

PAUL ON THE DYNAMIC OF GRACE,  
AND THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

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*This article stems from 5 presentations made in September 2013 in St. John NB at the annual gathering of the Atlantic Association for the Spiritual Exercises Apostolate. This meeting brought together over 40 persons, mostly lay, but also religious and clerical, from the Maritime provinces of Canada. I have often taught Paul on grace during my years at Regis College in Toronto from 1971 to 2002. This meeting was an opportunity for me to relate Paul and Ignatius on a topic pertinent to my present ministry in the area of spirituality.*

There are five units to this article. The first and second are on Paul's experience of grace, communal and personal. The third and fourth are more systematic in nature, dealing with the stages of grace in Paul, and the conflict to the death between grace and sin. The feedback from the participants led me to develop the fifth presentation on grace and tribulation.

Grace permeates every part of the New Testament, and in it we find different approaches which are complementary to each other. These approaches are reflected in the world-wide Church of today. Grace in John's writings is highlighted in the Eastern Churches, and stresses the mysteries of Christ's incarnation and our divinization; grace in Paul's writings is reflected in the Churches of the West, and stresses the mysteries of Christ's death and resurrection, and our deliverance from the power of sin; grace in the newly emerging Churches of the Southern world refers us to the mysteries of Christ's earthly life and pushes us in the direction of outreach and counter-cultural mission. We have chosen to focus on Paul's approach, well matched with that of Ignatius, who emerged in the Church of the West, knowing that the other two New Testament approaches are essential for a fully balanced perspective on how God is gracious to us.

1 PAUL'S EXPERIENCE OF GRACE IN THE COMMUNITY

Paul's teachings on grace are rooted in his own experience of grace transforming both communities and individuals. How does his teaching connect with the spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola, and, in particular, with the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises? And what insights will that give you in how to work with your directees?

Let us begin with his experience and go back to the very beginnings. Grace at work in the community is reflected in the very first text written by Paul, around 52 AD. He begins with thanksgiving to God for this life of grace as he perceives it. The word grace in Latin (*gratia*) and in Greek (*kharis*) means both the gift that is given freely and the ensuing thanksgiving which the recipient gives to the donor. Thanksgiving is the proper context for grace. Here is the text:

*1 Thessalonians 1:1-10:*

2 *We give thanks to God for all of you,  
constantly mentioning you in our prayers,*  
3 *remembering -your **work of faith**  
-and **labour of love**  
-and **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ,  
before our God and Father.*

4 *For we know the choice (he made) of you, brethren beloved by God.*  
5 *for our Gospel did not come to you  
in word alone  
but also in power  
and in the Holy Spirit  
and in full conviction.*

*You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.*  
6 *And you became imitators of us and of the Lord,  
receiving the word in much tribulation  
with joy of the Holy Spirit,*  
7 *so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.*  
8 *For the Word of the Lord has sounded forth from you,  
not only in Macedonia and Achaia  
but in every place  
and your faith in God has gone forth, so that we need not say anything.*

9 *For they themselves report concerning us  
what a welcome we had among you,  
and how you **turned to God** from idols,  
**to serve** a living and true God,  
and **to wait** for his Son from heaven,  
whom he raised from the dead,  
Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

Essential points made in the text:

What we get in this text here is a snapshot of the dynamism of grace at work in these Christians.

A) As human beings we live in the present, but we are spiritual creatures that can also remember the past in which we are rooted and anticipate the future towards which we are moving. God's grace touches us in all three dimensions: past, present, and future. Already we see how this plays out in our text, under the familiar heading of faith, love, and hope, and we see how the theme recurs at the end of this thanksgiving passage:

past	work of faith	how you turned to God from idols
present	toil of love	to serve a living and true God
future	steadfastness of hope	to wait for his Son from heaven

- Faith: an attitude which is rooted in a past event (Christ's paschal mystery; our own entry in that mystery through our turning to God). We moved from putting our trust in idols which will never satisfy us to putting our trust in the living God. This set the foundation for our subsequent lives. While we may have already received this grace of conversion, it can always be deepened and its impact in our lives broadened.

- Love: the gift of faith enables us to live in the present coping with the tribulations that come our way. Transformed by love we forget ourselves in service, struggle, and toil. In serving our neighbour we serve the living and true God.

- Hope: this attitude enables us to keep a firm focus on the future when Christ will return in glory and save us from this present age (the wrath to come). No matter what comes our way, what might lead us to despair and impasse, with this gift of hope we can continue forward without deviation.

B) Grace is dynamic; it spreads by imitation (Paul imitates the Lord; the Thessalonians are invited to imitate Paul; and others hear about the Thessalonians, who in turn become examples for others to imitate. This outpouring of example and imitation is the outer dimension of grace; there is an inner dimension as well which enables the example to be recognized as such and to become operative in the life of both individuals and communities.

C) The inner/outer dynamic is already present in Paul's experience at this stage. The word might be preached outwardly, but what draws Paul to thanksgiving is that the Thessalonians receive it inwardly through the power of the Spirit. (E.G. Parable of the Sower and the Seed). For conversion to take place, there has to be the concurrence of a) God's outward action through events, challenges, other persons and what they say and do, and b) God's inward action through the transforming power of the Spirit. Because of this inward action the word is preached not in the void, but it is received in fertile ground, with the conviction that permeates the one who hears and brings results in his/her life and ministry.

D) Grace coexists with tribulation. Without grace we cannot endure in the midst of the obstacles and struggles we have to face. With grace, rather than discourage us tribulation tempers us and brings us to perfection.

Exercises of St. Ignatius:

A) Faith, hope, love are central to the exercises. Ultimately the Exercises are there to favour the life of grace within us and to enable the flourishing of the grace of conversion. Let us hear Ignatius on consolation: "Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all

internal joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord." Faith, hope, and love are not just something we believe we have received as gifts because it has been revealed to us, but also something which we are able to experience in some measure. Paul corroborates Ignatius on this point.

B) For Paul the Gospel comes not just in word but in power, the Holy Spirit, and in full conviction. That is the whole point of prayer in the Ignatian mode, especially contemplation. The point is to invite the exercitant to create a space within for the Spirit to act in a way that is tangible and transforming. Thus the words of scripture are allowed to be powerful, impregnated with the Spirit, leading to full conviction.

C) Responding to Christ's invitation to join him in the struggle to establish his kingdom is to be involved in the great dynamic of grace spreading outwards which Paul describes in this text. We respond as best we can, imitating Jesus in his attitudes, sharing in his ministry, becoming examples that others will want to follow. As directors our task is to enter into this great dynamic, inviting people not to sit on the sidelines but to participate in whatever way they can. Just as Paul did, we preach the word, in our case by bringing it to our exercitants, and we count on the Spirit to do the rest.

D) The initial conversion is from idolatry. That is a wide-ranging term. We will not encounter too many people who literally worship idols in their homes, but so many are caught up in attraction to the pervasive idols of self-satisfaction, of addictive behaviour, of power, of prestige, of wealth, whatever stands in the way of entrusting our lives to God in Christ.

2 PAUL'S EXPERIENCE OF GRACE IN HIS OWN PERSON
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In addition to describing grace at work in a community, Paul describes it at work in the individual person, using himself as an example:

*Philippians 3:3-14:*

*4 Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.*

*If any man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh,*

*I have more:*

*5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel,  
of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews;*

*as to the law a Pharisee,*

*6 as to zeal a persecutor of the Church,*

*as to righteousness under the law blameless.*

*7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*

*8 Indeed I count everything as loss*

*because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.  
 For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things,  
 and count them as refuse,  
 in order that I may gain Christ  
 9 and be found in him,  
 not having a righteousness of my own, based on law  
 but that which is through faith in Christ,  
 the righteousness from God that depends on faith;  
 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection,  
 and may share in his sufferings,  
 becoming like him in his death,  
 11 that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

*12 Not that I have already attained this, or am already perfect  
 but I press on to make it my own,  
 because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*

*13 Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own;  
 but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind,  
 and straining forward to what lies ahead:*

*14 I press on towards the goal  
 for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

In this text Paul tells us about two key moments of transition:

A) First, before his conversion on the road to Damascus, he was quite satisfied with himself, with his achievements, with the status before God in which he falsely boasted. But then he had an earthshaking encounter with Jesus in which everything fell into a totally different perspective. The things he counted on for his status before God were garbage, useless. Indeed the only thing that henceforth counts for him is Christ and his forgiveness. His self-justification through his own actions and resources is a sham; the only justification that counts is through faith in Christ.

This faith is far more than believing in certain propositional truths: it is a total surrender of ourselves to Jesus Christ as the one who saves us. (It also includes love and hope, but generally faith – as in the Thessalonian text above – is highlighted in the initial experience of conversion)

B) Having had this kind of conversion, the danger is of thinking that we have achieved our final fulfillment. We may bask in a religious honeymoon for a while, but at some point we have to wake up. Yes, everything is different because of our conversion, but everything remains the same. We have to continue living our lives, with a new purpose, a new energy, of course, but our weaknesses and flaws continue. We have not achieved the prize but must struggle towards it. We struggle with the same demons, but we have a renewed energy and confidence. God has made us his own; now we must make God our own. God has acted; we must react. Paul very soon realized this fact. He might have basked in a religious honeymoon for a short time, but

together with his conversion came a mission to be a preacher of the Gospel, a life in which he experienced much conflict from outside and a thorn in the flesh within. Thus conversion is not a momentary experience but has major implications for the rest of our lives. It entails a life of discipleship.

### Exercises of St. Ignatius

What this passage presents to us is the reality behind the progression in Ignatius' Exercises in the first and into the second week. The first week is devoted to conversion, the second to the discipleship to which are invited those who in the first week have recognized themselves as forgiven sinners. This transition between the weeks is brought to light in the first week, when the exercitant is invited to pray before Christ crucified and ask: "What have I done for Christ, what am I doing for Christ, what will I do for Christ?"

The graces of the two weeks are quite distinct. A story will tell the difference. Once when I was involved in the leadership of our Jesuit province we were looking at a promising candidate for our novitiate. He seemed to have received the graces of the first week in a profound way, and we thought that he would be a suitable candidate. But when presented with the fact that following Christ in the Society of Jesus meant that he would have to let go of his attachment to his family, his diocese, and that the call to re-shape his life was a radical one, he turned away. He thought he could be a Jesuit in his home diocese and was not willing to go further afield. He had received the grace of the first week, but was not ready for the grace of the second week. Like the rich young man he walked away.

First week: we recognize the idols in our lives that are not God, we smash our pretensions to self-justification, often lurking in a hidden way within our psyches. God graces us with a deeper knowledge of our own disorder, a realization that we are hanging by a thread over the abyss, but a solid one which is God's unfailing mercy. We entrust ourselves to God's mercy, letting go of all else.

Second week: The grace of repentance and our gratitude for it urges us on into service. As the Eternal King Christ has a project of universal salvation, of overcoming once and for all the power of sin in the world, and he seeks the collaboration of human beings – and that includes me – to achieve it. This means a life of struggle against many enemies, and is described by Paul in the life he leads after his conversion, of disciplined effort towards the goal of final salvation. The second week begins by inviting us to the grace of resolving to follow Jesus but it sharpens the focus of this resolve by discerning the ways and means for me, the unique path I am to follow.

3 GRACE HAS STAGES: already now and not yet
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We have opened ourselves to Paul's experience of grace as it works in the Christian community (of Thessalonika) and in himself. Paul also dealt with the same issues in a more theological

perspective, in response to the challenging problems that occurred within the communities he evangelized. As he struggled with the apostolic challenges they presented to him, he drew on his own experience of grace, and he put it together with his knowledge of God's action on behalf of his people as described in the Hebrew scriptures which he knew intimately. Our remaining three units will be based on his theological perspective: grace and its stages; grace and sin; grace and tribulation.

We have seen in the first text that grace respects the fact that as human beings (unlike animals) because of our spiritual selves we are simultaneously plunged into the past (faith), the present (love), and the future (hope). In the second text we focused on the tension in Paul, touched by grace, between what has already happened in his life – on the road to Damascus – and what still needed to happen on his journey towards final salvation. Already Paul is experiencing in his own life and ministry the tension between the already now and the not yet – terms used by Pauline scholars today. He has had (already now) a major conversion experience, and all is different for him. But just as before he lives in a struggle to achieve what is not yet at hand.

Paul develops this tension in a more systematic way in his main letters, in response to the similar tensions experienced by the members of his communities. These tensions led to numerous conflicts. He tried to develop a balanced theology to help these community members live with one another peacefully in spite of their different religious perspectives. Roughly speaking, here are the two groups he had to manage:

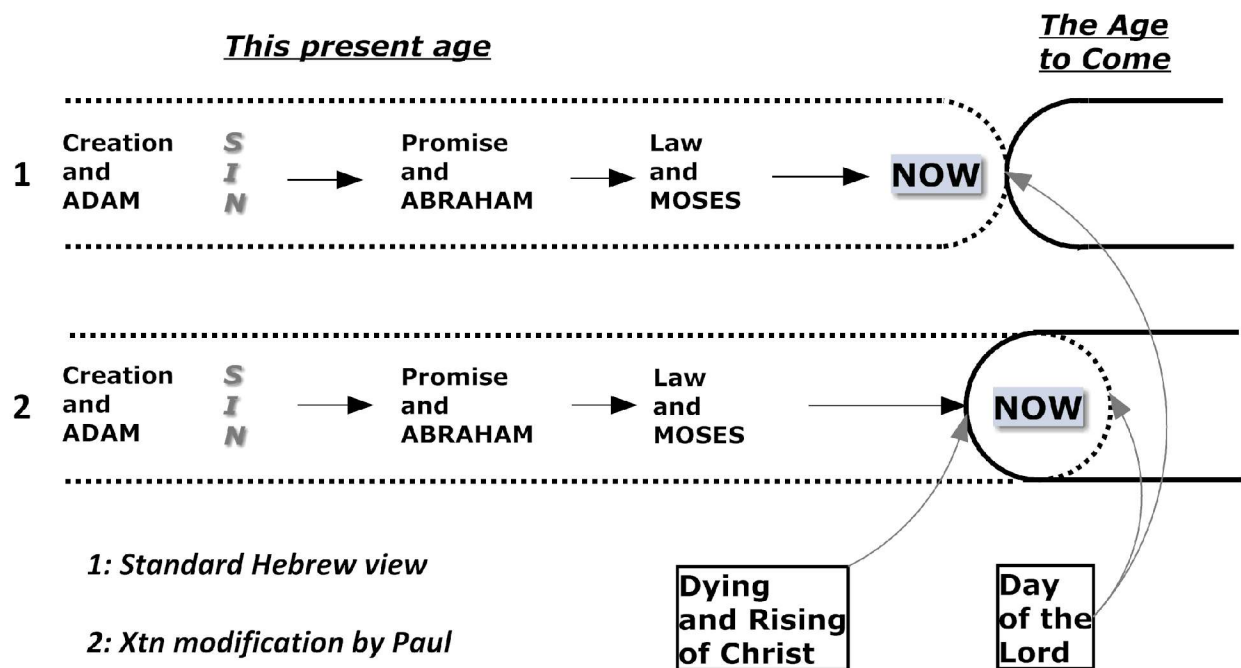
◆ Many Jewish converts failed to recognize that something radically different had happened with the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They felt that observing the law of Moses with all its regulations was still necessary. For them, before you can become a Christian, you must be a Jew. They were still caught up in a not yet approach, still waiting with their Jewish co-religionists for the final fulfillment which had not yet come, bound by the many legal demands which Jesus had already abrogated. For Paul and for Christians, this fulfillment was already here in Jesus. Let go of the old order and enter into the new. We are not justified by God through fulfilling all the precepts of the Jewish law, but we are justified by faith. Justification is available to all, Jews as well as Gentiles. This point he stresses in his letter to the Galatians above all.

◆ Many Pagan converts in their brand new experience of Jesus and his Spirit felt that in their conversion the fulfillment of God's plan was totally given to them already now. Those who came from a more sophisticated background thought that they had special knowledge (Paul refers to this as "wisdom" in I Corinthians), special spiritual experiences of a charismatic nature, and they looked down at their brothers and sisters still caught up in superstitions and struggling with old taboos deeply rooted in their psyches. Paul reminded them that while Jesus had already entered into the world and set the age to come in motion, the hoped for fulfillment would only take place when Jesus returned in the second coming. This present time is still a time of struggle, and this means tolerance of the messy plurality of their communities with people elsewhere on the religious spectrum. Yes, our spirits have been transformed, but the body of Christ has many members, some strong, some weak, all to be treasured for their

contribution. The greatest gift of all is tolerant and compassionate love. This point he deals with especially in Corinthians.

The illusion of the first group was that they were justified before God by the works of the law; the illusion of the second was justification would come through self-validating religious experience or by a shallow pretend-wisdom.

How to bring those two groups together to live peacefully as followers of Jesus? In sum Paul tells his communities that already now they have been redeemed and the life of grace is within them, but the final fulfillment ushered in by grace is not yet. Neither of the two groups wanted to embrace the tension of living in both the already now and the not yet. His mature teaching is found especially in Romans where both sides are presented. The salvation history background of this teaching can be diagrammed in the following way:



The standard view of salvation history for the Jews is presented in (1), and in (2) Paul's modification of it to account for the entry of Jesus Christ upon the scene. Both Jews and Christians have a linear view of history: history has a beginning, a progression, and an end. (Other groups in the time of Jesus and today have a cyclical view of history: there is no goal, no end, no fulfillment, only repeated cycles of nature, and for some reincarnation.)

The early history is the same for both Jews and Christians: creation and Adam, the onset of sin, the promise and Abraham, the law and Moses. Both expect a final denouement of history. Both see the conflict between this present age which is full of sinful pride, greed, injustice, conflict, and the age to come to be ushered in when the Lord comes in power to bring all to fulfillment.



Jewish believers in God still await the age to come, to be ushered in by God's final intervention and the coming of the Messiah.

But there is a significant difference. For Christian believers this age to come is already upon us with the coming of Jesus who is the long-expected Messiah. In principle the victory has been won through his passion, death, and resurrection. But he has not yet returned in glory. We still live and struggle in this present age, but the age to come has already established its dynamic in our midst. Not so for Jewish believers.

Thus in the diagram, the two ages in the Jewish perspective do not overlap, but they do for Paul and they do for us. The Jews of Christ's time are exasperated with their suffering, and their fantasies are of a God that is going to come very soon and deal with their enemies and usher in a period of permanent peace. Christians are dealing with the mystery of a Messiah who has already come and ushered in the final age through his own resurrection from the dead, and left his followers in a state of expectation as to the blessed moment when they would share in that resurrection with him. There is some conflict among Christians, some thinking the return was imminent, others more settled into this present life. Jesus wanted them to not concentrate on precise times and dates: the second coming is a mystery in the bosom of the Father.

Thus, to say the least, we Christians live in a complex situation: the final age is upon us with the resurrection of Christ, but we still await his second coming in glory. We live in both. We are pulled backwards towards the present age; and pulled forward towards the age to come.

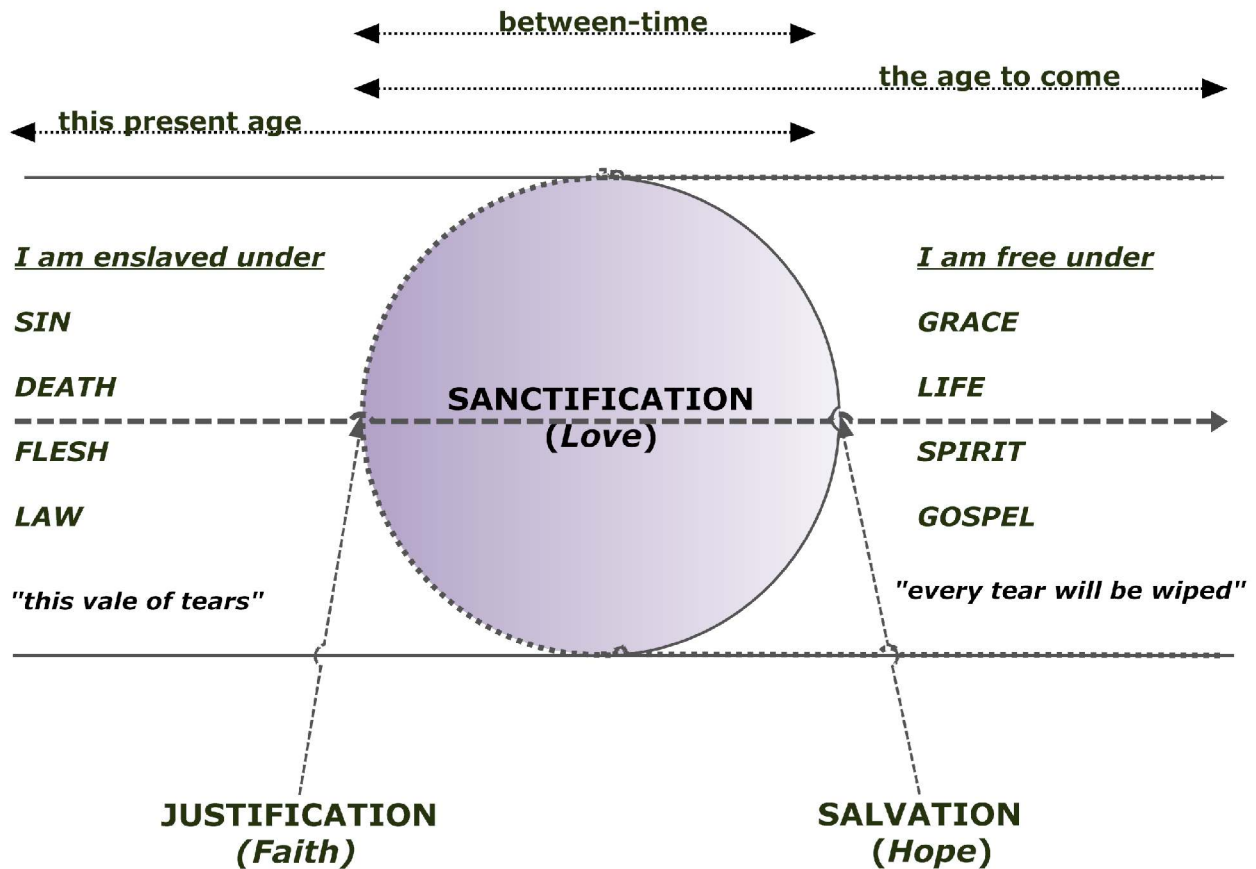
This way of thinking translates into Paul's classical language of justification, sanctification, and salvation. We are already justified by faith; in the midst of tribulations we now live the life of sanctification in love, and we are not yet saved and live in hope:

### *Romans 5: 1-11*

- 1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith  
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ
- 2 through whom we have access to this grace in which we  
stand  
and we REJOICE IN THE HOPE OF THE GLORY OF GOD.
- 3 Not only so, but we REJOICE in our tribulations  
knowing that tribulations produce endurance
- 4 endurance produces character  
character produces hope.
- 5 And hope does not disappoint  
because God's love has been poured into our hearts  
by the Spirit which has been given to us.

- 6 For in effect it is when we were still weak at the right time  
that Christ died for the ungodly.
- 7 Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man  
though perhaps for a good one one will dare to die.
- 8 But God shows his love for us  
in that when we were still sinners Christ died for us.
- 9 Much more, since we are justified by his blood  
will we be saved by him from the wrath of God.
- 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God  
by the death of his Son,  
  
much more, now that we are reconciled,  
shall we be saved by his live.
- 11 Not only so,  
but we REJOICE IN GOD through our Lord Jesus Christ  
through whom we have received our reconciliation.

You will recognize in the following diagram the same pattern as in the first diagram we presented in this section. The first one presented salvation history as a whole. This one shows how each person re-lives the whole pattern of salvation history in his/her own life, moving through individual conversion (justification) into the new age; struggling to act lovingly in the between time with its tensions and tribulations (sanctification), waiting for total deliverance from this present age and total incorporation into the age to come (salvation).



You will note the contrast between this present age and the age to come: slavery as opposed to freedom, grace as opposed to sin, death as opposed to life, flesh as opposed to spirit, law as opposed to gospel. The Christian in this world experiences both ages, is caught between them.

Sin leads to eternal death; grace leads to eternal life. Elsewhere Paul will say that grace leads to glory, which means the same thing.

Flesh and spirit are not to be taken as body and soul, as if the body is evil and the soul is good. Rather flesh is the whole human being, spirit, soul, and body, under the realm of sin; and spirit the whole human being as the temple of the Spirit.

The contrast between law and gospel is somewhat more complex, and we will refer to it in the next section.

This teaching of Paul gives us a deeper insight into the distinction which Paul made in his own life (unit two) between the grace of conversion and the ensuing struggle to reach out for the final prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus:

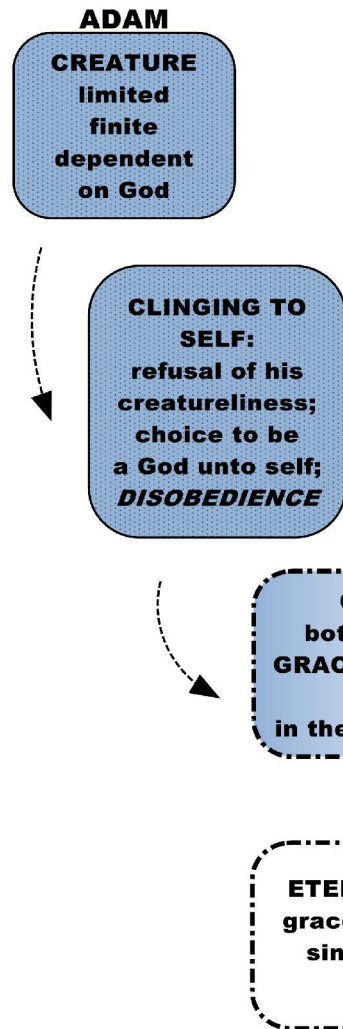
- ◆ The conversion corresponds to justification by faith, that letting go of all the ways in which we seek to control our relationship to God and/or to find fulfillment in what is not God,
- ◆ The struggle corresponds to the life of sanctification in love which we live in the between-time,
- ◆ The achievement of the final prize is the salvation we all hope for.

The first week of the Exercises is devoted to receiving and/or deepening the grace of justification, which means totally letting go of all that stands in the way of our total entrusting of ourselves to the living God. The second week is devoted to setting us firmly on the path of sanctification, in which we seek to know Jesus more intimately, love him more dearly, and follow him more closely.

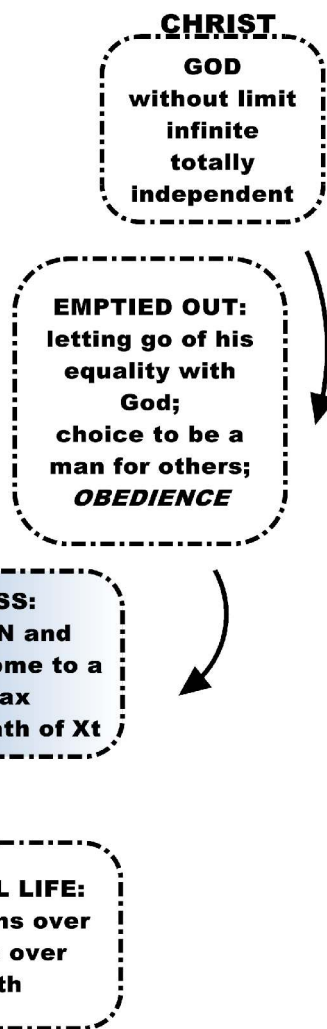
The process of conversion is rooted in the first week of the Exercises, but continues in the second. The exercitant may already be focused on following Jesus by the end of the first week, but to do this reflectively will lead to a further deepening of one's awareness of how the power of sin – often subtly and elusively – has taken root in one's life. Thus the dynamic of justification continues in the second week. Likewise the dynamic of sanctification begins in the second week, but continues in the third, which brings the exercitant in touch with the toil and struggle of Christ in his passion, and deepens one's resolve to accept the toil and struggle of one's sanctification. (The article on the Jesuit Orientations website on the stages of the spiritual life offers more details on this, and connects it with the three traditional ways of spiritual development, purgation, illumination, and union. [Click here.](#))

**The two dynamics, based on Romans 5: 12-21**

**Dynamic of Sin**



**Dynamic of Grace**



Already in the last section the theme of sin as the counterpart of grace has emerged. This present age in Paul's understanding is given over to sin, death, the flesh, and the law. The age to come is marked by the opposite: grace, life, the Spirit, and the gospel. A conflict is set up between these two dynamics. The one who has chosen to respond to Christ's invitation has opted for the dynamic of grace, confident in its ultimate triumph.

The diagram to the left presents the two dynamics and their clash. Initiating the dynamic of sin is the disobedience of Adam; initiating the dynamic of grace is the obedience of Christ. Both dynamics come to a climax in the terrible event of the Cross, at one the worst sin that could ever be committed, putting God to death, and the greatest act of love imaginable, giving up one's life to God.

The selection from *Romans 5:15-21* presents the gist of this dynamic:

15 But the free gift is not like the trespass.

For if the many died through the one man's trespass,  
much more surely have the grace of God  
and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ,  
abounded for the many.

16 And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin.

For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation,

but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification.  
17 If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one,  
much more surely will those who receive  
the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness  
exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

18 Therefore  
just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all,  
so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.

19 For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners,  
so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

20 But law came in,  
with the result that the trespass multiplied;  
but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,  
21 so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death,  
so grace might also exercise dominion through justification  
leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In this text the two dynamics are contrasted, but it is clear that no matter how powerful the dynamic of sin is, the dynamic of grace overcomes it. Justification supersedes condemnation. The dynamic started by Adam's disobedience is countered by the dynamic started by the obedience of Christ.

To get at the full meaning of this passage, one must go further afield in the Pauline epistles. A key text is the kenotic hymn in Philippians 2. The obedience of Christ consisted in his readiness to not avail himself of the privileges of his status as God's equal but to take on the form of the servant. It directly counters Adam's sin which consists in his seeking to grasp equality with God contrary to God's precept to stay away from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

#### Exercises of St. Ignatius

The dynamic of sin and grace and their conflict are present throughout the SpExx. A key difference between Paul and Ignatius must be noted. When Ignatius presents the Two Standards in the second week, the two adversaries in conflict are Christ and Lucifer/Satan (SpExx 137 ff). Ignatius refers to the sin of Adam in the first week, but this is preceded by a consideration of the sin of the angels (SpExx 50 and 51). Indeed, if we go back to Genesis, Adam was prompted by Satan to commit his sin. Ignatius appears to go further back in identifying the origin of sin. At the same time Satan was a part of Paul's world of thought and imagination, and the fall of the angels was evoked more explicitly in the later New Testament writings of Peter and Jude. A general pattern may be apparent in all this, but the details are somewhat sketchy and elusive.

First Week: at first the focus of this week is on the dynamic of sin and how each individual is engaged in it. Successive meditations on the sin of the Angels, the sin of Adam, our own sin, the ultimate consequence of our sin which is hell, all of these invite us to realize the extent to which we are touched by the dynamic of sin, and to seek the grace of ever deeper repentance. But even more central in the first week is the realization that even while the dynamic of sin touches our lives, we are enveloped and protected by God's grace which is even more powerful. We are still alive and able to do good; we are constantly being saved from the consequences of our own sinning. In the words of Romans 8, absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Once we have received a measure of this grace and the gratitude that flows from it we are ready to move to the next week of the Exercises.

Second Week: the dynamic of sin and the dynamic of grace are both featured in the second week. The opening contemplation presents the kingdom which Christ came to inaugurate, which is God's enterprise to overcome the consequence of sin in the world. The other initial contemplations present the unfolding of the dynamic of grace in conflict with the dynamic of sin. The conflict between sin and grace comes to a head especially in the Two Standards meditation. The desired outcome is that the exercitant not only chooses to ally him/herself with the project of Jesus to overcome sin and establish the kingdom, but also aligns his/her choice of work within that kingdom with God's own desires for him/her.

Third and Fourth Week: we see the final clash between the two dynamics: the passion and death presents the final culmination of this clash. In the same event we see the total defeat of love in the eyes of the world, because Christ appears to be conquered, and the final victory of love because Christ gave himself over to death out of love. The fourth week invites us to live in the victory and to savour it.

A final note has to do with the role of law. In the earlier text of Paul we saw how law is opposed to Gospel. If the Gospel which announces the age to come is good news, the law which weighs us down in the present age must be bad news. But in this text and other texts in chapters 6 and 7 the role of law is described more precisely. The law was given to Moses as part of salvation history even though its effect was to enhance the impact of sin. The role of law is akin to that of a hot compress to treat a sty. You bring the sty to its maturation, it erupts, and the pus is gone. By exacerbating the power of sin and above all enhancing the unhappy consciousness of the sinner who now knows that he/she is violating God's law, it brings the person to the point there is no other way out than to entrust himself/herself to God in faith. In that sense the law is a pedagogue that leads to faith. (Gal 3:24)

In directing the Exercises or in spiritual direction generally, it may be good to be aware of the role that legal observance or other similar patterns may have played in the life of exercitants, to help them realize how though this may have been very painful it was a part of God's providence extended to them.

## 5 GRACE AND TRIBULATION

*(The topic of this fifth session of this work-shop was left open, and after two sessions it was clear that the word "tribulation" used by Paul gathered a lot of interest among the participants, and that grace and tribulation should be developed as a topic.)*

Tribulation comes from the Greek *thlipsis* (which literally means a squeezing), and is frequently used in the New Testament, with the meaning of a suffering which tests one's commitment and resolve. Can I live through the tribulation? That is the question that I have to answer time and time again, and so did Jesus, for example in the desert. In a minor mode it denotes the daily state of tension in which we usually live, the anxiety and struggle which often marks our lives.

In many New Testament texts tribulation is connected with the end-times, e.g. the end of world texts found in Matthew. This is not surprising Christians then lived their lives in that context, and were invited to embrace their sufferings and testings, with a vivid sense – rarely found today – that Christ would return soon. This should be our sense as well.

This end-time suffering is the hollowing out which creates space for grace, and is thus productive, like child-birth. This will be our text:

### *Romans 8: 9-23*

9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

10 But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin,  
the spirit is life because of righteousness.

11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,  
he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies  
also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

.....

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing  
with the glory about to be revealed to us.

19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;

20 for the creation was subjected to futility,  
not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it,  
21 in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay  
and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now;

23 and not only the creation,  
but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit,  
groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

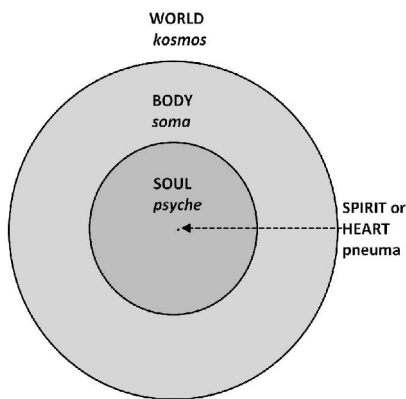


The above passages make two points that are most important for us.

1) In verse 10 Paul is talking about persons redeemed by Christ, living in the spirit, and engaged in the long and arduous process of sanctification. Their spirit, inhabited by the Spirit of God, poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5), is life because of righteousness; but their body is death because of sin. The grace of God makes an entry into the deepest, most central part of ourselves, but in this life we live in a body which is destined to death, until it is raised by the Spirit who raised the body of Jesus. Grace has established a beachhead in our being. The conflict between that part of us which has been transformed by the grace of God and that part of us which that grace has not yet transformed is painful and protracted, and is at the root of what Paul calls tribulation.

2) In verses 22 and 23 Paul offers us the powerful image of childbirth. Our sufferings, our tribulations are akin to the pains of childbirth. This is a pain which is productive of new life, and we endure it with hope. The image of stretching, or dilation, used by the medieval spiritual author Richard of St. Victor applies here. In our period of tribulation, of child-birth, we are being stretched out, the part of us where we are receptive of God's grace is being expanded. But this is a painful process akin to that of childbirth. Hence the groanings Paul refers to and which we all experience in different ways.

All this fits in with Paul's basic anthropology:



Paul expresses this anthropology in the final greeting of the first letter to the Thessalonians. He prays that our spirits, souls, and bodies be blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (I Thess 5:23). These three components are presented here in concentric circles, with the spirit at the very centre, and the world as the surrounding reality to which we are linked.

Spirit is the same for Paul as heart ("the love of God poured into our hearts": Rom 5:5). It is our inmost self, the point at the centre where we are related to God ("you have created our hearts restless until they rest in Thee: Augustine").

Soul: (psyche) is the first concentric circle. It represents the inner world of feelings, thoughts, emotions, images, judgements, decisions through which the human spirit awakens to itself and takes a stance towards life and towards God. The soul is connected to the world (outside the concentric circles) through the body (second concentric circle) which presents the objects, images, situations, challenges, etc. which are the stuff of psychic activity. Some parts of the psyche are accessible to us, others are sub-conscious and require therapeutic intervention to come to the light.

Body: (soma): this refers to our physical bodies, but they enable the powers of communication and interaction through which we shape a whole realm of relationships: I-thou (personal), we-they (social), humankind-world (ecological).

As we see from the first text, as we begin our journey towards salvation we receive the grace of justification poured into our inner selves, our hearts. At the end of the process, which is salvation, our bodies are glorified, permeated with the Spirit. Already now we have received grace as the first-fruits, the promise of a harvest to come (Romans 8:9-11): but then we will receive the full redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23). They will be glorified, with immeasurably enhanced powers of communication. But in addition to this individual transformation creation will be set free from its bondage to decay, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Right now we live in the intermediate time of sanctification. The area of grace which permeates our psyche is being stretched out, hollowed out. We allow, albeit reluctantly, the grace poured into our inmost self to permeate all the nooks and crannies of our psyches. This stretching out leads to pangs akin to those of childbirth. We begin the task of using our bodies to transform the world, a task which will only be complete at the end. This means the transformation of our personal relationships (and we might make some headway), the setting right of the relationships of injustice which mark our world, and the protection of a sustainable environment (and, it seems, make less headway).

In general grace works both outwards and inwards. It starts from the transformation of our hearts, the innermost part of our selves, and works out towards the transformation of the vast inner world of our psyches. We then reach out through our bodies to seek better relationships with one another, with our society, and our cosmos. The actual transformation of our bodies from earthly to glorified, from imperfect to perfect instruments of communication, is something we cannot give ourselves but which we await as a final grace from God.

There are two possible deviations in this process. In both of them we refuse the life of tribulation, in other words the life of carrying our cross together with Jesus.

Already now people have the illusion that they are already there because of the experience or the superior wisdom which they think is theirs. They are trying to go from the heart to the final vision of a renewed heaven and earth, but bypassing the struggle, the tribulations experienced on the human journey. But eventually tribulation catches up with them.

Not yet people are stuck in their routine of self-satisfaction through legal observance or whatever addiction gives them a false sense of security. They don't move, don't enter into the world of tribulation which is marked by fragility and insecurity. They seek personal survival in a manner that they can control rather than totally entrusting themselves to God.

Spiritual Exercises: The potential of these reflections on tribulation for giving the exercises is immense. It opens up images that can be used, and questions that can be raised.

Helping exercitants realize more deeply what is the role of tribulation in their lives will enable them to live with tribulation with a greater sense of hope. The second week invites the exercitant over and over again to enter into a life of struggle, marked by conflict, by humiliations, by scarcity in the resources at our own disposal. That is the condition for joining in with Jesus on his project of salvation. And in the second week we are engaged more intentionally in the two-fold work of looking after ourselves, the disorders that continue to lurk within our own psyches, and looking after the world, with the structures of injustice and ecological degradation that reflect the inner disorders of our own souls. In the third week we enter into solidarity with Jesus who drank the cup of tribulation to the full. For us this means the grace of not ever shirking from the path we have undertaken. In the fourth week we take time to look back and to recognize that in all of this the fulness of the resurrection, already enjoyed by Christ, is making its way in our own selves and in the world.

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