

The Dynamics of the Exercises
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Lecture 2: Principle and Foundation [23]

Introduction. The 1599 Directory describes the Foundation (the only name it uses for # [23]) as “the groundwork of the whole moral and spiritual edifice of the Exercises” [cf. Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, and p. 25]. The Foundation is neither a meditation nor contemplation; it is a consideration, i.e., a meditative rumination. Its interpretative history [cf. Joseph A. Tetlow’s “The Fundamentum: Creation in the Principle and Foundation,” *Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits* 21/4, September 1989, pp. 30-43] is one of **decline from** its original intent to be a religious experience carried on in a conversational and instructional mode between the one gives and the one makes the Exercises before but integral to the First Week of the Exercises **to** a philosophical and even catechetical presentation of self-obvious truths that guide every Christian. This was also a movement from personal religious affectivity to communal ascetical performance of a basic Christian moral imperative. In the 20th century there has been a conscious effort to retrieve the original intent of the Ignatian tradition especially as this was laid out by Polanco in his Directory. This evening my remarks follow the retrieval tradition. **The Foundation is an experiential period of reflection on the way I have been called to be this creature within a community of created reality by a loving, self-revelatory God.**

The text. Like the reality it introduces, **creation**, the Ignatian text is about the **relationship** between the one making the retreat and the God of the Exercises. The text presumes that the one making the retreat reflects the dispositions of annotation # [5]. The movement within the text is revelatory not didactic, experiential not programmatic; that is, every one making the Exercises will go through the Foundation in his or her own way. Despite the language, it is about ongoing creation as an event in “my” but seen first as the activity of God for me even before I was born, echoing the experience of Jeremiah 1:5 and 31:3, called from the womb and embraced by an everlasting love and the ongoing experience of being drawn by everlasting kindness. **Consequently, I learn what praise, reverence, and service are not so much from my experience as from the self-revelation of God, especially in Genesis 1.** Freely and lovingly God has chosen me to be God’s creature not through imposition of power but through attraction, desires, and an evolving sense of being loved as I am and in who I am. **This is the heart of revelation as relational sharing, a theme throughout the Exercises. I have been invited to a shared vision with my Creator of whom I am called to be and how I will respond to that call. I am specifically a created act of God in all my history, temperament, talents, struggles and failures, successes and satisfactions. This is very close to John Duns Scotus *haecceitas*, the unique “thisness” that makes me this creature and not just a creature.**

I share this ongoing creative relationship with other creatures that Ignatius characterizes as “helpers.” The importance of this term can be grasped by the centrality the term “to help” plays in the Autobiography and then later both in the Jesuit Constitutions and Ignatius’ letters. This multi-relational God of creation has a name, “God our Lord,”

which for Ignatius means a Trinitarian God—Father, Son, and Spirit—revealed through the person and work of Jesus the Christ and our Lord.

Given this foundational relationship, Ignatius proposes from paragraph 3 onwards in the Foundation text the ways we act from this relationship. First, I am never out of relationship with the rest of creation. Through my freedom I assess the authenticity of how every other created reality leads me to God or distracts me from God. In that process I learn whether I see God as my only absolute and act out of that relationship. Second, there is a balance between “use” and “ridding” oneself. Both are part of genuine relationship. Ignatian use must be understood within the context of praise, reverence, and service not just utilitarian employment, like a paper cup you can toss out once it has done its task. You reverence the other in creation and care for it in service. Ignatian ridding oneself is not dismissal, abuse, or harsh rejection. It is self-examination about how at times I can substitute the good of creation for the God of creation, which explains, in part, the juxta-positing of the material on the Examination of Conscience in # [24] ff. in the text of the Exercises. What is important here is to accept asceticism as a means to an end not the end. Asceticism is a created tool that helps to sustain an authentic relationship not an end in itself. There is an ascetical movement within the Foundation but it is not the movement of the Foundation. The movement is love interpreted as a forging of relationships.

Indifference, use of things insofar as and as much as [*tantum/quantum*], expressed in the translation as “to the extent,” and the idea of the more [*magis*]—these three terms are important but, again, they must be understood in the light of the creative relationship that founds all the subsequent movement of the Ignatian Exercises.

Indifference is not emotional retardation, affective numbness, or cruel lack of care. Indifference is a balanced overview of praising, reverencing, and serving God through the gifts of God and not substituting the gifts of God for the God of gifts. Later Ignatius will present this approach in the Rules of Discernment for Week II of the Exercises. Important to note, too, that “ridding oneself” is a grace not just a human effort. The grace of the Foundation is to be moved to desire and to choose only that which leads me more and more deeply into the freedom to love that is the heart of God’s creative action. I want to be where God dwells and in that dwelling place I will find all the friends of God, my helpers.

Pastoral adaptation. [1] Our scriptural, ethical, and theological understanding of creation has enriched the Ignatian application of the Foundation. Today we see ourselves in solidarity with creation not as “users” and much less as exploiters.[2] Not everyone ought to make the Foundation and the idea that this is a primitive, easy prayer that lays out truths already known is an abuse of the Foundation. The Foundation is a prayer to be used by those who are capable of the full Exercises, either in the 30-day form or in the 19th annotation form. It explores dispositions that will be developed through the experience of the full Exercises. [3] What I have found helpful is Luke 15, the trio of parables about mercy, which are really revelations of the father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. These present mercy as a re-creation, “my son who was lost is found; he was dead and has been resorted to life.” The God of Jesus is the father of incredible self-donation in the

parable. What is important in the parable is that the father is true to his vision of what it is to be a father.

Ignatian spirituality. [1] Again the role of conversation as pivotal in the way the Foundation is done in the context of the Exercises. [2] The pedagogy of Ignatius is developmental, e.g., the Foundation continues to reappear throughout the Exercises and always in newer, deeper ways. It will appear in the process before the election and then during the actual election process and will come to a more contemplative fulfillment in the Contemplation to Attain Divine Love. I think that this developmental reality is important because it helps to gauge when a person moves from one week to the next or from one prayer to the next. For example, there is a difference between a person who is in a developmental mode and one who is simply incapable of moving along from Week I to Week II. [3] The individual care of a person within the Exercises is also an act of praising, reverencing, and serving the specificity of God's creative act. People share created realities but they are not identical in that sharing. [4] When mission and identity questions are so important in our apostolic works, it is good to see in the Foundation that theological foundation within the God for creation. God identifies as the creature [identity] and then labors to effect the fulfillment of creation through partnership with the creature [mission].