

The Dynamic Structure of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius

The Principle and Foundation text (P&F) is the usual starting point of for those making the Spiritual Exercises (SpExx), and offers them a foretaste of the structured experience they are about to enter. The four successive phases of the SpExx, known as weeks, and made up of various prayer exercises, build on one another cumulatively. In addition, within the weeks, especially the first and the second, a carefully delineated progression in prayer themes is proposed to the exercitant.¹ The P&F does not foreshadow this structure in all its details, but with reflection on this text together with consideration of the dynamics of human decision and action a helpful perspective on the dynamics of the SpExx will emerge.

The approach of Gaston Fessard in his complex two volume work entitled *La dialectique des exercices spirituels de S. Ignace* (Paris, Aubier, 1956-) will guide us in this essay. For him, as for many interpreters, the basic point towards which the SpExx converge and from which they then diverge is the election which each exercitant is invited to make at the end of the second week. In this context election refers to a decision in which each exercitant, under the influence of grace, chooses the right path of life or makes the right decision called for in the particular circumstances of his or her life. The first two weeks prepare for it, and the last two weeks flow from it. Election in this sense of personal choice is situated within a continuum of various human attitudes and actions, some which precede it and others which follow it. Thomas Aquinas' account of this continuum, when he lays the foundations for his moral theology in the Ia-IIae of his *Summa Theologiae*² will play a role later in the development of our theme. We will begin, however, by analysing the text of the P&F.

An analysis of the text of the P&F:

As one examines this text as a whole, one easily notices that the first half is formulated in more general terms, with "man" in a generic sense as the subject, whereas the second half, which pertains more closely to the decisions individuals are to make in ordering their lives, decisions

¹An exercitant, for those not familiar with Ignatian terminology, is a person making the Spiritual Exercises.

²Ia-IIae qq. 8-17. The Summa is divided into three parts, and the second part itself is divided into two parts. Ia-IIae means the first part of the second part.

which differ from one person to another, is put in more personal terms: the terms used are “we” and “ourselves”. As we move from the more generic beginning point of the exercises to the moment of decision, there is an increased personalization. What am I to do here and now, in this particular situation? At this point the issue is between each exercitant and God, and the director is not to intrude or interfere, but simply to witness the transaction which occurs between them and to help it take root in the life of the exercitant.³

Let us return to the first half of the text, which comprises three sentences: in brief they tell us that a) human beings are created for God, b) the other things on the face of the earth are created for human beings, and c) human beings are to use those other things in a way conducive to achieving their end which is God.

The first sentence in germ contains the whole dynamic of the exercises. The sequence of “praise, reverence, and serve” followed by “saving his soul” is not a rhetorical embellishment. These terms are carefully chosen: as we move from “praise” to “reverence” and finally to “serve” we move from what is more gratuitous, spontaneous, generic to what is more specific, disciplined, carefully thought out. Already we are drawn into the dynamic of the SpExx.

Ignatius tells us that the first and foundational attitude towards God who created each one of us is praise: we recognize God to be God and we praise God for his glory. In this we are not asking for anything, striving for anything, nor are we reflecting on ourselves and our relationship with God, but simply recognizing God for who God is and dwelling in God’s presence. Praise in this sense is akin to a simple movement of love in which we are drawn outside of ourselves. This simple movement is not accompanied by an overlay of reflection: we are not concerned about how close or how far we are from the Beloved. We simply love.

³This point is made very clearly in annotation 15: “He who is giving the Exercises ought not to influence him who is receiving them more to poverty or to a promise, than to their opposites, nor more to one state or way of life than to another. For though, outside the Exercises, we can lawfully and with merit influence every one who is probably fit to choose continence, virginity, the religious life and all manner of evangelical perfection, still in the Spiritual Exercises, when seeking the Divine Will, it is more fitting and much better, 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 future. So, he who is giving the Exercises should not turn or incline to one side or the other, but standing in the centre like a balance, leave the Creator to act immediately with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and Lord.”

From praise flows reverence. A movement of reflection occurs in which we become present to our own movement of praise, and realize who we are and Whom it is we praise. We sense the gap between ourselves as creatures and God as the creator whom we love and praise. This love, we begin to realize, is far from the final and irrevocable communion we long for. This sense of absence is sharpened when we recognize and regret the ways in which we have deepened that gap through our own waywardness. We now experience God as the infinitely Other, the transcendent One. God is present to us in the mode of absence. Paraphrasing the words of Augustine, "God, you have created our hearts, yes, but you have created them restless until they rest in you." In conjunction with praise, reverence offers us a balanced attitude towards God, one which makes room for both divine immanence and transcendence and acknowledges how fragile our hearts are and how precarious our relationship with God.

From reverence flows service. How do we close the gap between ourselves and God? How can the instability of our response to God's presence to us be overcome? How can the elements of absence of God which we painfully experience be changed into a presence which is totally secure and fulfilling? The path for us to follow as we seek our fulfillment in God is the path of service: we are called upon to serve God, and by this means to save our souls. What this service entails and the choices it calls for will be dealt with later in the SpExx. As is intimated by the subject of this first half, which is "man" in the generic sense, this project of salvation is not an individual one, but a collective one in which we save ourselves by sharing in God's work of saving others.

In the second sentence of this first half of the P&F we discover more clearly that the God who has created us for Himself is not indifferent to our fate. God wants our salvation and provides for it. Everything else on the face of this earth has been created for us as a help towards pursuing the fulfillment we yearn for. "Everything" is to be taken in the broadest sense: obviously it includes all the beings that God has created and the good things of this earth, but it also encompasses what our fellow human creatures under Providence have achieved in terms of social organization and cultural development as they impact on us and our relationships, all the events which contextualize and shape our lives, among which the principal one, as we see from the later unfolding of the SpExx, is the coming of Jesus Christ as our

Saviour.⁴ The point for Ignatius is not that creation becomes subservient to us, to be used at our whim, but that it is there for us to make use of as we do God's will in serving God's salvific purposes.⁵

The third sentence makes us more keenly aware of the context which governs the choices human beings are to make in their service of God. This context, which is that of God's unfolding providence for us and our own limitation as creatures of God, puts constraints on us.⁶ Some options soliciting us may be against God's plan for us, jeopardizing the achievement of the end for which we are created and the particular unfolding towards that end which God has in store for each one of us. In other words there is a dynamic of sin as well as a dynamic of grace operating within our world⁷. The struggle between these two dynamics is intimated here but developed in the First Week of the SpExx. It is the ever present backdrop of all our choices, which ought to lead us towards God rather than away from God, but sometimes lead us astray.

This third sentence leaves us with a burning question. Which are the right options for us and how do we discover them? In the second half of the P&F Ignatius gives a condensed answer to this question, one that will be developed more amply especially in the Rules for Discernment. We will divide this second half into three parts, quoting the text:

(A) For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things in all that is allowed in the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it; (B) so that, on our part,

⁴This in more classical theological terms could be referred to as the actual graces which beckon us from without and which work in conjunction with the empowerment of the Spirit which takes on such vital importance as in the Exercises we move towards the phase of election. Ignatius intimates this broad interpretation of created things in the second half of the P&F where he refers to health and sickness, riches and poverty, honor and dishonor, long and short life.

⁵One could use this point to develop a theology of stewardship and of ecological consciousness which would be beyond the ken of Ignatius. He makes the essential point: ecological degradation today is the result of disordered attachment of human beings, especially in the developed world, to their own comfort and ease here and now, without regard for others and for future generations.

⁶In the classical tradition espoused by Aquinas, the solicitations of evil are multiple, the path of good a single one. This path is narrow, and exercises that will dispose one to find that path as God determines, such as those of Ignatius, are valuable.

⁷The most powerful presentation of these dynamics is that of Paul in Romans 5.

we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, long rather than short life, and so in all the rest; (C) desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created. (SpExx 23: here we are using the earlier Mullan translation)

In (A) Ignatius intimates a key distinction between those created things (using “things” in the broadest sense) which could be (or not be) a good option for us and towards which we are to make ourselves indifferent as we prepare to make a free choice, and those which we must without further ado reject because they are in and of themselves prohibited or accept because they are commanded. This distinction foreshadows the distinction between the issue of the first week, which is our conversion from sinful behaviour regarding those goods whose choice is obligatory or forbidden, and the issue of the second week, which deals with our choices among the various options available to us which may be good in themselves but which may or may not be the ones which the Lord would want us to choose.

The choice of a prohibited good or course of action puts human beings directly on the path of final alienation from God. In this case they are focusing on that particular good to such an extent that it becomes not a means to help us attain fulfilment in God but a final end which replaces God, and leads to our damnation.

To follow Christ, however, it is not sufficient to do what is prescribed for all and to avoid what is prohibited for all. There is the vast area of what is neither prescribed nor prohibited, which offers a range of choices for human freedom. For each human being there is a particular dosage of riches and poverty, sickness and health, long and short life, honour and dishonour which befits his or her own particular mission within the purpose of God. How do we make the best choices, the ones free from disordered attachments, that fit the plan God has for each one of us? At this point we move away from the generic to the specific, and it is not sufficient to simply take into consideration the prescriptions of the law that apply to all. There is a particular will of God for each one of us, and the one who follows Christ makes himself as sensitive as possible to that will, which means a stance of active indifference, of readiness to act in accordance with that will.

Our natural bent is to favour health over illness, honour over dishonour, etc., so Ignatius advocates an attitude of indifference [B], which is not a passive unconcern but an active

readiness. Indifference readies us to welcome the clarity we need on which of the options before us is “most conducive for us to the end for which we are created” and to choose that option [C]. Otherwise we become an obstacle to what God wants to achieve in and through us.

God’s providence for us is dynamic not static. We might think that God has a master plan leading to our salvation, and if we fail to embrace it God will simply reject us. No, God’s plan takes into consideration our refusals, and the new situations these refusals create for ourselves and for others. God traces a new path for us to journey most directly and effectively to the final fulfillment he wants for us. Indeed in the course of our lives God’s plan constantly evolves according to our own history of grace and refusal of grace, our own history of the disorder we inflict on others and the disorder others inflict on us. God invites us to discover and embrace that dynamically evolving plan. This plan as it unfolds not only guides us more securely towards our final end but also makes of us more effective instruments in God’s plan of salvation for the world and those who inhabit it.⁸ Thus God will continue to work for our salvation no matter what choices we have made, even those which put us directly on the path of our final alienation from God. Given all the circumstances of the world, including those changed because of the impact of our sinning. God will trace another path for us and for all those affected by our sin. God writes straight with the crooked lines we offer Him.

Another distinction is intimated in this second half, one which Ignatius presupposes rather than formulates. (A) refers to the choice of our free will. The word used in (B), however, is ‘want’ rather than ‘choose’. Health or long life or honour are not within the grasp of a simple act of choice. They are to a great extent goods outside our own control. We naturally want or desire them, and the issue for Ignatius is the intensity with which we want them and how this will affect the choices we make of other goods. We can intend to pursue them to such an extent that all our other choices are mobilized in such a way as to achieve them, even to the extent of choosing goods that put us on the path of destruction. This would manifest a disordered attachment to what in itself is a genuine good. To combat such disordered attachments and to achieve a state of equilibrium, Ignatius advocates an attitude of indifference, such that we are

⁸Often it is our own disorder and sinfulness, which, once forgiven and transformed by the grace of God, makes of us especially compassionate instruments of healing for others. According to the phrase consecrated by Henri Nouwen, we become wounded healers. Or else our sinning might be the occasion of heartfelt conversions in which the gift of divine love becomes even more deeply rooted within us.

open to discovering the will of God for each one of us and ready to make choices in accord with it, even though these choices might be for us the source of sickness, dishonour, poverty, short life. In (C) Ignatius goes beyond wanting to include choosing: ‘desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created’. We might mention at this point that in addition to choice or desire, Ignatius in the first half of the P&F employs another descriptor for human action, “to use”. These references to wanting, choosing, and using in the P&F suggest a complex reality which needs to be unpacked. This is the task of our next section.

A typology of human action:

Before delving deeper into the ways in which the P&F adumbrate the whole movement of the SpExx, let us briefly outline the typology of human action presented by Thomas Aquinas in the Prima Secundae of his *Summa Theologiae*.⁹ It is derived from earlier, especially patristic sources, and brings the various components of human activity together in a way which is readily identifiable in ordinary human experience. Ignatius usually does not use the terms desire, choice, use, intention in a technical sense,¹⁰ but at times his usage of these terms and of other terms can be clarified by the definitions provided by Aquinas.

Aquinas' doctrine on the various acts of the will accounts for the complex movement from the first spontaneous, often hidden, and interior attraction to some good or end to the exteriorly manifested performance designed to lead us to the achievement of that end.¹¹ For

⁹This treatment is found in questions 8 to 17. There is a corresponding treatment of the passions in questions 23 to 49, and a structural similarity between the two can easily be traced, one which will help clarify what Ignatius is doing in his SpExx.

¹⁰Many times Ignatius uses these two terms in less technical ways in which their distinction is not evident. One place where the distinction emerges in his text is in No. 177, in the contrast between our desire of the end and our choice of means to achieve it.

¹¹These acts are presented schematically in PPG, 212. My first treatment of them, composed roughly at the same time and totally independently from Crowe's CC, was in an MA thesis at the Université de Montréal, *The Interplay of the Intellect and the Will in the Moral Act according to St. Thomas*, 1957. A recent account with a good summary of the earlier literature can be found in Westberg, Daniel, *Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994, esp. ch. 8 and ff. He fails to incorporate the distinction between simple volition and intention, which is deeply rooted in the Augustinian tradition, and pertinent to what Ignatius proposes in the SpExx. In our account we will leave out the corresponding acts of intellect.

him in a complete human act there are six acts of the will with their corresponding cognitive acts. Three of these will acts refer to the end: volition, intention, and fruition; and three refer to the means required to achieve the end: consent, election, and application (or use). These acts concerning means situate themselves between intention and fruition in the complete human act. Aquinas' thought in this matter is not totally knit together in his writing, but, using a simple example not foreign to the SpExx, that of the choice of one's path of life,¹² we will present the sequence of these acts in their traditional version. These various acts of the will are surrounded by feelings which Aquinas describes under the heading of the passions: they are listed in capital letters in the first column and will be explained later:

<p><u>Simple Volition</u> of the end</p> <p>LOVE</p>	<p>The thought comes into my mind to settle the stable way in which I am to serve God in this life. I experience a simple, spontaneous attraction to this as a good-in-itself. In and of itself this movement is a velleity (I would like to) rather than an intention (I want to).</p>
<p><u>Intention</u> of the end</p> <p>DESIRE</p>	<p>I move to a second order in my willing, one which involves reflection. To discover the path of my service of God is a good-in-itself. I can put off that investigation and drift. Do I really want to pursue it as a good-for-me? Is such a pursuit feasible? As a result of this reflection I may actually intend to pursue this good as a good-for-me or else drop it and move to some other more immediately present attraction. Intention implies a commitment to take the required means to achieve the intended goal. To pass from simple volition (velleity) to intention, I may have to consider this goal I could pursue as a means to my ultimate goal, which is my salvation in God. In that sense intention is free.</p>

¹²I will use the example of a religious vocation, which is the most familiar to me. I could as example have chosen married life, or the choice of a path of greater service to others within the lay vocation, e.g. a retired person who is looking for a way to contribute to the Church and to society through charitable or social action.

<p><u>Consent</u> to the means</p> <p>HOPE</p>	<p>I deliberate about what means to take to achieve what I intend, a stable form of life. If a number of means emerge, I can give them my general consent (except for those particular means which may evoke in me a revulsion, a non-consent). In this case I could lead married, remain single, become a religious, a cleric.</p>
<p><u>Choice</u> of the means</p> <p>DARING</p>	<p>I bring to an end the process of deliberation about the particular means available to me to serve God and freely make a practical judgement to choose the means which I will take here and now: I will commit myself to explore a religious vocation.</p>
<p><u>Application</u> or use of the means chosen</p> <p>ANGER/ PATIENCE</p>	<p>I execute the means chosen, applying myself (to do more thinking, to find the various internet sites I wish to explore, to write e-mails, to consult, pray, etc. In this process as Aquinas understands it, the mind commands (<i>imperium</i>) and the will applies the other powers to the chosen purpose (<i>usus</i>).</p>
<p><i>The process of deliberation, consent, election, application continues as long as is necessary to actually achieve what I intend. Each means can become a subordinate end requiring a further selection of means. If an obstacle comes in the way, I may move in the backward direction and reassess my original intent.</i></p>	
<p><u>fruition</u> of the end</p> <p>JOY</p>	<p>Successful application of myself to the purpose at hand means that in the end I will rest in the achievement of the good which originally evoked in me a feeling of attraction, not as a good-in-itself (simple volition), not as an absent, desired good (intention) but as a present, fulfilling good. Ultimate fruition is of the final end which is my salvation, but there are many relative fruitions on the way: e.g. I am satisfied that my action to write the vocation director has yielded useful information, I am satisfied that I am now settled in my choice, or engaged in the way of life I have chosen, etc.</p>

Here is a brief explanation of the corresponding passions:

To the foundational act of simple volition there corresponds love where we are attracted to a good simply for and in itself, without any further thought. (The opposite is hate).

To intention there corresponds desire: the good is experienced as absent: I do not possess it, and so the basic love which I experience towards it takes on the coloration of longing or desire. To really desire something is to intend to take the means to achieve it. (The opposite is aversion.)

At this point I engage with the means which I must take if I am to fulfill my desire, which means striving against obstacles and expending energy. First, like in the simple act of love, I survey the means available to me in general, and, without choosing any one of them in particular, I rest in them and experience hope: the desired end seems feasible and there are ways to achieve it. (The opposite is despair: there are no means available for me to take.)

But at a point I must take a risk. Just contemplating the means will get me nowhere: I must take the plunge and choose one or other of them. The corresponding emotion is daring. (The opposite is fear: I become paralysed and cannot move.)

Having taken the risk, I have advanced to the stage of making use of the means, implementing my decision. That is a difficult process, one in which obstacles generally emerge, and call for resistance and resilience on my part. The corresponding emotion in moments of crisis is anger, which gives me the energy I need to overcome the obstacles, but in most circumstances anger should become transmuted into the consistent and measured energy of persistence and patience.¹³

The struggle may continue for a time, but when the goal is achieved and the absent good becomes present, which is the stage of fruition, the corresponding emotion is joy. (The opposite is sorrow when my efforts fail or when some good which I had been enjoying is taken away from me.)¹⁴

¹³Cf. Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, questions 123 and 134.

¹⁴We can easily discern a parallel between the three actions/attitudes towards the end and towards the means. Just as love is directed to a good end without any further consideration, hope is directed to the means taken globally and without further consideration; just as desire adds the note

The Dynamic Structure of the Exercises:

We are now ready to come back to the P&F, and through it to elucidate in greater detail the dynamic structure of the SpExx. Obviously the focus of the P&F, as is the case with the SpExx as a whole, is election. How do we make the right choice of means as we live our life, the first choice being the foundational one of the form of life and service which the Lord wants each one of us to choose in order to most effectively pursue the goal for which we are created?¹⁵ But other elements of a complete human act are present in the P&F, and they are even more present in the fuller unfolding of the SpExx of which the P&F are a foretaste.

Let us begin with the first sentence of the first half of the P&F. Four elements are presented there: praise, reverence, service, and salvation. Praising God for the sake of God, like love, is gratuitous. One is attracted to the reality of God directly, simply, spontaneously. Reverence grows out of a reflection akin to the one which moves us from love to desire: upon reflection I realize that I do not securely possess God, the good that I love. I feel the distance between my own precarious self and God, and I am called to take the means to change absence of this good to into secure presence. In other words I must serve God our Lord, which means in first instance a commitment to serve and then choice of the means I will take in carrying out this service. The ultimate goal to which this service is ordered is salvation, which the state of achieving the good for which God has created us, which is God himself, a state of unending joy.

The rest of the P&F concentrates, in the terminology used by Aquinas, on election and application. Everything else is created by God as a potential help to human beings in achieving the end for which they are created, and they must choose (election) not any means but the

that the good we love is absent, daring comes out of an awareness that the means available are theoretical and a risk must be taken; just as joy adds the note that the good we love is now present, anger/patience brings a note of presence as well: the means contemplated and then chosen are now being implemented.

¹⁵If we look at Aquinas' schema, the more foundational choices appear to be more akin to intention than to election. However when the forming of an intention is carried out deliberately it is akin to an election. I ask myself whether I really want to do this in the light of the more foundational willing of a goal which is already part of me. I cannot go back any further in my quest of a foundation for my intending and choosing than my constitutive desire for happiness, which I can seek to fulfill in God or apart from God. At this point we are entering into the area of fundamental option developed in 20th century theology.

right ones and use (apply) these means in such a way that they finally achieve the goal for which humans are created. Exercitants must choose, but choose in accord with the impulse of God's grace within them. They must prepare themselves for a right choice by making themselves indifferent to good health or bad health, honor or shame, etc., fostering their freedom from bias and attachment, and sharpening their ability to detect God's movement within their souls and to allow it to blossom into deliberate action.

Let us now take each of the increments of the human act as interpreted by Aquinas, and this time move beyond the P&F to include elements of the SpExx adumbrated by the P&F.

volition: The P&F begins with the simple movement of praise in which we are attracted to God and dwell in God simply and directly. The spontaneity of love is the wellspring of human activity as a whole, whatever the object of one's love. The spontaneity of our loving God is basic to the whole dynamic of the SpExx: and it plays a key role in the unfolding of the SpExx, especially when they invite us to dwell in and treasure (rather than reflect on and dissect, which takes place at a later moment) those spontaneous movements which arise in our prayer, but especially in the crucial moment which is election. Election at its best proceeds from consolation without previous cause, in which God comes into our soul and draws it wholly to the love of His Divine Majesty (SpExx 330). There can be a period of deliberation, of comparing various options with their advantages and disadvantages, of imagining oneself on one's deathbed and looking at our life retrospectively, but ultimately the best choice is one in which one experiences a direct movement of the Spirit giving us consolation akin to that which we experience when we praise God in the preparatory movement of the Exercises.

intention: Reverence follows upon praise as intention follows upon simple volition. In the first moment of praise, I am attracted to God directly and rest in God without any explicit sense of whether God is present or absent, but once I reflect upon who I am in relation to God, a creature in the presence of my Creator, and – this is the point specially developed in the first week of the SpExx – a sinner in the presence of my personal Saviour, a sense of distance between myself and God is developed which does not nullify the original movement towards God but which gives balance to it. The God from whom I now sense a distance continues to be with me, and continues to support me in existence in spite of my sinfulness; His deep desire is my salvation, as evidenced by the Jesus on the cross. I ask for a sense of my sins such that my reverence towards God be based not on a cold sense of God's absence and indifference or

even hostility to me, leading me to fear and despair, but on a deep sense of being forgiven and welcomed by God in and through Jesus Christ. The exercises of the first week are designed to open me to the grace of firm purpose of amendment. For instance in the colloquy of the third exercise, I ask for “an understanding of the disorder of my actions, that filled with horror of them, I may amend my life and put it in order” (SpExx 63). This theme is also expressed in the colloquy of the first exercise, as I ponder the questions “What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?” At this stage I go beyond simple volition to intention. I have not yet begun considering the precise means by which I am to amend my life and serve Christ, serving God in this or that particular path, but I have raised this issue and am committing myself to take whatever means are necessary to move in the right direction.

consent: There is nothing in the P&F that explicitly refers to consent as a distinct moment in the human act, but it can be found easily enough in the SpExx. The move from the First to the Second week of the SpExx is a movement from firm purpose/intention towards consideration of the means I ought to take in order to make my intention effective in the service of God. The Second Week culminates in the election of those means which are to be used, but prior to election there is a moment akin to consent in which I globally envisage the means by which I can serve God and I acquiesce in them. This moment begins with the contemplation of the Kingdom of Christ which serves as transition from the First to the Second week, a contemplation designed a) to make me aware that whatever means I am to take, they involve the following of Christ in whatever he asks me to do, and b) to dispose me favourably towards the range of options he is likely to put before me, including the ones which from which I would naturally shrink. This general benevolence towards the means which I may be called upon to take is reinforced throughout the exercises of the Second Week. These exercises invite me to rehearse the choice I am called upon to make, to consent in general terms to all the possible choices that may be set before me: “If this, whatever it is, is what God wants, I am ready.” They open me to the grace of an intimate knowledge of “our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow him more closely” (SpExx 104). The typical subject matter for this election is that of one’s state of life, which I am to choose and live out. But it can also be the choice of means by which I can live out my state of life more perfectly. Such an election sets a basic framework for other more particular choices which flow from it.

election: Everything in the Second Week is aimed towards the election, which for Ignatius is the choice I make in dialogue with God, seeking to conform myself to God’s will for me. The

point is not to choose my state of life or anything else in a self-willed manner but to “prepare myself to arrive at perfection in whatever state or way of life God our Lord may grant us to choose.” (SpExx 135). Even though there is a range of choices available to me which are not without further ado prohibited, still within the permitted choices there is the one which points for me the particular perfection, essentially bound up with a particular form of service, which the Lord chooses for me and for which he wants to make use of me to accomplish His purposes, and I need to be open to whatever that choice turns out to be. My free choice to follow God’s will as best I can does not originate in me as an isolated individual: it is the fruition of an initiative of God to which, under God’s grace, I entrust myself. But it remains my choice and I experience it as such: I am called to venture out into the unknown, to take a risk, a step I have prepared myself for in the previous exercises of the Second Week, which have tested my disposition and readied me in advance for whatever God asks of me. By making this particular choice, I may be letting go of a host of other interesting and attractive possibilities. I make myself vulnerable, open to the real possibility that God may choose me for failure in the eyes of the world, dishonour, ill fame, ill health. This takes courage. But God is present to me in this act of freedom which defines me in my own eyes and those of God.

application: Once my election is made, it needs to be lived out in all its implications and consequences, and that will entail suffering and call for great patience on my part. I can shape myself and my own purposes, but sooner or later I will meet that which I cannot shape and I will be tested through suffering. My own willingness will meet the unwillingness of others, or at least the resistance thrown in my path by circumstances over which I have no control. I will need to trust that God will be with me in ways that escape my anticipation and control. I act, but it is equally true that I am acted upon. Authentic human action is always conjoined with passion, passion in the sense of the passion which Christ underwent, which in his case meant total loss of control. To achieve my desired purpose (in this case the salvation of my soul) I need to persevere in that form of life and service which I have chosen, to be tempered by that which I suffer. This grace of strength, persistence in my choice in faithfulness till death is sought in the Third Week of the Exercises. In other words this is the grace of conformity to Christ who achieved his God-given purpose through suffering, failure. This third week proposes for us the way of patience rather than the way of anger.

fruition: The ultimate goal of all human activity is already noted in the P&F: the salvation of my soul, which, as I enter more deeply into the SpExx, is understood to entail my participation in

the salvation of others as well. This salvation, which is the final fruition of human life, is experienced neither within the SpExx nor during the course of human life. There is an overall cycle in which I prepare for a choice in accord with God's will, make it, live it out during the course of my life, and hopefully enjoy the reward beyond this life. But within this life there are also a host of smaller cycles in which I move over and over again through the stages of human activity, as delineated in the SpExx. I may have achieved one or other purpose which I have determined for myself, and in this I am given to share something of Jesus' joy, his sense of fruition. I pass from passion and death to resurrection, from the third to the fourth week. I rest there temporarily before continuing my journey, as one who stops to enjoy the vista from a look-out found on the way to the highest peak. Over and over again in that journey I drift from my basic purpose, and feel called to renew the bases of my spiritual life and my commitment to serve God. In the classical terms of the stages of the spiritual life, I may have come to a sense of union after passing through the stages of purgation and illumination, but that union has become less present to me and I need to enter once again, and more deeply, into the process, beginning with purgation.¹⁶ Thus, having made the SpExx I can in accord with the rhythms of my own psyche enter into them over and over again, each time seeking further enlightenment and motivation.

After the fourth week one finds in the SpExx a Contemplation for Obtaining Love. Its role in the SpExx may be conceived in different ways:

- One can see in it a counterpart to the Principle and Foundation. Just as the P&F offers a foretaste of the Exercises as a whole, so too this Contemplation offers a recapitulation, with each of the four points of that contemplation corresponding to the four weeks.
- One can see in it a prayer which aims at deepening one's commitment to the choice one has made in the Second Week and to the process of implementation into which one is engaged. It is clear from the text of the Exercises that my free choice is under God's influence: I must prepare myself to arrive at perfection in whatever state of way

¹⁶If we follow Gaston Fessard's analysis in *La dialectique des exercices spirituels de S. Ignace*, the stage of purgation begins in the first week and continues into the second week; the stage of illumination begins in the second week and continues into the third; the stage of union begins in the third week and continues into the fourth.

of life God our Lord may grant me to choose (SpExx 135). But my awareness of this role of God in my life and activity is deepened and broadened in this contemplation: I offer myself totally to the Lord that He might make use of my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my will wholly according to His will. I am ready to be an instrument in His hands in the circulation of love that this contemplation so powerfully evokes.

- One can also see in it a model to follow once the SpExx are completed. The sense of presence and consolation of which I had a taste as I gave myself to the drama of the SpExx becomes less intense, less drawn out in time, as I return to my direct involvement in the world. But I seek to keep the flame burning, and this contemplation keeps me alive to the ways in which God is present, active, even toiling within the world, and how I must continue to praise, reverence, and serve him. In other words I return to that which is the foundation of the Exercises. The circle is complete.

In its own way this analysis of the SpExx can be represented by a funnel image similar to that presented by Fessard. For him election is the focal point of the SpExx, marking a before and an after. I begin very broadly with praise of God and creation, and little by little am drawn into a narrower and clearer focus by following Ignatius' method. Praise becomes reverence, and intention to overcome sin and conform myself to God. Then I concentrate on what this conformity might mean for me, and am led to the moment of election. Having made an election, I am gently brought back through implementation to interaction with the whole world, which becomes the setting in which I allow myself to be an instrument of God's purpose for me, and through me for the world. The "before" is defined by a narrowing of my focus, the "after" by the broadening of my insertion into the world and experience of it as I live out my chosen project under God.

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