

The Dynamics of the Exercises

Rev. Howard Gray, S.J.

Lecture 1

Introduction: Title, Presupposition, & 20 Introductory Annotations

Introduction. In the First Annotation of the Exercises Ignatius describes the process in terms of physical exercises like strolling, walking, and running; that is, progressively more focused physical activities. The analogy underscores an overarching characteristic of the Exercises, their focused movement towards discovery. That is what I mean by the title of this series, *The Dynamics of the Exercises*, what Ignatius will describe as “to seek and find the Divine Will.” The Exercises are a text, a compilation of experiences that are designed to help the one giving the Exercises to do so with some sense of being part of a tradition. The Exercises are also a pastoral adaptation of the text to the rich set of realities that constitute the relationship of the one making the Exercises, the one who gives them and the Triune God [i.e., Father, Son, and Spirit] who is the ultimate Overseer of the entire enterprise. Finally, the Exercises are a constitutive part of a wider and deeper reality, Ignatian Spirituality, which includes the Jesuit Constitutions, *The Spiritual Diary* and Ignatius’ letters. In this first set of reflections we are going to concentrate on the Introductory Annotations [1] to [20] and the untitled description under [21] and the Presupposition [22].

The text. The introductory annotations are “wide ranging explanatory notes [in effect they are the first of the ‘directories’]. Of these annotations, some are intended directly for the exercitant, while others deal with the general use of the Exercises and with certain principles for giving them. It was Ignatius’ own practice to give the exercitant Annotations 1, 20, 5, and 4 at the beginning, and 3, 11, 12 and 13 after the ‘Foundation’” [Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, p.1]. What the text offers is wise and yet venturesome reflections often encased in language that sounds ascetical rather than pastoral. **The one who makes the Exercises** should see the importance of words and phrases like “every way,” “preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all disordered tendencies,” “acts of the intellect in reasoning” and “acts of the will.” What Ignatius looks for is someone capable of being consistent and generous so that the dynamics of grace can operate in the mind and heart. **The one who gives the Exercises** ought to present these as preludes to prayer not as lectures, homilies, or lesson plans [2], paying special attention to the movements [3] and [17], facilitating the gradual assimilation within the one making the retreat of the discernment of spirits [7] to [10] and [14], and to facilitate this accompaniment through prudent adaptation of the text to the human and spiritual personality of the one making the Exercises [18] and [19]. **Finally as a process the Exercises culminate** in a relationship between Creator and creature, which Ignatius characterizes as an affective communication with effective orientation to the future: “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 [affective communication] and disposing it for the way in which it will be better able to serve Him in the future” [effective orientation to the future]. This orientation to the future is tricky, and it is here that the one giving the retreat must help the one making the retreat towards

what I call transparency before God [16]. This is what the Exercises are all about, i.e., choosing within the mystery of God the better service I can give to God [21].

The pastoral adaptation certainly is implied in a correct reading of the text [1]-[20], fitting the Exercises to the person. But it is more sophisticatedly embedded in [21] the Presupposition. All Ignatian pastoral activity is mutual, helping both the one who gives and the one who receives. For Ignatius God is a helping God, which was his great discovery at Manresa [cf. the Autobiography]. For the pastoral reality of the Exercises both the giver and the receiver have to trust that God is working **within the relationship**. This cluster of spiritual realities [i.e., God is a helping God; God communicates within relationships as well as in solitude; there is no relationship without mutual trust] reveal the fundamental consolation as one begins the Spiritual Exercises, i.e., God's providence is individual and operationally constant.

Ignatian spirituality within [1]-[20] and [21] and [22] centers on (a) the role of pilgrimage in the life and works of Ignatius, (b) the role of conversation during that pilgrimage, and (c) revelation is affectively embraced truth, i.e., through love you see God's meaning for you. The archetype of Ignatius as a pilgrim and the evolution of his idea of pilgrimage [from Montserrat to Manresa to Jerusalem to a world-mission] pervade his spirituality. The Exercises are a pilgrimage of a soul seeking, weighing, moving through the pilgrimage of Jesus and relating the gospel journey to oneself. In that journey the pilgrim soul making the Exercises is not alone but has a companion who supports, suggest, explains but constantly guides the pilgrim's journey to God. In many ways the 20 annotations are about the kind of conversation that should dominate the relationship between the one making the retreat and his/her companion, travelling together the path of the Exercises. Conversation was one of the great apostolic ministries of the early Jesuits. Finally, the goal is the privileged communication between God and the one making the Exercises. In that communication—sometimes vivid and dense with meaning and sometimes still and obscure—a relationship is being formed, which the one making the retreat realizes is God's revelation not about things but about God's self. Gradually the one making the retreat understands that God does not give mercy but God is mercy; Christ does not call to discipleship but Christ dwells within the discipleship; the Spirit does not bestow consolation but the Spirit is the consolation. This is why Ignatius speaks so often about affective movements.