

HOW GOD ACCOMPANIED IGNATIUS: A PARADIGM FOR US IN “HELPING SOULS”

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This article is an attempt to shed light on the way that the Lord acted with Ignatius inspiring in him not only his own commitment but also his manner of “helping souls”.

Might we not speak of the Lord’s way of leading Ignatius as “accompaniment”? The term of itself evokes a kind of walking side by side to attain a fixed goal. “Spiritual accompaniment”, however, is not really a “walking side by side” since the two companions are not involved in an identical way. To offer someone spiritual accompaniment is not a matter of mutual exchange concerning useful indications to clarify the way to walk together. In spiritual accompaniment there is the one who accompanies and the one who is accompanied. It is understood that those who are engaged in the accompaniment have a certain light, experience and the necessary resources to help the others who are being accompanied. When after his conversion, Ignatius felt called to offer to others the spiritual help of which they had need, he began to offer the kind of help that he had experienced from God. Consequently, he recognized within himself a responsibility for those “souls” that he was beginning to help.

Ignatius wanted to share with others what he, himself, had received from God. If the term “accompaniment” can be applied analogously to the rapport between God and Ignatius and a similar kind of support he would offer to others, we recognize the intervention of the Spirit, the source of his own spiritual life. If Ignatius moved quickly to teach and to

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guide others, it is because God first had taught and guided him. Did not Ignatius himself define his relation to God during his months at Manresa, as God, his educator? "During that time, God behaved towards him in the same way that a school-master conducts himself with a child: he was teaching him" (Auto. n. 27). Thus, Ignatius recognized that he had lived at Manresa a privileged relationship with God, a relationship of teaching which certainly consisted towards reinforcing and developing his knowledge of the mystery of God (Ignatius points out the many graces he received), but also a teaching which carried over into the practical experience and the transformation of his own life. Since he had been taught by the Lord himself, he thus felt responsible to communicate to others what he had learned. In other words, the way that Ignatius used with others was inspired by the way that God had dealt with him. What we are seeking to do is to bring out, through his own journey, some formative elements that God inspired in him after that decisive meeting at the Manor House in Loyola.

**The Starting Point for Accompaniment:
the Human Reality of Each One**

To be fully efficacious, spiritual accompaniment is dependent upon an attitude of interior readiness and openness on the part of the one seeking it; an attitude that is not always so. In the beginning of the Autobiography in which Ignatius conveys to us his interior experience, he humbly recognizes that apparently he was not expecting great things of God. He was, he notes, given over to "worldly vanities". Must we conclude that the passage from this first state to the meeting with God could be realized only at the price of a total break with his former life, so that nothing of it, henceforth, could continue? To bring about the conversion and the transformation of Ignatius, would God have had to relinquish providing any support for him?

When called upon to help someone spiritually, would it be better not to become involved from the outset, renouncing complete responsibility, if we should discover in the person whom we would like to help a sort of opacity that allows for no conceivable opening for God to enter? Then, if such an entrance should happen, should we not look upon it as a

sheer miracle, God having worked what was humanly impossible?

Such a stance has indeed its element of truth, and notably in the case which concerns us when faced with the decisive moment of conversion: it was not Ignatius who was converted, but God who converted him. Are we to say, then, that in the relationship with the persons who come to us and who also recognize that they are prisoners of “worldly vanities”, every intervention and every work on our part, as guides, would be simply futile? Is it true that in leading Ignatius to conversion, God could count on nothing of what he was, and thereupon was obliged to proceed with a pure and simple substitution of his person?

No! If God acts, at times, powerfully in the life of persons to transform them, we cannot deny but that he also takes into account what he finds

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within each one. In the case of Ignatius, God certainly kept in mind the make-up of his personality, in particular the human virtues and up to a point, the Christian virtues that God would have discovered in him. The spirit of Ignatius, notably in function of the formation received, was far from being a matter-of-fact spirit; he was not without a certain nobility of character. From the moral point of view, he was exacting of himself when it was a question of truth, of

authenticity, of respect, generosity and of a real freedom regarding money. He was also a courageous man, not recoiling before difficulties and remaining steadfast in his commitments.

Before every approach, every spiritual dialogue, in the ministry of accompaniment that we offer to others, — even as we look for a solid base and a source of hope — should we not be mindful of the qualities and virtues of these persons? If God could have so radically overturned the life of Ignatius, it is certainly thanks to the work of his spirit; but the Spirit, himself, penetrated the person of Ignatius using up to a certain point, for his work, the truly human qualities and virtues which were his own. The

sense of the “magis”, for instance, which informed him from the beginning, the Spirit directed at first towards some models of realization quite different from those which previously had stimulated his imagination and his thought; the Spirit then transformed his urgent need for “more” by inscribing it no longer into dreams of success and exterior achievements, however saintly these might be considered, but by conforming him little by little to the paschal mystery of Jesus. Such was the course set forth at Manresa.

Receptivity Towards God and His Conditions

One of the difficulties – we know that – in spiritual progress, is that persons who ask for help are often engaged in many enterprises, and succeed only with difficulty to be free of their many activities. They would like to deepen their relationship with God; they like to have someone speak to them about that; and if they have decided to have recourse to spiritual accompaniment, it is because they would hope, that in acting this way, to grow spiritually. But the receptivity – even if at times theoretically assured – can produce its fruit only if certain conditions are verified.

In the case of Ignatius, the situation is not difficult to verify. Here is an active man, ambitious, certainly a believer in God, but sufficiently taken up with his own personal enterprises so as to leave no space for his Lord, to the point that God comes in and actually takes his place – at the centre- in Ignatius’ life : this happened, however, by God creating deep within the heart of the convalescent a readiness and openness never previously experienced; it was the total and forced halt to his human endeavours and then living in a state of useless inactivity that he longed to fill. Because he had nothing to do, Ignatius decided to read some books that were not much to his liking. But the solitude and the silence of his long days of convalescence allowed, in spite of himself, the seed sown in his heart by the account of the life of Christ and of the lives of the saints, to produce unexpected fruits. A new receptivity, soon to be allied to an unknown provocation began little by little to shake Ignatius, making him move from a passive, and no doubt a not too patient waiting, to a welcoming of interior resonances of whose nature he was unaware.

From being active Ignatius was forced to become receptive and the chance of circumstances meant that he was being thus led to allow to grow in the depth of his being nothing other than the Christian mystery revealed in the life of Jesus and manifested in the lives of the saints.

It is a fact, one might admit often arising from quite banal events, that spiritual growth (or eventually conversion) calls for, above all, an openness to God and to God's grace through exercising a welcoming attitude and an interior receptivity. As in the case of Ignatius, solitude and silence (both interior and exterior) were present as normal conditions baring the way for an authentic receptivity. Ignatius underlines, in the 20th Annotation of the Spiritual Exercises, the importance of this emptying time. Even before he had tested the truth of this experience during his long stay at Manresa, he would have perceived the impartiality of it since the time at Loyola, when he began reading the life of Jesus and the lives of the saints, letting his thoughts pause to ponder "for a long while" this new universe (the interior universe) that he was in the process of discovering.

In the accompaniment of persons, we know the fruit that can be produced from pulling away from everyday life, confiding in God and trusting his Word in silence and solitude.

The Importance of Prayer, of Prolonged Prayer Being Written Into a Formal Programme

Prolonged prayer often moves into unsolicited spiritual energy. Persons discover in it a profoundly personal relationship with God. One could say that the conversion of Ignatius coincided with an interior movement of prayer which arose in him in a new and unexpected way.

In the autobiographical account that Ignatius has left us, we want to emphasize even more the importance of structure that a life of prayer implies. From this perspective, it is his stay at Manresa that interests us above all. Briefly describing prayer, that was in fact his own way, Ignatius stops over certain aspects that in his later experience of accompaniment would clarify and reinforce this exigency. Looking at the key moments of prayer, Ignatius affirms clearly that the length of time assumes an

indisputable importance. At Manresa, he was praying he tells us, each day for seven hours and even outside of that time “all the rest of the day” was consecrated “to thinking on the things of God” (Autobiography n. 26). In responding to the interior demands of God, Ignatius discovered those lines of action, which would become very clear directives when writing the Spiritual Exercises. Does he not fix, for example, for each day a given number of exercises for each of which it is necessary to set aside an hour? And in the sixth addition, he is very precise that in the course of the day, the mind be not distracted nor invaded by thoughts that do not correspond to the orientation of prayer.

Another detail worth underlining, relative to the time set aside for prayer: the number of hours of prayer does not have as its end to establish records by multiplying unreasonably the time given over to prayer. God gives to Ignatius a very lucid perception of how such a way of going about prayer can become disordered and unconsciously self-seeking. Let us recall the account in which he gives of this discovery, God wishing to enlighten him as to the importance of fidelity disengaged of purely sentimental elements: “When he was going to sleep, great understandings and spiritual consolations would often come to him; so much so that he would lose much time that he had set aside for sleep... which was not very much. And thinking about this, he considered how he had decided to set aside for God a certain time, and as well, whatever remained of the day. And, from that consideration he began to question whether these “understandings” were coming from the good spirit. He came to the conclusion that it was better to let them go and to sleep during the time set aside for sleep. And this is what he did” (Ibid).

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Very soon afterwards, God asked Ignatius to consecrate to him long hours of prayer and to direct his reflection in such a way as to appropriate even better the fruits of the meeting he had lived with God. But, in the mean time, God makes him understand that the commitment that He expects of him is one of fidelity stripped of all self-seeking. It is by

putting order into our lives and especially into the regulation of our days and nights that we become capable of responding concretely to the love of God and to the direction that God marks out for our life.

When, engaged in study, Ignatius would prolong his reflection on a certain point, and he discovered that to substitute work for prayer, does not in fact bring him closer to God, but rather blocks off the expected meeting.

It is exactly what happens at times, and needs to be verified in spiritual accompaniment: a disordered commitment in prayer can in certain circumstances distance us from God instead of drawing us closer to Him. Thus when prayer is practised privately and the fulfilment of one's duty is neglected there is a false understanding of work, of action and of complying with one's obligations.

All the elements are, from now on, written into the conscience of Ignatius to bring about tomorrow the required union between prayer (contemplation) and work/rest (action), even as the "in actione contemplativus" will require yet a deeper experience of communion with God in one's commitment to the service of God and neighbour.

The Dynamic of Desire and the Role of Discernment

Desires propel us to see them realized. Ignatius has always been a man of desire, and his desires have always been strong desires. We have already said it: from the moment that he wanted to fill up the time of his convalescence, there were books available that scarcely appealed to the desires that were stirring within him.

The first great desires of Ignatius were projected, in effect, to a future defined in terms of human glory and of matrimonial union that would culminate in his being honored as a celebrity. But now he undergoes an opposing attraction. To Ignatius, the question being asked henceforth is: who really is he and what is he being called to become?

This question is a new question, similar to that of vocation, because it consists finally for Ignatius in discovering the place of his truth. Every one who accompanies another knows the importance of moments when a choice must be made in function of God's call. At the outset of election that Ignatius faces, a landmark will become decisive: that of the effects

stirred up in his spirit by two opposing desires.

Rational reflection does not permit a clear-cut decision. As the marginal note added by Gonçalves da Câmara indicates in the account of the conversion of Ignatius, here is the way God introduced Ignatius, his “accompanied-one,” into an awareness that was like nothing he had ever had. God alone can in a decisive way provoke a real spiritual consolation. Now, such was in truth the reality that Ignatius came to live. Totally different to what his soul had been accustomed when he gave himself to sensual desires and the reflections arising from them, now the attraction influenced by the life of Christ and the lives of the saints is being revealed to him, bringing solid consolation. It comes like this, he concludes, to know little by little “the diversity of the spirits which agitate us, the one from the devil, the other from God” (Autobiography n. 8).

At this moment, Ignatius is not yet at Manresa, “at the school of God himself”. But, from the beginning of his conversion, can one not say that God is actively present in the history of Ignatius in some way or other accompanying him? God offers to him enough light to discover God’s action in his life.

Is it not, at times, from quite simple experiences wherein God’s presence and action are detected, that we can help others to understand how God acts in them and is actually leading them? This awareness demands close attention to discover where God can be recognized in the midst of opposing desires.

Penance and Attachment to Jesus

We intend here to focus on how Ignatius under the guidance of God was led to undertake in his own life initiatives that the Spiritual Exercises will make explicit particularly in the first two weeks of the Exercises.

It is clear that from the period of Loyola, recognizing that God is active in his life, Ignatius becomes aware without delay that his own life has not corresponded to the expectations of the lord. Thus, he undergoes, as he enunciates, the need for doing penance. “ Having acquired from his reading, a light not to be ignored, he begins to think more seriously about his past life and the great need he has to do penance”

(Autobiography n. 9). For Ignatius, conversion is not only a simple change of life; but it includes also and necessarily an approach towards the integration of his past life and the new life, and hence an attitude of regret and of penance (he will speak later, in the Exercises, of penance both interior and exterior).

Every experience of God, every effort of fidelity to his call cannot dismiss at whim past errors, let alone ignore them. It happens to us without doubt to have to recall them in spiritual accompaniment. Every “convert is invited to recall past errors so as to find the path to follow; one must correct former bad habits and overcome what brought them about.” Ignatius’ life, upheld by the grace of God, is again clarifying from this point of view: he knew how to impose on himself decisive checks preventing him from ever going back.

If the approach to conversion and penance in spiritual accompaniment recalls the significant stage of the first week in the Spiritual Exercises, it is reserved for the second week to concentrate on the life of Jesus, with the desire to follow Jesus letting oneself be guided more and more by Him. An affective attachment to Jesus then plays a decisive role. So as to become true disciples of Jesus, the grace asked for by way of repetition in the second week is none other than that of an “interior knowledge of the Lord who (for us) became man, so that we might love Him and follow Him more closely” (SpEx. 104).

If in the conversion of Ignatius, the decisive factor came through the reading of the life of Christ, then, it is without question, that the relationship with Jesus – with whom he then wanted to be recognized as the “companion”, earnestly asking Our Lady as he was on his way to Rome to be placed with her Son – became in some way the primary source of inspiration in his search for truth. To what depths, Ignatius received the grace “to be with Jesus”! He makes a touching admission when speaking the following day after his conversion. He applied himself first of all, almost in child-like fashion, to

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copy out by himself from the gospel account, the words of Christ and the Virgin. Using calligraphy, he brought all his attention to this work: “It is thus that he began to write a book with so much care (...): the words of Christ in red ink, those of Our Lady in blue, the paper smoothed out and lined, and in a very legible hand because he was a good calligrapher” (Autobiography n. 11). At Manresa his attachment to Jesus deepened; he noted down the psychological insight of his piety from a trinitarian perspective and gave renewed attention to the work of salvation realized by the Lord Jesus... But the human-divine person of Jesus would often reappear in the following years: reminding him of a tender and sustaining presence, near and full of majesty. It suffices to refer to a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as an example, and also the helpful meeting at the time of a difficult stage towards Padua before embarking for the Holy Land (Autobiography n. 44). Jesus – the situation is clear – manifested himself frequently to Ignatius in such a very close way and He drew him more and more to Himself with bonds of love! It is pleasing to heaven, if in our experiences of accompaniment it is given to us to help those who confide in us, to mature and develop in their heart and in all that touches their lives, a strong and tender attachment to the Incarnate Son of God!

Scruples and Absolute Trust in God

One knows the depth of the crisis that Ignatius underwent in the course of his stay at Manresa, when he found himself assailed apparently without any possible defense by a crisis of scruples which brought him to the brink of suicide. Those who, in one way or another, have had to accompany persons beset with scruples know how harsh an experience that is for themselves, even considering that their suffering in no way compares to that of the persons being accompanied and undergoing these scruples.

What did God allow Ignatius to discover here? What is clear, is that Ignatius would try later to help others, drawing up a few “comments” on scruples to include in the Spiritual Exercises (Cf. SpEx. 345-351). To read these notes is to become aware of the way that God knew how to guide Ignatius at the time of his tough testing; and afterwards when Ignatius sought to draw lessons from it. It is impressive to encounter in a person

who experienced a truly trying time of scruples, such a positive assessment of scruples if they do not go on beyond a sufficiently short time...Scruples, Ignatius remarks, “ for some time (especially when the undertaking of a better life is recent) it is of no small advantage to the soul in a wonderful way and it takes it away from every appearance of sin, according to Saint Gregory’s words: ‘it belongs to good minds to perceive a fault there is no fault’” (SpEx. 348).

The experience of scruples, Ignatius thus discovered, contributed to an opening towards a more delicate attentiveness to the will of God. It puts one in the position of thanking the Lord sincerely. Furthermore he ended up being led to a boundless hope, the very virtue that scruples were threatening to take from him!

Certainly, it is not by becoming slack in our conscience that victory over scruples takes place. But, beyond the effort made by persons to integrate into their discourse the whole reality of sin, there is an act of total confidence, throwing all turmoil into the arms of God, who alone can release us from the imprisonment of scruples

When Ignatius left Manresa, having for the most part overcome his crisis of scruples, he threw himself into a life totally abandoned to God. Up to what point would he choose to translate into signs and attitudes the total confidence placed in the Lord! We recall how at his departure for Jerusalem, he refused to go out and beg for money to pay for his passage (Autobiography n.40) and previously, at his departure for Barcelona, how he brought with him only some biscuits, because obliged to by the master of the ship, which were to sustain him during the passage (Autobiography n. 36). Total confidence in God was an attitude that Ignatius expressed throughout his life, as much before the foundation of the Society of Jesus as when General Superior of it.

How, in spiritual accompaniment do we maintain the growth of this virtue of confidence so key for a life given to God? In the 10th Part of the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, which resembles a certain number of formative exigencies so that the Society may be faithful to its nature and mission, Ignatius speaks clearly and with conviction of the urgent need he has to put his whole confidence in God. Speaking of the recourse necessary at times to use certain human means, he underlines in a very decisive way that we must guard against “putting our trust in them”

(Const. n. 814) Absolute confidence in God, therein lies the fundamental attitude for the spiritual life. To have found confidence, as did Ignatius at Manresa, when he was totally incapable of being ensured of an authentic relationship with the God of love, highlights all the more the importance of confidence and its predisposition for abandonment to God.

Determination to “Help Souls”

The ordeal of scruples closes persons who are suffering, in upon themselves; they are faced with an obligation which appears overwhelmingly impossible. What can then save a person is total confidence placed in our unique Saviour. In as much as scruples enclose a person, so much on the contrary, does confidence free people opening them to God; it frees them and opens them to their neighbour, with whom they share the most sweet fruits of the spiritual experience.

In the ignatian perspective, experience of life with God is effectively destined to be shared. In short, spiritual conversion wells up quite spontaneously for Ignatius from his own experience of God.

Let us recall briefly how this point was inscribed from the beginning stages of his meeting with the Lord. Going back to this subject in the autobiographical “Récit”, we discover without difficulty how God, the prime spiritual accompanist of Ignatius of Loyola, caused to be born in him without delay the great need to help others.

At Manresa already, Ignatius notes that “outside of his seven hours of prayer, he was busy helping souls who were coming looking to him for spiritual needs” (Autobiography. n. 26). If God was leading him through successive phases in his spiritual education, it was not – Ignatius was convinced of that – to keep for his own profit what God was communicating to him and allowing him to discover.

“At this period”, Ignatius declared somewhat later, still speaking about Manresa, “for some days, he was extremely desirous to converse about spiritual things and to find people who were capable of entering into

such conversation" (Autobiography n. 34).

Such were the first expressions of a desire for spiritual conversation, which would be broadened and would become more and more an offer generously proposed to people he met, to help them along the path of a relationship with God. The expression "help souls" thus became more and more imperative in the mind and heart of Ignatius. And the defenses that he encountered or the restrictions that were imposed on him in the spiritual help that he wanted to offer to neighbours were strong enough to force him to leave both Salamanca and Alcala. He had to find elsewhere a place where the service to help souls was not forbidden to one who felt interiorly called and who offered every guarantee of conformity with the Christian message.

To be more precise, to help souls was understood, above all, by Ignatius as the communication to another – in all or in part – of his own interior experience, a help, consigned progressively in what became little by little the book of the *Spiritual Exercises*. One can understand why, at a later date in his life, he worked earnestly to have the Holy See officially approve the Exercises.

It was from God himself – he had an intimate conviction of this – that Ignatius had received the very substance of these Exercises. In writing them, he was only paying his tribute of gratitude to the Lord who had wished to lead him by the way of grace. God himself had accompanied Ignatius in the period of spiritual growth; and the little book in which he consigned the way undertaken became from then on the master-text for spiritual accompaniment in the ignatian school.

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The Role of Ecclesiastical Mediations

At the start of his life as at the outset of his conversion, Ignatius presented himself as a faithful member of the Church. Yet he was able to perceive

clearly how, from the beginning of his life to the stage of his conversion, a radical transformation had transpired within him on this very point. At the start of his life, the Church was for him a respectable institution of which he was proud, in some way, to belong. (Was he not ready to receive even the tonsure?) Later, it would be an alive and profound adherence to God, to Christ and to the whole Christian mystery which would dominate his belonging the Church, a belonging that henceforth would be leading him towards responsibility. Upon reading the account that Ignatius makes of his personal story, one becomes aware that at no moment, after his conversion, does ecclesiastical mediation appear in his sight as something exterior; his adherence to the Christian manner of thinking and living was never separated from his interior knowledge of God. By following Christ and being obedient to His Spirit, Ignatius perceived more and more intimately the role of the Church and the place reserved for it in the Christian existence. Let us recall here some significant events which manifested even more what one might refer to, in a global way, as the obedience offered spontaneously by Ignatius to the Church of his times. To attach himself deeply to Jesus never meant for him to refuse any other mediation than that of his own personal experience—quite the contrary. The growth of Ignatius in the knowledge of the Lord and in the gift he made to Him of his whole person was never dissociated from a submission without blemish to ecclesiastical authorities. From the Church, he had always expected that she would nourish him, not only with the word of the Gospel, but also with the sacraments through which the Lord, in her, is communicated to all those who recognize Him and welcome the generosity of his gifts. Ignatius also recognized, in the representative authorities of the Church, those in whom the word was for him vested with authority and to which he was happy to obey in all circumstances.

A first expression of the readiness of Ignatius to be open to the Church was manifested in the trust with which, at various moments of his journeying, he confided in confessors whom he met along the way. It was first of all the general confession made at Montserrat: he abandoned there his whole life into the hands of God through his confessor. During the months at Manresa and in particular during his crisis of scruples, he waited, even in vain, for his confessor as God's representative, to be

comforted in his new freedom as a Christian... And, when he was elected Superior General, he took refuge for three days at the Monastery of Saint Peter in Montorio to hear finally from Father Théodose “that he appeared to be resisting the holy Spirit”. It is thus that he finally overcame this deep-seated opposition that he experienced towards the responsibility received by election.

Other incidences need to be emphasized in the behaviour of Ignatius and a flawless obedience to legitimate ecclesiastical authority. An example was the decision to leave the Holy Land because the provincial of the Franciscans was against welcoming him and the Apostolic See had entrusted to him the necessary authority, if need be, to send Ignatius away. (Autobiography n. 46)...And later, when Ignatius and his companions found themselves in an impossible situation to fulfil their vow of going back to the Holy Land, it was to the “Vicar of Christ on earth” to whom they confided their missionary readiness.

Does not Ignatius invite us to do the same in every spiritual accompaniment, that is to help those who are confided to us not only to conform themselves to the Gospel and to listen to the aspirations of the Spirit but also to mature as true children of the Church?

True Openness to God Verified in the Concrete Reality of Life

Here is an observation which tends unfortunately to be too frequent: in spite of the perseverance that one looks for in spiritual accompaniment as the source of authentic growth, it would seem that in the concrete, life does not seem to change as much as one would normally expect it to do. This remark with which we end our reflection seems to question, at least in certain cases the impact of spiritual accompaniment relative to the fruits that it seems to produce.

Certainly in a reflection of this kind, it is better to avoid every temptation of oversimplification: at times, without appearing in some visible manifestations, fidelity to spiritual accompaniment actually supports for some that constant search for God and enables them to remain faithful to the fundamental movements of their spiritual commitment. Those who accept, for months and years, to submit themselves to the value of accompaniment will, at least, be helped – one

may hope – to hold fast to their course and to prolong the effort to respond to the calls of God that they recognize in their own life.

It remains nonetheless that certain spiritual journeys seem more than others to be animated by a superior power of transformation. No doubt, the journey of Ignatius was of that kind: God, in manifesting Himself to him, enlightened his mind and heart and brought about in his person some radical transformations. Let us focus our attention for a moment on some visible results from an action that happened in the life of Ignatius by this “Guide” without equal, the Lord Himself. In each step of the way of conversion and of growth Ignatius appeared so docile to God that God was able to introduce into his life some decisive modifications. For Ignatius to accept the Gospel with complete magnanimity – just as he had striven to do since Manresa – meant henceforth to live differently.

Many aspects could be cited here, to point out in the life of Ignatius the sequence which promptly ensued within him between the light received and the modification of his behaviour. Let us be content to underline the fact in a comprehensive way – but there are other instances of it – where, clearly, understanding engendered immediate action or modification to his life. The meeting of Ignatius with the poor and humble Christ is a good example. In this encounter, it was a question for him not only to know with clarity the choices being presented by Jesus, but also to let himself be drawn immediately into a life of poverty and of humility.

Many more examples could be mentioned here: the choice of utter destitution during the pilgrimage to the Holy Land; the option to dress as a poor beggar with the companions who gathered around him; during the first stages of his life of study, the decision to place himself at the service of a “master” to finance his studies in Paris; the option which his family could not understand, to take residence at the Azpeitia hospice...; and then having found his companions in the North of Italy, the choice to preach together “dressed as poor folk” and sharing the life of the indigents... One is not surprised then at the importance given thereafter by Ignatius aptly to define the poverty practised by the Society of Jesus: it is this very point that takes up all the first part of the pages of his *Spiritual Journal*, which has been conserved for us.

For Ignatius, to be conformed to the Christ of the Gospel implied the

necessity of letting himself be “accompanied” by Him along the way of poverty and humility. How could we believe that it would be possible to “accompany” those who ask us to guide them on their journey towards the Lord if that request did not imply on their part a strong desire for an effective conversion to the Gospel of Jesus?

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