

LIFE REFORM: PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES

Introduction

It is a fact that today, the process of "Life Reform" finds little credibility among the directors of the Spiritual Exercises. There is a generalized feeling that, most of the times, it only serves the purpose of creating a series of virtual expectations which are then rapidly frustrated by the reality of life and all that it entails as far as limitations, multiple influences and acquired and deeply rooted habits. Ultimately - as many believe - the result is always the same, that is, everything is practically just as it was before the Exercises' process began, when there were so many expectations of a change

of life.

On the other hand, this belief does not imply that those accompanying exercitants are questioning the fundamental contribution that the Exercises' experience can make to people's lives. Rather, we end up thinking that the "effectiveness" of the Spiritual Exercises should be set out in terms that differ from the ones usually suggested by the "Life Reform". Therefore, we should consider it preferable to put aside an attempt to "Reform-Life" understood as a determination for a precise and observable change in the life of the retreatant. Nevertheless, we cannot forget that the "Life Reform" (*Sp. Ex.* 189) constitutes a core issue in "the way and order" that Ignatius proposes through the process of the Spiritual Exercises, when these are not motivated by an election to be made (objective). On the other hand, this mostly occurs to

people who start the process. The ordering of life, that is, the change in the setting of one's own existence, constitutes an essential element that should result from the intimate and deep communication that occurs during the encounter between the *Creator and the creature* [Sp. Ex. 15]. Otherwise, the Exercises' process could remain a merely imaginary experience, driven by pure emotions that are more or less superficial or possesses a manifest spiritual sterility. The matter is not resolved by eliminating that central part in the "way and order" that must be followed; it requires rather a deep analysis and correct understanding of what the "Life Reform" suggests according to Ignatius' mentality, as well as a better perception of the difficulties and possibilities that are implied today, as a result of the mentality and life regime ruling our lives. The following pages shall reflect upon these issues.

The Maximalist Temptation

In order to reach an adjusted understanding of the meaning of "Life Reform" it is necessary to consider in advance the complete lack of maximalism as an attitude that governs the Ignatian proposal of the Exercises. Its sense of reality and its deep perception of the human being as well as of his many influences, clearly distance it from an idealist and maximalist position at the time we need to determine the objectives of the process. Not every personal situation allows access to specific goals. However, it is also evident that clear awareness of the limitations does not encourage; it may result in giving up what each one can achieve, according to one's own dispositions, circumstances and specific motivations. Each person, depending on his own personal and specific dynamisms and period of life, desires a change and opens up to a transformation in the direction indicated by the "Principle and Foundation". Nothing more, nothing less. It is important to keep in mind this idea at the time the proposal of a "Life Reform" needs to be considered.

In the eighteenth annotation, Ignatius takes into account *the disposition of the persons who want to make the Spiritual Exercises*, according to their particular circumstances of *age, education or aptitude*. Different "applications" must be implemented based on those specific dispositions or circumstances. However it is also necessary to rely on their will which is another indispensable element to be considered at the time one starts a process of

exercises aimed at making a choice: "according to his willingness to dispose himself for them," Ignatius tells us further ahead in the same note. There is, therefore, a fundamental respect for freedom and will for what the subject wants.

Not every person is, in fact, willing to get involved in the process of the Exercises in the same manner; it depends on his specific circumstances and desires. Not all can follow the same pace nor have the same degree of motivation for change. That is the reason why Ignatius envisages different modalities of experiences, each one adjusted to the disposition of each person. That same annotation addresses a modality of the exercises which* must not necessarily focus on the "election" but which would rather be limited to a "Life Reform". A reform which may not be very deep nor ample. The person guiding the exercises, as Ignatius states, must see the "*subiecto*" or *natural capacity* or the fruit which may be expected. In principle, no one is excluded (even though, we must insist, we shall not fall into the naive idealism that suggests that everyone is capable of the same). This is about adjusting to each one, according to the "*subiecto* " or *natural capacity* [*Sp. Ex.* 18] of every single person.

The element of the will as a determining factor is present in the central part of the text dealing with the "Life Reform": *where there is no room nor disposition to deal with elections*. The "Life Reform" does not simply apply for those persons who already made the "election" (*ecclesiastical office or marriage*), but it also involves those who, for whatever reason, are not motivated enough to undertake a radical change of life as may be required by the election in question. If we were to make a comparison with what occurs in the context of a psychotherapeutic setting we'd have to indicate that not every person is willing to entirely question and review his or her own personal dynamics. Often the only thing that is expected is the modifying of a section of life which, for whatever reason is causing problems. And in those cases, we need enough clarity to understand that we may achieve a much deeper internal transformation of the person by using "a brief or "focused" therapy limited to the analysis and transformation of specific aspects of his behaviour than through a classic and prolonged session of psychoanalysis. Lack of motivation or the limitation caused by specific circumstances suggest that the person will not benefit otherwise.

The essential goal of the Exercises' process results from the objective that Ignatius sets out through the terms "prepare" and "dispose" [*Sp. Ex. I*]. This is an essential objective of the Exercises, whatever the modality you are committed to. Undoubtedly it is more important than the specific and particular content you can attribute to a Life Reform:

Preparing and Disposing the Soul

The main objective of the Spiritual Exercises is in preparing and disposing for a re-ordering of affectivity which gives place to *seek and find the Divine Will* [*Sp. Ex. 1*]. Thus, if the Exercises meet the objective to well *prepare and dispose* for the "election" or "Life Reform" even if this is not carried out within the same Exercises' process, we'd have to think that the objective of the same has been largely met.

Often, the fantasy (so frequent and necessarily analysed in a process of psychoanalysis) suggesting that it is possible to achieve a permanent change, once and for all, one that is determined, concluded and guaranteed, is only a reaction to a dangerous pretension of security, one very distant from what we understand as "conversion". Processes are never finished, nor can factors that continuously put "indifference" in danger be avoided. This explains the meaning of the Ignatian proposal for a Life Reform that may apply to what could have been a prior choice but that later, with the other meritable choices made in every day life, may have been spoiled and distanced from its original motivation.

To "dispose" the soul, becomes the fundamental motivation we should pursue during this process. It is the most important aspect. In general terms, radical changes do not occur in the lives of people. And we should add that, on many occasions, they are not even necessary. That desire for change, for "reform" may very well be the expression of a magical thought, of a maniacal and almighty nature, of that transforming one's life into something that actually would no longer be the life of the person.

All this leads us to believe that if a process of Spiritual Exercises is completed with a deep incorporation of the method: that is, allowing the retreatant to adopt in his life a rooted attitude of permanent discernment, of listening to the thoughts which "which come from without" [*Sp. Ex. 32*], of

suspecting his own personal reality to capture where is deteriorated... All this could be considered as the best "Life Reform" that could take place. Therefore, it must not always or necessarily be expressed in a visible "modification of conduct", in a "reform of behaviours", but rather in a "reform of deep attitudes" toward oneself, before God.

To consider the Spiritual Exercises as a means to achieve a modification of behaviours, may easily lead to interpret them in a hyper-moralizing and voluntaristic way. Too often this distances itself from the original commitment: to favour a mystical experience in meeting God so that He may "dispose life" in another way. This disposition - once again - which must not always and necessarily be expressed through the modification of some observable behaviours, but rather in the transformation of the basic structures which govern all behaviours.

To "reform life" may be understood as starting some mechanisms of progressive transformation, introducing new elements and resources which contribute to change, to the reform of the internal dynamics and of its fundamental options. It would mean, if we may refer again to a comparison with psychotherapy, to start an engine which should not stop, as it doesn't stop after the last session with the psychotherapist but it is kept running, pushing forward the relation with oneself and with the surrounding reality. In a therapy of a psychodynamic type, the person learns to read his own internal reality in another way, gains sensitivity to capture the internal movements and better understand his latent motivations.

Something similar should undoubtedly occur after a process of Spiritual Exercises in which the person *rids himself/herself of all the disordered tendencies* [Sp. Ex. 1]. The process must leave room for learning to listen to one's own internal reality, the voices and thoughts that come from within his own personal reality, those that *come from outside* and what is his mere *liberty and will* [Sp. Ex. 32]. In this way it will be possible to favour an alliance with the voices of the "good spirit", getting trained at the same time to avoid the traps that, from our own interior, result from the bad spirit, from the enemy of *human nature* [Sp. Ex. 71]. Finally this has to do with introducing a new dynamic from which behavioural changes will progressively emerge, understood like an ordering of the world of affectivity, so that later (we should not forget the temporal "order" that Ignatius introduces in his

proposal) it may be possible to seek and find the Divine Will in the disposition of his life [*Sp. Ex. 1*].

Mystical Theology and Commitment

The insistence of the Exercises in *preparing and disposing the soul*, far beyond an anxious search for some behavioural changes, must not be confused with a type of spiritual proposal limited to favour a mobilization of the internal world in order to cause a religious experience of greater or lesser intensity. The entire process aims at transforming the subject with an immediate repercussion on the "disposition" of his life.- to *find the Divine Will as to the disposition of one's life for the salvation of the soul* [*Sp. Ex. 1*].

Without this necessary fruit the process favours for *the disposition of life*, Ignatius knows that the entire process of the Exercises could only represent a purely imaginary experience. That is, the creation of an affective world which only attempts to escape confronting reality or, stated differently, a fantasised world far from reality, away from the inter-subjective relationships and therefore not relativised by facing any type of limitation. There are many religious experiences that unfortunately, end up as such; few fields like the one of religion result so favourable to that pathologic and childish mode of *fuga mundi*.

It is fundamental to have in mind the way in which the entire Ignatian spirituality pursues the necessary conjunction of the two basic sources of all religious experiences: mystical theology and commitment, contemplation and action: *inflaming and disposing* [*Sp. Ex. 15*], *love and service* [*Sp. Ex. 233*], *love and following* [*Sp. Ex. 104*] or *contemplation in action, as will be said of the Jesuit*, are significant expressions which show the compulsory articulation of the two basic dimensions of the experience of faith, mystical and prophetic. The psychology of Religion saw in this the expression of the maternal and paternal sources of all religiosity.³ An authentic experience of the Exercises must necessarily be conducive toward this intimate articulation of the mystical and prophetic elements. Because, even though the Spiritual Exercises must constitute in themselves a mystical experience of a loving encounter with God, that experience must end up in the discovery of how that love for God must be expressed in the concrete life of the exercitant. Communication, that is, the

embrace between God and the creature, unleashes a new structuring of the identity of the person; this results in a new way to be situated in life, a new way to feel, to think and to organise the relationships with others. The "election" as well as the "Life Reform" constitute central objectives in which takes place that necessary translation of religious experience into a life experience.

Factors that condition the "Life Reform"

The success of a real "Life Reform", whatever way you interpret it, depends on a series of factors that are the central themes in the *Method and Order* proposed by Ignatius [*Sp. Ex.* 2],

Firstly, it is evident that the transformation to be accomplished in an exercitant who commits himself to a process of Spiritual Exercises will depend essentially on his degree of motivation. We only have to recall the fifth annotation: it establishes that *courage and liberality* are necessary conditions to *undertake them* [*Sp. Ex.* 51]. The generous and open disposition that the subject must present is an indispensable requirement to begin the process. It seems clear that on many occasions this Ignatian pre-requisite is ignored and people who, for whatever reasons are not in that generous and courageous open-minded disposition, are also admitted to the Exercises'

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process.

We should also investigate the authenticity of motivation to enter into the experience of the exercises. In many cases (it also occurs in psychotherapy) the subject is falsely motivated. There are many situations in which the human being doesn't actually know what he wants and he very easily makes mistakes in reading his wishes. At the time the person foresees the possibility of some Exercises, he/she also falls into this type of mistake. What is actually expected is not a life change or a Christian reorientation of existence; but rather something else, that is hidden with no bad faith. It may be for instance, the desire to please a certain person or group of people who at this stage represent important references. Sometimes, we must also verify whether the subject is fooling himself, in thinking that the Exercises will resolve a conflict (psychological, for instance) which the Exercises cannot and must not try to resolve. We must be cautious when considering the meaning and origin of the

motivation of a person undertaking the process with so many personal implications as the Exercises.

It is obvious that the necessary task *to remove from oneself all disorderly attachments is a prior and a sine qua non condition to find the Di-vine Will in the disposition of his life, depends on the degree and mode of the actual motivation* [*Sp. Ex. I*].

In fact, the Exercises process presupposes the difficult task of re-elaborating the world of affectivity, necessary to attain a state of indifference and indispensable to choose or reform one's own life. The "Life Reform", in fact, as Ignatius presents it in the text, clearly and directly refers to the "Principle and Foundation". The terms that Ignatius uses in the text leave no room for doubt: *by setting before him the purpose of his creation and of his life and position, namely, the glory and praise of God our Lord and the salvation of his soul*[*Sp. Ex. 189J*].

A previous effort is needed to reordering affectivity and eliminating the "disorderly attachments." This is carried out during the entire first week and is established and confirmed over the following ones. That transformation of the affective world is indeed very deep. Ignatius articulates a series of able techniques and resources which we will not address now. However, if ultimately that work does not achieve a sufficient transformation of the deepest sensitivity of the exercitant, we cannot hope for an effective and lasting "Life Reform". When affections do not support the purpose, when the internal dynamism of desire is not in harmony with the idea or the will, the project of "Life Reform" is useless. If desire does not precede the choice or reform (*visiting and choosing*. [*Sp. Ex. 23*] that which Ignatius indicates in that wise and precise order of the "Principle and Foundation" one or the other will have little consistency.

Life can hardly be reformed unless we remove "places" and "objects" its affectivity was fixed on through powerful and well-established links; and until freedom has been procured to invest in that new object of love represented

by God's will in the passionate love for the image of Jesus. Those affections determine the process following the Exercises. Depending on the direction they take, they will favour or ultimately numb the transformation of one's own personal dynamics and the specific reforms that we expect to carry out. In fact, the process of the Exercises of the "First Week" pursues the central objective of abhorring past attitudes and behaviours and opens up a new horizon of love, personified in Jesus calling and inviting us to follow Him. The degree of feasibility of the Life Reform will then depend on the degree at which the exercitant has been impregnated, through contemplation and dialogue with the Lord Jesus, modifying his profound "Self while identifying with the ways to feel, think, and value of Jesus he is contemplating (*whom-ever wishes to come with me must be glad to eat like I do, as well as drink, dress, etc. [Sp. Ex. 931]*).

No real "Life Reform" takes place without a prior sufficient mystical experience to achieve an interior reform of the world of our deep affectivity. If that affectivity does not favour the change that is ideally pursued, the reform will just remain in some new behaviours, that are more or less artificially built and which will progressively collapse. They will leave room for others, which dynamised by deep affectivity, did not submit themselves to the transformation along the process.

Lastly, we must also underline another important element that must be kept in mind at the time we address the effectiveness and authenticity of the "Life Reform:" that is, the need for the said reform and re-addressing of life, to respond only and exclusively to "freedom" and to the "personal willingness" of the exercitant.

The conviction that God acts directly and intimately in the deepest part of the human being is a central point in Ignatian Spirituality and it is only in that singularity of one's own desire that it is possible to perceive that action of God. From this, we conclude that in order to address the "Life Reform" it is indispensable to be the fruit of that intimacy and singularity, avoiding all pressures of the one who gives "method and order" (shall we continue to refer to him as "director"?) or any other type of environmental pressure. Otherwise the change or the expected reform, will only be the expression of a "seduction" that is more or less manifest, a manipulation which will be revealed sooner or later. This will unleash not only the collapse of everything

we set to build with the reform, but it may also carry a destructive effect, a distancing and rejection of any other possible spiritual experience.⁷ The whole complex psychoanalytical issue of transfer and counter-transfer should be recalled here. This helps us to understand to what extent a life reform is achieved, not so much in relation to God's wish but rather in relation to the companion, accompanying person vested with the paternal role of "director" to whom the exercitant submits himself under the effect of a subtle seduction.

Two Dangers: from Illusory Change to Ethical Defeatism

Since the beginning of this project we've underlined the risk that the "Life Reform" may respond to an illusory desire for change which does not measure nor take into account the real conditions of possibility for change to take place. It is one of the factors that contribute to discredit the Ignatian proposal. Now it is time to insist upon that from a different perspective, as we contrast it with another more specific risk in our days: fatalism or an attitude of ethical defeatism that the person experiencing the Exercises may have to face.

As to the first issue, we could start by comparing it with what happens in the psychotherapy field. Whoever operates in that field knows very well about the difficulties caused by any "life reform" (in its merely psychological sense) as a change that makes possible a more harmonious relation with one's own reality and a better adaptation to the vital circumstances in which the person lives. In psychotherapy, you address and accurately *analyze* all the influences and obstacles that exist and give rise to the "disorder" that you are trying to remedy. The analysis of the past that imposes itself upon a difficult present is carefully observed, sometimes giving way to that painful narcissist wound that suggests you are conditioned, sculpted in thousands of ways by one's own history with strokes that significantly cause difficulties or that, on occasion, even manage to make that wished for or dreamed of change or transformation totally impossible. Sometimes you can only grieve, acknowledging that you have definitely lost those ideas of transformation which will never become true. It is only through experiencing this grievance that a real change can become possible in the way one confronts his circumstances. We are always faced with a challenging task that requires dealing with enormous

defences and resistance. This takes a variable period of time that tends to be always long and intense, in order to reach a satisfactory degree of transformation and change, of "Life Reform."

Spiritual Exercises do not analyze the biographical conditioning that fixed behaviour within some specific parameters. It is not meant to carry out this analysis. This does not correspond to the objective (and hence) nor the method of the Exercises. However, there is no doubt that, as it occurs in all attempts of transformation of attitudes and rooted behaviours, one will encounter fixations, resistance and important obstacles. Ignatius was clearly aware of them, as we can see from many of the resources he proposes to use (additions, mobilization of guilty feelings, activation of affects related to new representations, etc) in order to deactivate them and thus reach the difficult objective *to prepare and dispose the soul to remove all inordinate attachments*. The proposal, seen from a psychodynamic perspective, is ambitious and not exempt from complications and difficulties. It seems that the followers of Ignatius were not always aware of the difficulty to carry this out with the same insight and lucidity as their inspirer. This is especially so when such a deep objective is expected to be reached in processes lasting eight days and in groups.

Those attempts, at least from a psychodynamic perspective, can only appear to be the expression of some naive fantasies, probably favoured by a false intelligence of the action of God, to which we attribute a certain magical character. It is obvious that from a faith perspective, we cannot deny a transforming action by God which can take place in a minute or in any type of experience, be it the Exercises or any other type. However, waiting for such an action of the Spirit to occur in an almost miraculous manner such as leaving a side or even denying one's own personal history with all its limitations, is to say the least, illusory. It is only in the context of that history, in the reality of a present limited by the past, that Grace can find fertile land in which it may sow the seed of change and personal transformation.

When we reflect about the "Life Reform" we should also keep in mind the analysis carried out by some scholars about what are called "second conversions" (which have significant equivalence with the Ignatian proposal of "Life Reform"). These analyses show us that we can rarely see a radical change in the everyday life of the "reconverted" as compared to how it was

Before. For the most part, their everyday life goes on change is the way in which they are aware what they are experiencing, the new face they perceive in the spiritual mirror; it is the way in which we interpret what we do, the way in which we re-construct and look at existence.⁹

However, it is evident that if the danger of conceiving the "Life Reform" as a false illusion of change can take away the possibility of the Ignatian proposal, we can also end up in another extreme attitude that is just as dangerous: a rooted attitude of fatalism and ethical defeatism. This points out to the establishment of a feeling of total impotence that on occasion survives due to the repeated frustrations experienced through the false illusions of transformation and change. In addition, age can also contribute to leave room for scepticism about the possibilities of personal transformation. A progressive built up of a "second class of men" [*Sp. Ex.* 154] mechanism, which cannot even be recognized as such, takes place.

Thus, we find ourselves in a personal dynamism which indicates that there is nothing much to do except to accept in resignation and conformity what one's own reality has gradually become. The repeated experiences of collapse while attempting to re-take control of one's own life, (failure in accomplishing the proposals of the prior year for instance) as well as the tiredness, with a false apparent "realism" that the years tend to bring about, may easily result in that sort of ethical defeatism that believes that any fight to support a reform of one's own life is lost before it even starts.

The awareness we have managed to acquire in our time, of the multiple influences that play a role in defining our behaviour; the feeling that the margin of freedom that we may count on is much smaller than what we believed; all this easily contributes to bring about an attitude of defeatism and impotence that sets aside right at the outset whatever effort may be required in order to modify one's own personal dynamics. There is no doubt that the impact of human sciences, especially deep psychology and sociology, has made us quite sceptical about having any possibility of change and transformation in our life. The awareness of personal freedom is very resented and weakened by the knowledge we have acquired about the mechanisms that determine our conduct; a mechanism that often, in addition, operates in an unconscious manner. Thus, the determinist mental scheme arising from the

strong impact of the human sciences, impregnates our sensitivity in good measure and easily leads to believe that the effort to modify one's own personal reality is called to failure or that it only responds to a naivety that is the result of ignorance. The field of spirituality is not distant from this mentality either, nor is it immune to these beliefs that float in the air of our western societies.

Specific Difficulties of Present times

Times and different cultures present specific possibilities and difficulties to Spirituality. There is no doubt that "Life Reform" is also determined and presented in specific ways according to how the different mental schemes as well as beliefs, myths and messages in which we operate affect us. In our post-modern culture regarding the Ignatian proposal for a "Life Reform," there is probably no other phenomenon that can affect us more negatively than the the exaltation of narcissism, so characteristic and in a very essential manner, of post-modern western societies.

In fact, one of the traits that characterizes post-modern mentality is, as we know, the difficulty to accept or commit oneself to collective ideals of social transformation. We are told that the times of the "Great Words" are over. The air we breathe carries a taste of general disenchantment about the great promises of past times, such as the ones made by reason, progress, revolution and even democracy. As a result, there are serious difficulties to make commitments, to be sensitive to collective situations and even to establish bonds and solid relationships. The supreme value no longer is what transcends us, but what is encountered within ourselves. It is the glorification of individuality and the exaltation of narcissism. There is no need to insist on this point: many studies have treated and analyzed in depth this state of

things.¹⁰

For our purpose we need to determine how this cultural wave affects and conditions the Ignatian proposal for a "Life Reform." It is evident that the individualist dynamism and the exaltation of what is intimate, of what is personal and singular, also impregnates dynamically the concept and experience of spiritual life. In order to understand to what extent it does, we need only remember the role that self-esteem, personal growth, internal

search, etc. occupy in many areas of spirituality. It is evident and a matter of concern the psychologization of spiritual life today.

When the narcissist dimension prevails over all other personal dynamic aspects (let us not forget that this can happen with little awareness of the person) a "Life Reform" will face serious difficulties. These difficulties are essential ones if we keep in mind the nuclear objective Ignatius explicits: his surrender of self-love and of his own will and interest [Sp. Ex. 1891.

Narcissism is, exactly, love for oneself. Even when the person apparently dedicates his/her life altruistically toward others, he/she actually lives in a relationship with himself/herself which absorbs the most decisive aspects of his/her affective energy and he/she goes about life in accordance with that love for himself/herself. Even if, as previously stated, one lives dedicated to act in favour of others. It has been said, and not without reason, that *nobody liyves more than the hysterical person*. In cases of hysterical dynamism (as all neurotic conflicts there is the difficulty to get rid of narcissism) love toward the others only serves as a mere apology to enjoy the experience to love, to enjoy its intense emotionality, the pleasure to contemplate oneself oblatively and sacrificially devoted to a cause. Or, in situations involving obsessive tonality (incidentally, this is more frequent in religious environments), where perfectionism and concern for the "cleaning" of one's own image occupy the core of life aspirations of the person. From these types of dynamisms, marked by intense narcissism (whether this is hysterical, obsessive or other kind) *one's own love, will and interest*¹¹¹ end up imposing themselves and taking over one's greatest part, even if this happens under faultless appearances.

It is this type of psychological dynamism that is intensively favoured at present, which results in making vague "otherness" (a veiy serious matter) and at the same time poses difficulties to integrate whatever overcomes or transcends it. It is clear that in the absence of any ideal or value that authentically transcends one's own personal reality, no reform, change or personal transformation will be possible.

Besides, there is little possibility for any "Life Reform" when a mechanism of denial of the guilty feeling is acting. Such a denial would eliminate the need for a change in the orientation of one's life. In our time it is a fact that there seems to be a sort of allergy to all kinds of guilty feelings. The proclaimed and omnipresent self-esteem is often understood as love for

oneself which must avoid feelings of a displeasing nature, as may be guilty feelings. However, with no ideals nor a sound guilty feeling (that is, not for the purpose of reducing and narrowing the spirit, abiding by the rules, fitting well to appearances in the human-religious context; but rather expressing discrepancy with that ideal) there are few possibilities to undertake a convenient "Life Reform." There is no "Life Reform" without a prior crisis, without movements of various spirits, without perception (partially unpleasant, introduced by the guilty feeling) than it is necessary to make a turn in the direction of one's own life.

Otherwise, the "I" will remain bound to itself and will only be modified and reformed in accordance with what represents its own love, will and interest; that is, in accordance with what contributes to its gratification and growth, but not according to what can set him out of itself, from that *own l(yve, will and interest*. A "Life Reform" carried out exclusively in function of *"the ideal of the Self"*¹¹ can suggest a reform which only gives room a widening of the narcissist dimension, idealizing the "Self." We would have to refer to *"the ideal "Self,"* an instance that is different from the ideal of the "Self," which manifests itself in the magnifying of one's own reality, even if it is carried out in virtue of an apparent relation with values or high instances, as can be the ones of a religious nature.

Only when the "ideal of the Self leaves room for, stimulates and opens up to the reality of others, when it opens up to otherness and to diversity, beyond one's own ideals of perfection, does it actually comply with its role in the process of the Spiritual Exercises. In the light of this, we must necessarily affirm that it would be very difficult to carry out an authentic "Life Reform" lived with a lack of sensitivity for the brutal realities of our world, people's pain, the scandal of injustices, war, hunger, etc. As stated by Carlos R. Cabarrus, *until we experience the pain and suffering of our brothers as a matrix of spiritual life and/or concomitant phenomenon, we are not in such*

a disposition as to let ourselves be moulded by the Spirit of Jesus. Any experience of change in spiritual life must necessarily go through a change in the relation with others: those others become the source of the same "Life Reform" on is our objective.

A Revealing Application: the Use of Money

The fact that Ignatius illustrates the "Life Reform" with an application that concerns our relationship with money must not be seen as a secondary or merely casual matter: *"So too he should consider what part of his means should be used for his family and household, how much should be set aside for distribution to the poor and pious purpose" [Sp. Ex. 189].* Indeed, this issue (intimately related to the rules for the distribution of alms [Sp. Ex. 337-344]), must be considered as a possible "application" of the reform in a particular case, it is not by coincidence that Ignatius chooses it at this very moment. No other application could better illustrate the way to amend one's own life and state, than this one concerning the relation with money.

Money constitutes, in fact, a decisive point of reference with respect to the love for oneself or for others. In addition, we must keep in mind that our relation with money never constitutes something of a merely functional or economic nature. There is always "something more" than just money in our perception and bond with it. Money easily becomes an object to which we confer a "quality of the Self;" as if it were a part of ourselves, an extension or an object that got detached from our being. Something that is outside but that we consider should be inside.' Money, then, with that representation of "Self" becomes quite an important issue also in personal dynamics and easily gets problematic: to lose money, to give it in exchange, donate it, constitute acts of deprivation which we cannot just consider as mere loss of an external object; it is something that has previously been "incorporated"; that is, something intimately related with one's own "Self."

The problem is increasingly serious if we keep in mind that, because it is a question of love that ties us to money (love that, as psychoanalysis has shown, has strong unconscious connections), the relation with it carries as many self-deceptions as the ones characterized in deep affective matters. Self-deceit and the situation with the money ("the ten thousand ducats") typical of the "Second class" [Sp. Ex. 154]. False justifications maintain the

objective to stay lovingly bound to that money we've turned into a safety fetish of personal power over the others, etc. Few fields are so propitious to "temptation." That is, ready to present itself to one's conscience as something good, just, promising while in fact it is the contrary-, deceit and a source of destruction. Money has a "sticky" nature, it possesses a sinister adherence. As it becomes more fixed, its power to attract new segments increases. Finally it ends up by forming a hard crust which defends and isolates from the surrounding and alienates the subject making him insensitive toward whatever does not form part of his own reality.

To regain authentic freedom and indifference away from the fascination of money, transformation must take place in one of the most decisive places. Detachment from money can represent, as few other instances, detachment from oneself, *"the surrender of self-love, and of his own will and interests."* That is why we must affirm that hardly any ordering or "Life Reform" without a readdressing the use and relation we maintain with money. This is particularly true in a society where monopolizing trends are imposed as a supreme good. If *greed for richness* is the first step toward arrogance and from there to all evils, poverty and detachment will also be the first step toward humility and imitation of Jesus Christ [*Sp. Ex.* 142-1461; the model of that coming out of one's *self-love, will and interests* which must rule over every project of "Life Reform". It is not by coincidence, therefore, that Ignatius chose such a particular application of the "Life Reform" to illustrate the dynamics of detachment and generosity that this must stimulate.

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"Life Reform" regardless of the modality that is adopted or the particular contents treated, will always aim at having the retreatant change in the direction of his personal dynamics. This has to do with being "prepared" and "disposed" to live with a different attitude, with greater capacity to listen to oneself, to have suspicion of the thoughts that come from "outside", to have permanent determination to come out of one's own *self-love, will and interests*. This disposition, which will have specific repercussions in one's attitudes and particular behaviours, goes far beyond and is not limited to formulating some merely behavioural purposes. "Life Reform" will therefore express a valid and honest attempt to modify one's own life, without falling

into *magical or* vain illusions of change, nor succumbing either to ethical defeatism where there is no longer hopes to change anything.

CARLOS DOMÍNGUEZ MORANO, S J. is a clinical psychologist, professor of Psychology at the Theological Faculty of *Granada*, Spain; director of "Centro de Psicoterapia" ("Centro Francisco Suarez"). Author of "*El psicoanálisis freudiano y la religión*" (1991), "*Creer después de Freud*"(1992), "*Orar después de Freud*"(1994), "*Experiencia místico-psicoanálisis*"(1999), "*Psicodinámica de los Ejercicios Ignacianos*"(200y).

NOTES

1. It appears clear that Ignatius believes that choice is a process that must be initiated at a specific time (and not before), but that may stay open until the end of the Spiritual Exercises, even after these have been completed. Chapter XXXIII of the Official Directory addresses the possibility of keeping the choice process open once the Spiritual Exercises have been completed entirely since it is after those that one can find the more appropriate situation to choose. Cf. *Official Directory*, XXXIII, 3: Translation by M. Lop in: *The Directories of Exercises*, Messenger/Sal Terrae, Bilbao-Santander, 107-108.

2. If we may once again refer to the field of clinical psychology, we'd have to recall the results we may achieve from a merely behavioural therapy (even though in certain occasions it may make sense and be appropriate) and what we may expect from a psychodynamic therapy, which, contrary to the first one, does not address "symptoms" as much; that is, the external expression of internal conflicts, rather it aims at gain us access to those basic structures which are at the origin of those conflicts.

3. About this subject, central in psychoanalysis of religion, I wrote in *Creer después de Freud*, San Pablo, Madrid 1992 (*Crer depois de Freud*, Ed Loyola, San Paulo 2003) and insisted in its application to Ignatian Spirituality in *Psicodinámica de los Ejercicios Ignacianos*, Mensajero/Sal Terrae, Bilbao-Santander 2003. I also referred to this subject in *Místicos y profetas: dos identidades religiosas*: Proyección XLVIII (2001) 339-366. *Mystiques et prophètes: deux identités religieuses*:

www.aiempr.org/archives.

4. In the light of this problem it may be very convenient to leave time for some personal thoughts, before starting the experience, during which the person must take charge of the important process he is going to commit to, as well as of how it may affect his life. A commented and accurate presentation of the *Annotations*, of the "*Tres modos de orar*" and of the "*Principio y Fundamento*" may very well serve as introduction and preparation of the exercitant before he formally commits himself

at the beginning of the process. Adolfo Chercoles addresses it in this manner in his practice manual for the Spiritual Exercises in ordinary life. Cf. *Una bora con Adolfo Chercoles*, epilogue of the above-mentioned work *Psicodinámica de los Ejercicios Ignacianos*.

5. S. Arzubialde, *Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio*, Mensajero-Sal Terrae, Bilbao-Santander 1991, 757-764.

6. There is no need to mention that some "Spiritual Exercises" that are carried out over eight days or in a group (which should be better called "retreats of Ignatian inspiration", reserving the name Spiritual Exercises for the individual monthly in daily life), may make that necessary transformation of the affections possible, which constitutes a condition sine qua non to make an "Election" or a "Life Reform" in depth. However, during that time and in those conditions it may still be possible to capture deviations that are taking place in life and to understand the need to take a turn in one's own existence. To demand more than this could respond to some illusionary or magical situations, just as today's recommended "quick" therapies which promise results in very short times.

7. Cf. with respect to this L. R. Rambo, *Psicosociología de la conversión religiosa: ¿vencimiento o seducción?* Herder, Barcelona 1996.

8. Cf. T. Anatrella, *La conversion a l'épreuve des identifications inconscientes*, *Lumen Vitae* 87 (2000) 137-148.

9. Cf. J.M. Gauthier, *Pourquoi une seconde conversion? Et comment?*, *La vie spirituelle* 134 (2000) 439-446.

10. In relation with our issue at hand, G. Lipovetsky, *La era del vacío. Ensayo sobre el individualismo contemporáneo*, Anagrama, Barcelona 1986; L. Hornstein, *Narcisismo. Autoestima, identidad, alteridad*, Paidós, Barcelona 2000; P. Bruckner, *La tentación de la inocencia*, Anagrama, Barcelona 1996.

11. The "Ideal of the Self" is a differentiated instance of the "I" that constitutes a model to which the subject attempts to adjust. Cf. J. Laplace - J. B. Pontalis, *Diccionario de psicoanálisis*, Labor, Barcelona 1971, s.v. Ideal of the I.

12. The "Ideal Self" refers to an intrapsychic formation that some authors differentiate from the "Ideal of the Self" and that is defined as an ideal of narcissist omnipotence forged on the model of child narcissism. Cf. *Ib.*, *Yo ideal*.

13. Cf. C. R. Cabarrus, *¿for que no nos cambian los Ejercicios Espirituales?*, in: C. Alemany - J. A. García-Monge, *Psicología y Ejercicios Ignacianos*, Vol. I, 275-276.

14. Cf. S. Arzubialde, *Ib.* 406.

15. O. Fenichel, *Teoría psicoanalítica de las neurosis*, Buenos Aires 1973, 318-324.