

The Dynamics of the Exercises

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Lecture 10: The Contemplation To Attain Divine Love

Introduction. Because the text of the Exercises does not designate any particular place for the Contemplation [sometimes referred to as the *Contemplatio*], historically there has been some controversy about its interpretation and role within the Exercises. In what I consider the best essay in English on the Contemplation, Michael Buckley has summarized the discussion this way: “Is it a method of prayer, equally viable at any stage of religious development, or is it a synthesis of the Spiritual Exercises, dependent for its efficacy upon the evolution that has gone before into loving union with God? There is another way of putting this same question. For Ignatius the election demanded an antecedent maturity, a freedom from deranged affectivities, and a sensitive identification with Christ. This religious liberty, which emerged from [the] influence of God and a concentrated human co-operation, stood as a presupposition to finding God in a decision. Now the issue is: are these similar dispositions for entering into the Contemplation for attaining Love? Does it demand that one has progressed through the struggles and the graces of the four weeks of the Exercises and now draws them into a unity, or does it find a legitimate place at any stage of this development?” (Buckley, “The Contemplation To Attain Love,” in the *Way Supplement* 24 [Spring, 1975]: “Ignatian Election and Christian Choice,” p. 94). Buckley then analyzes the Contemplation carefully, phrase by phrase, coming to this conclusion: “The purpose of the contemplation was entirely, a comprehension of all that had gone before, a comprehension whose activity was the sharing of personal communion. Within the single person, there is the ecstatic unity in which personal knowledge, love, and service become total surrender. Within the universe, all things are finally understood as descending from God as gift, as holy, as sacred history and as participations in the divine. The merger of these two—of the surrender of man [sic] and of the descending creation of God—is a unity in which the lover and beloved become one, integral in their mutual communication and commingled in personal communion. And to allow for this, *La Contemplacion Para Alcanzar Amor* resumes the principal themes of the four weeks of the Spiritual Exercises into a synthesis by which a person moves gradually to God as he is and to whom [s]he surrenders [her]himself in all things” [p. 104].

Presuppositions of any interpretation of the Contemplation:

- **Ignatius sees all as a movement, a progress with a beginning and an end** [cf. the Autobiography, the Exercises themselves, and the Constitutions], an unfolding history not atomic movements.
- **This movement is developmental**, a growing of consciousness, what Ignatius called “interior knowledge,” **passing through stages called “weeks.”**
- **The orientation of this knowledge** is towards the goodness with which God has surrounded the human person and out of this

recognition grows human love, a movement towards God as God has moved towards the human. “[O]ne is taught to love only by being loved, and this pattern of ordinary experience repeats the most profound models of religion” [Buckley, p.96].

- **“The purpose of the Contemplation is not contemplation simply but a contemplation that transcends itself and moves into the decisions and direction of a man [or woman’s] life.** This unity of three movements—interior knowledge or realization, love or affectivity, service or action—constitutes the full goal of the contemplation of the goodness from God. It is not an understanding of the sources and implications of love, but rather the personal experience of a development, of a history in which this source is apprehended and its implications accepted” [Buckley, p. 96]

Structure for Praying the Contemplation. It is important for the guide to understand [230] & [231] as hermeneutical principles, utilized in the Buckley analysis above. The preludes are sweeping in their implications; a generosity of viewpoint should end the Exercises: [233] & [234]. Note how **generosity** is such a rich, all-embracing virtue for Ignatius-- about viewpoints, about conduct, about reception of the other, about hope for the future.

Each of the four points focuses on a specific power of the human—memory [234], affective insight into what I remember [235], reflective analysis of how God works towards something [236] and surrender to the embrace of God as Alpha and Omega [237]. I have found helpful John 21, the encounter between the Risen Lord and the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, as a concrete example of the Contemplation to Attain Love. Jesus gives them the gift of food, warmth, and his presence; he gives this as a sign of his dwelling within the human and not outside it; he has labored to make this seaside breakfast, and the entire scene is a recall of how they were called and are called again, an embrace of their discipleship experiences of being called anew.

Unpack the “Take and Receive: Why is liberty mentioned first of all my human gifts? Go back to what we said above vis-à-vis generosity. *Libertas* is the capacity to be generous, a magnanimity of spirit, for Ignatius the great gift we can give back to God is the impulse to do good [“to help people” from the Autobiography into the Constitutions].

“**Take**” is not to relinquish but to consecrate, to place my powers under the impulse of grace and love, to orient these human gifts to the divine passion for life and love.

Pastoral Note. The richness of the Contemplation can be too much for one prayer period; therefore, consider the gradual presentation of the points throughout the second to fourth days of Week IV.