poles . . . on the one hand, the internal guidance of grace and on the other, the external guidance of representatives of the Church's authority. On both sides there can be error since there is no question here of the infallibility of the magisterium of a council or a pope.

Ignatius, himself, faced this situation in Jerusalem and relates in detail his experience in his autobiography. He has a *very firm purpose* of remaining in Jerusalem and *he judges that nothing could make him abandon carrying it out* (Aut. 46). These words seem to indicate that his insistence on staying there was a part of his election made in Manresa as the fruit of a profound mystical experience. However, the responsible ecclesial authority in the Holy Land, the Franciscan provincial, refuses him permission to carry out his plan. Ignatius reacts by saying that *because they so judged with the authority they had . . . I will obey them* (Aut. 47). Thus, his plan of life failed even before beginning. This produced in him a deep internal agitation: *Once the said pilgrim (Ignatius) understood that the will of God was not in Jerusalem, he continued to ask himself what he should do* (Aut. 50). In any case, in spite of his deep anguish, he could have no doubts that God had made known his will by means of the representatives of ecclesial authority. Therefore, what the latter has determined is preferable to internal impulses even when we consider them well founded. In similar situations, all the saints always proceeded in the way indicated by Ignatius in his rules: *to have the true sentiment which we ought to have in the Church militant: All judgement laid aside, we ought to have our mind ready, and prompt to obey, in all, the true Spouse of Christ our Lord, which is our holy Mother the Hierarchical Church* (Sp.Ex. 353).

Therefore, it is logical that the process of the Exercises does not end with the election, but leads us to the contemplation of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. Right after the election, it can seem natural to get ready to put into practice what has been proposed to us. In the world, this means carrying it out and having success. Exactly because we are not dealing here with our own will and desires but rather with the will of God, we should feel more motivated and obliged to bring it to fulfillment. Nevertheless, the redemption of the world by the death and resurrection of Christ shows that the maximum fruitfulness of our works does not reside in success, but in obeying the law of the grain of wheat: *Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains only a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit* (John 12:24). We do not know whether or not this destiny will be that of the exercitant when he or she has finished the exercises. To prepare them for it is, however, the objective of the *Third week*.

3. Given to the power of darkness

At the beginning of his passion, Jesus says: *this is your hour, this is the reign of darkness* (Luke 22:53). To him, who had been so clear and sure of himself in all his declarations, there finally arrives the fear and anguish of the Mount of Olives. During his passion, he will remain silent and allow others to mistreat him and manipulate him without a complaint. Already on the cross, he will exclaim reciting psalm 22: *My God, my God, Why have you abandoned me* (Mark 15:34)?

The exercitant, too, after having made his election, must consider the possibility of being wrapped in darkness and anguish of not perceiving the sense of his proposals. This can happen in the form of fear or an interior darkness which presents everything, especially the election he has just made, as absurd and without sense. It can also occur through the misunderstanding of friends and companions whom, he believes, agree with and are in solidarity with his election and from whom he had hoped to get help in moving forward. Finally, it can be a

matter of calumnies, ignorance of his intentions, illness, accidents and even the refusal of approbation by the ecclesial authority to put into action his 'election.' Thus, it seems that Satan shows that he is the strongest, demonstrating the uselessness of our efforts, i.e., the long journey towards the election and the election itself. For the one who sees himself delivered over to the powers of darkness, nothing now makes sense. He will be threatened by the dangers of considering vain and absurd first the election and what preceded it, then his being Christian and finally his whole life. The logical consequences of all this will be moral or physical suicide.

In such a situation, it is decisive to count on the help of a guide who, without allowing the exercitant to be pulled towards the vortex of doubt and auto-destruction, clearly and serenely speaks the voice from on high to the exercitant so that he/she can get back on their feet. The person subjected to such hard trials needs the support of the community of the faithful and of its exterior signs. It is a moment when one, unable to experience one's own faith, lives through the faith of the others.

In this phase of the process, *it is important to show that it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle but against the principalities and the ruling forces who are masters of the darkness in this world, the spirits of evil in the heavens* (Eph. 6:12). The first attack is to nullify the election, to cancel it. If this first assault is rejected, others follow against faith and even life itself. Only holding on to Christ and to the Church is one able to resist such violence.

4. Representation

What is most difficult for the person who, here, feels abandoned to the power of darkness is to see oneself as a useless and an unproductive, when not embarrassing or harmful, member of the Body of Christ. In reality, one is now more fruitful than before because one is more deeply inserted into the circulatory system of this mystical organism. Although the experience seems to deny this fact, one's

suffering is no longer just a purification of one's likes and disordered addictions but, rather, aims at the election, in other words, at the decision to follow Christ in a concrete and resolute manner. This suffering is typical of a disciple of Christ against whom the powers of darkness vent their anger but we are dealing with an impotent anger because Christ has already overcome it.

The Christian consciousness has always been aware of this mysterious fruitfulness. In spite of the frequent erroneous and sometimes abusive applications of the idea of sacrifice or expiation, the concept itself is not false. It points to a connectedness towards which all of humanity converges. Becoming a human being, Christ has become a member of this Body and by his death, his descent to hell and the resurrection, irradiates his saving grace to the farthest corners of the earth. This makes the members of his mystical body more 'accessible' to one another. The more they are united to Christ the head, the more closely they participate in his work of redemption. Once this union has been decided upon by means of the election and carried out in the concrete circumstances of their lives, they truly cooperate with Christ sharing his same sufferings for the redemption of the world. They share both his sufferings and the 'for . . .', that is, in a certain way, they complete and represent Christ. Undoubtedly, this is what Saint Paul wants us to understand in his letter to the Colossians when he says: *now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the Church* (Col. 1:24).

5. Easter

The resurrection from the dead is not a return to life on earth. For this reason, in the contemplation of the *Risen One* proper to the fourth week of the Exercises, it is not a matter of forgetting the sad and somber aspects of life thanks to the easy consolation of a happy ending. Nor is it, already, solely a question of experiencing beforehand, as an individual, a participation in the glory of Christ. The sense of the fourth

week consists in showing the exercitant, with complete clarity, the salvific dimension of belonging to the Body of Christ a dimension which, in the earlier phase of the third week, remained hidden. This is precisely what is referred to by the book of the Exercises. In the third week we read: ... *to consider how the Divinity hides Itself, that is, how It could destroy Its enemies and does not do it* (Sp.Ex. 196). And then in the fourth: ...*to consider how the Divinity, which seems to hide Itself in the Passion, now appears and shows Itself so marvelously in the most holy Resurrection by Its true and most holy effects* (Sp.Ex. 223).

The Christians, who commit themselves to follow Christ, cannot, any longer, see their own salvation isolated from that of their brothers and sisters. Thus, happiness resides, above all, in proving that the grain of wheat which dies *bears much fruit* (John 12:24). This is the decisive pass on to the level of the experience of universal participation: *If one members suffers all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together* (1Cor. 12:26). Therefore, the fourth week of the Exercises should be understood as a preliminary contemplation which reveals the universality of the salvific work of Christ, head of all the universe.

With regard to the theme of life decisions and of vocation, it is significant that the described process definitively aims at our identity as a member of the Body of Christ. On the one hand, we must be converted into *co-heirs with Christ* which happens when *we suffer with him in order that we also be glorified with him* (Rom 8: 17). Moreover, *creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God*, because it also *will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God* (Rom. 8:19.21). Consequently, during our lives we find ourselves halfway between Christ, who went before us by his death and resurrection, and the whole human race and creation which are still moving forward. The deepest sense of our lives comes from being joined to this salvific organism, the Body of Christ, which permits us to be fruitful.



(E)

In Order to Gain Love



Chapter 12 of St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in which he speaks of the distinct charisms present in the body of the Church, is followed by chapter 13 called *the hymn to love*. In it, Paul shows an inner breath of life which animates the multiple gifts, charisms and ways of this mystical body. After enumerating some of these gifts as those of tongues, of prophecy, of knowledge and of having all faith, he ends up by saying: *If I have not love, I am nothing* (1Cor. 13:2). He continues by alluding to something having a most important role in the Exercises, poverty: *If I give away all I have . . . but have not love, I gain nothing* (1Cor. 13: 3).

The equivalent to chapter 13 of the first letter to the Corinthians is at the end of the Exercises, *The Contemplation to Gain Love* (Sp.Ex. 230-237). Here, the whole Ignatian process is summarized, once more, assimilated into a history of love. Far from all sentimentalism, Ignatius defines love as *interchange between two parties* (Sp.Ex. 231) and emphasizes with his habitual sobriety that it is not possible to reduce it to mere sentiments and desires: *... love ought to be put more into deeds than in words* (Sp.Ex. 230). The author of the Exercises thus summarizes, once more, the whole process which begins with enthusiasm, which is then incarnated in the most intimate depths of the person, takes on a concrete form for following Christ, ending up like the grain of wheat, disappearing for the world and bearing much fruit in the fertile soil of the Church. Although the text of this contemplation does

not have a directly Christological character, it is, in fact, impregnated with Christ and his way from beginning to end.

If God is Love (cf. 1 John 4:16), then human love must be limitless. This is why Ignatius gave his contemplation the title: *Contemplation to Gain Love*. True wisdom says of itself: *Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more* (Sir. 24:21). And the Song of Songs puts these words in the mouth of the bride: *I am sick with love* (Song 5:8). Thus, it is clear that love overcomes the contradiction between promise and achievement, seeking and finding, desiring and experiencing, scarcity and fullness, even if it does not completely suppress it. Looking back, we can already recognize that from the beginning of the journey and throughout the various situations and steps, it was that same love that moved us and continues to move us.

Thus, for Ignatius, the force which truly pushes us forward on the journey started consists in: *that the Creator and Lord Himself should communicate Himself to His devout soul, inflaming it with His love and praise, and disposing it for the way in which it will be better able to serve Him in the future* (Sp.Ex. 15). As for the consolation, he describes it like this: *...when some interior movement in the soul is caused through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and when it can in consequence, love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but in the Creator of them all* (Sp.Ex. 316). In this way we open ourselves to the reality that God is all in all and that we can find God in everything. We have integrated our lives into the 'all' created and led by God to the point that we can already swim lightly and freely in this immense ocean of love.

