

DISCOURSE ON EXERCISES AND CO-WORKERS

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1 The dramatic experience of the Spiritual Exercises involves four actors: God and Ignatius, the one who gives and the one who makes Exercises. In this introduction we want to get a better grasp of some aspects of these four actors' relations. So to begin with, we affirm that these relations do not function according to a set scheme. Each one of the actors gets involved in every step of the way of the Exercises –“walking, journeying on foot, running... seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul” [1]. It would be impossible, therefore, to juxtapose the relationship between the one who gives and the one who receives the Spiritual Exercises, on the one hand; and on the other, the relationship of God with Ignatius in his experience, and of God with an individual exercitant in search of the will of God. At their own proper levels, all four together are continually contributing to the work.

2 In Annotation 15, the distinction is clearly made between giving spiritual counsel, spiritual accompaniment, and spiritual direction “outside of the Spiritual Exercises” and “during the Spiritual Exercises.” The distinction depends on the meaning of the verb “move.” Outside of the Spiritual Exercises, one can or should “move” – draw someone to make an election – to choose – a consecrated life, a lay mission, or the priesthood. During the Spiritual Exercises, “one should not move” – one should not urge the exercitant, because the search here is for the will of God. It must be God who disposes the heart of the exercitant to serve God in the way that God wishes

to be served, pursuant to the admirable exchange between the exercitant who sets himself on the way where he can better serve his Lord in the future, and the God who communicates Himself to the faithful exercitant, embracing him – enflaming him – in love and praise.

3 Without denying that God has other ways of letting people find Him, Ignatius the actor proposes that the director take different stances toward the exercitant outside of and during the Spiritual Exercises. The one who gives the Spiritual Exercises has to maintain his own indifference in his relationship with the one who receives the Spiritual Exercises [23 and 179]. This indifference means that the one who gives the Exercises proceeds in such a way that the Creator is able to act immediately with His creature and the creature with his Creator and Lord [336]. This word “immediately” has created a problem. A look at the translations of the autograph *Spiritual Exercises* shows how “immediately” causes a problem in a text which intends to portray the role of the one who gives the Spiritual Exercises by requiring that he abandon the role of *mediator* in any sense of that word. The one who gives the Spiritual Exercises undeniably puts himself at the service of another, searching for the will of God. In this relationship, the one who gives the Spiritual Exercises will surely be “affected,” even though what is dealt with here is not his own life, which he must never hold out as a model, and about which he ought not share confidences with the one who makes the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius wants him to stay in the middle – remain at a balance – not so that he can make a decision like Solomon’s, but so as to guard indifference, that is to say, he guarantees in more than words that it is God who is able to tip the balance in the discernment of the will of God. This is the source of his attitude of “staying in the middle” like a balance – *como un peso* – so as to “allow” God to weigh in on this or that side of the choice being made by the one making the Spiritual Exercises to search for the will of God in his life.

4 It is good to remember that Ignatius’ insistence on the immediacy of God the Actor situates the experience of the Spiritual Exercises within that dialogue which God our Lord has wanted from the beginning to engage in with humankind, and to which God has remained faithful despite our

unfaithfulness. As do other tangible signs of God's personal care for each of His creatures, this dialogue continues as well in the Spiritual Exercises as in all other kinds of spiritual accompaniment outside of the Exercises. In his last discourse, the Lord revealed that it is the Spirit Himself who will lead us to the Truth which is Christ and transform us into Christians, that is to say into "alter Christus," if we let ourselves be seized by this Spirit, the Paraclete. This is the way the Lord brings the Three Persons into the long experience of the chosen people whom God Himself never stops guiding immediately, or better, personally. This spiritual direction on the part of God Himself seizes the chosen people first of all as a community of faith and of fidelity; and the individual only in the measure in which the person belongs to God's people, old or new. God remains faithful to this dialogue, giving the creature the capacity to search out God's individual design for each person and to fulfill it. "You, Lord, You probe me. You know me. Whether I rise or whether I sit, You know it. You read all my thoughts from afar" (Psalm 139, 1-2). If God did not create this capacity, making us "capax Dei", the Spiritual Exercises would be impossible.

5 The one who receives the Exercises is an actor in the measure in which he has accepted this capacity for God with a large heart and great generosity towards the Creator and Lord, offering to Him all one's will and all one's liberty, in order to serve the divine Majesty with one's whole person as well as with all that one possesses, in conformity with God's most holy will [5]. Ignatius, like many other holy men and women, confesses that God taught him the way a master teaches a child, and in his book of the *Spiritual Exercises*, he proposes his experience as an actor in this dialogue which the Creator initiates in His creatures.

6 In His spiritual accompaniment of His people, God has chosen to need humans. Yet in the Gospels, Jesus often said negative things about this exchange. To begin with, there is his solemn warning that no one ought to take the title of rabbi, or master, or father – which reveals the deceit of the spiritual director who imagines himself empowered to give that guidance which belongs ultimately only to God. So it is only sensible to feel a healthy suspicion about any accompaniment that is authoritative or arbitrary, the

abuse singled out by the Lord which, however much its existence be denied, is a real one. Above all, the disclosure of personal responsibility, illuminated by the unique role of free conscience, shows how reasonable Jesus' warning is.

7 Yet at the same time, the Lord Himself grants to His disciples the authority to confirm and to guide the church. Paul does not hesitate to acknowledge that the Spirit of God endows some people with a charism of guiding their brothers and sisters in the name of God. It is instructive that the pastoral letters – addressed not to an ecclesial community but to individual persons – give greater precision to the spiritual accompaniment of individuals. The work is not only to encourage, to strengthen, and to clarify, but – this is a new emphasis – also to teach that not every possible way leads to God. The whole vision of Paul is dominated by the care not to “hinder the Spirit” (1 Tim.5:19). From this comes Ignatius' concern to keep the relationship between the one who gives the Spiritual Exercises and the one who receives them as a relation which is not bilateral between two equals, but always asymmetrical. For the relation between these two actors is not that of one who knows with regard to one who does not know, or of one who guides with regard to one who is guided, but of one who wishes to be seized by the Spirit and who goes to another for help about how to let that happen – help which will not “hinder.”

8 So it is that in the Annotations, Ignatius' great preoccupation is to maintain a communication between the one who gives and the one who receives Exercises that shifts between reserve and warmth. The reserve – for instance, in a sufficient detachment while one gives the mysteries of the life of Christ in a brief and summary way, precisely so as not to hinder the Spirit, who gives greater spiritual savor and profit [2]. The reserve, again – in the impartiality with which one probes and learns every detail of the Exercises when the one who is receiving them is not moved by the Spirit [6]. The reserve – engendered by the fact of not having any information about what is still to come [11]. The reserve – unavoidable when the one giving Exercises, who is elsewhere recognized for allowing full liberty, intervenes authoritatively to fight against temptations that risk hindering the Spirit [13], or to temper enthusiasm and fervor not of the Spirit [14], or above all to adapt

the Spiritual Exercises to suit the real abilities of each one who makes them [18]. This reserve is indispensable in keeping the relationship between the one who gives and the one who receives the Exercises open to the activity of the other two actors – God and Ignatius.

9 On the other hand, the reserve must not obstruct warmth. The warmth of showing oneself gentle and good, giving strength and courage for what is to come. The warmth of revealing for the exercitant the play of evil spirits as they move to hinder the good Spirit that leads one to dispose oneself and to prepare for the consolation to come [7]. Warmth, too, in wholly accepting the exercitant in all of his capacities, in all of his vital energies, to direct him to God the actor, in the rhythm of the experience of Ignatius, also an actor [18]. Warmth in an accompaniment that discloses the impasses and the mistaken routes, for not every route leads to God [10]. Warmth in the shared listening to the work of Spirit, which can include the help to “react with all his forces” to anything that seems not to be “solely for the service, honor, and glory of the divine Majesty” [16]. Such help may perhaps require obedience on the part of the one who receives the Exercises: This is an obedience nothing like the arbitrary power of one person over another, but rather like a service to someone who, in utter freedom and confidence, completely opens his heart because he wants to have counsel given in full awareness [17].

10 It has to be noted that, in his description of the relationship between the one who gives and the one who receives the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius does not use the word *obey*. For the Ignatian experience does not have to do with obedience to another human, but aims to help recognize the will of God the actor, making His own voice understood through this experience. Once again, the one who receives the Spiritual Exercises is relating much more intimately to God in his desiring than he is relating to the others, that is, to Ignatius and to the one who gives the Spiritual Exercises.

11 If the one giving the Spiritual Exercises enjoys an authority because of his good judgment, his refined psychology, his delicate listening, and above all because of a spiritual sense that comes from the ignatian experience, this is all to the good. Still, in his relationship with the one who receives the

Exercises, he must humble himself before the One who is Master. It is normal that the one who gives the Exercises should enjoy a certain persuasiveness over the exercitant, which could tempt the one who receives the Exercises to try to please the giver. But both of them ought to stay attentive to what the Spirit is doing rather than to what the one giving the Spiritual Exercises might seem to suggest. It is in the name of Christian liberty that the two move in a relationship of trust [22], to the point that the one who gives the Spiritual Exercises expects the exercitant himself to choose from what has been proposed whatever helps him live his own proper experience, which might have no apparent connection with what was proposed. The proposal was made in the expectation that the other would trust it fully, to the point of obeying it; and the retreatant would honor what is proposed in such a way that his freedom grows continually greater.

12 This “job description” — a kind of inspection of the Annotations — justifies a quite negative assessment of certain kinds of “director” known in various places in the world. To begin with, there is the “disappearing director.” In some cultures, non-directive and client-centered therapy continue to influence directors of the Spiritual Exercises. They will not use the term “director” — a term that Ignatius himself did not use — because, they claim, it suggests paternalism and undue influence on the part of the one who gives the Spiritual Exercises. They prefer to be just a “companion,” expecting and enabling the other to give direction to the relationship. Sometimes, they want to be just a “witness.” In the dramatic act as Ignatius frames it, the one who gives the Exercises does find himself being depended on as “director,” but this certainly does not mean a loss of personal autonomy or identity on the part of the one who freely receives the Exercises. In placing his trust in the one who gives the Spiritual Exercises, the exercitant wants, with the help of an effective director, to unite himself to God.

13 Here is why the long tradition of spiritual direction which the Spiritual Exercises is part of avoids indexing this “fraternal sacrament” under the protocol of obedience to a spiritual director. The two actors fully share in a common search for the will of God. Their relationship begins with the confidence the exercitant places in the other’s ignatian experience. This

ignatian experience, the exercitant desires to avail himself of – the Spiritual Exercises always suppose “persons of desire” – for the sake of “the liberty of our desires, in which it can be possible for us to commit ourselves to the way of greater divine service,” in Ignatius’ own words [157]. As it turns out, the issue of a relationship of obedience does not arise, since the desire to go through the ignatian experience is very real, or at least the desire of having this desire, as Ignatius notes elsewhere.

14 Another type of director is the over-rigid director. He follows the text of the *Spiritual Exercises* rigidly, considering it mainly a source of material for prayer. These directors do not seem to have interiorized the clear description given by Ignatius of a director who really directs the retreatant and still stands out of the Spirit’s way. Just at this point, we should recall that all four actors in the ignatian experience are communicating: be it by words, be it by motions on the part of God, be it with the text of a book as in the case of Ignatius. One recognizes immediately on opening the book that it is not a text to read merely, but a many-faceted text to be put to use, not directly by the exercitant, but by the one who gives the Spiritual Exercises. Having lived the experience of the Spiritual Exercises himself, he is ready to help another live them according to “the manner of proceeding” of Ignatius – the manner which interweaves a communion in the universal fruits of Ignatius’ personal experience with a method of marking the way for an exercitant’s personal experience.

15 Applying this text of the communication of one experience of God, Ignatius played very different roles, depending on the persons he faced and the situations in which they found themselves. The one who gives the Spiritual Exercises, remaining entirely faithful to his own ignatian manner of proceeding, cannot lay claim to a rigid, idiosyncratic interpretation of the text, or to some exclusive orthodoxy, either, when faced with one who wishes to receive the Exercises creatively, stimulated by the experience of Ignatius as it is in the book. The over-rigid director is not faithful to the text, itself, if he does not interiorize his own direction when he is faced with the desires and the capacities of the exercitant.

16 While presenting the Spiritual Exercises this way, as an experience in which four actors, God and Ignatius, the one who gives Exercises and the one who receives Exercises, are constantly at work, it will be good to recognize that Ignatius did not foresee a possible fifth actor: a group that wants to make Exercises as a group with its own proper group dynamic. On the contrary, for Ignatius any Exercises in Daily Life would be Annotation 19 Exercises, even though he might not be so pleased with the expression. Ignatius could not conceive of Exercises “apart from life” and Exercises “in life,” having already established in concrete form a way that God shows to election, a way that presupposes that all of the actors are working in real life, where God allows Himself to be found participating in everything. With that in mind, Ignatius makes just this distinction: the Exercises made in a closed context from which all busyness has been cut off, assuring that the exercitant’s spirit will not be spread thin among many things, and thus making himself readier to approach His Creator and Lord and to unite himself to Him [20]; and the Exercises made in an open context without any particular isolation, a context in which the immediate contact with the ordinary things of daily life allows constant verification of the authenticity of the ignatian experience [19]. Yet, all things considered, even the Exercises in this open context require that certain conditions be fulfilled so that all four actors of the ignatian experience are able to be at work in the search for the will of God in the life of one who desires it.

17 There we have certain aspects of the relations among the four actors of the Exercises. What is most notable is that these four actors do not have invariable roles limited to certain defined activities. The actor Ignatius frees his experience to a thousand adaptations and interpretations. The one who gives the Exercises and the one who receives them – that is, both the one who intently probes the ignatian experience of the other [6] and the one who spontaneously tells the other what he is living in this experience [17] – are in a relation in which it is always possible to find other ways in the search for the will of God. The two are not fixed and frozen in this experience as long as the one who gives the Spiritual Exercises, among all the ways of proceeding, has the boldness to choose according to how the interplay of desire develops in the experience of the one who wants to receive the Exercises.

And finally, God as an actor never fails to surprise during the ignatian experience, for it is proper to God alone to give consolation without any prior cause, and it is proper only to the Creator to operate within His creature, to convert, to change, to transform utterly in love [330].

18 In this way, the dynamic activity of the four actors creates a situation always new which enables the re-creation of the one who receives Exercises, on the condition that he takes the risk of going out of himself, allowing himself to be redirected by the Spirit of Christ – as a Christian, *alter Christus* – thanks to the one who gives the Spiritual Exercises coming from the experience of Ignatius.

19 And since this experience offers always something new and creative, we will continually have plenty to discuss and discern, to share and to learn, about this activity of the four actors at the heart of the Spiritual Exercises.

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