

# LIFE-TRANSFORMATION IN DEPTH THROUGH THE IGNATIAN EXERCISES

## Radical Understanding of "Reform of Life"

"Reform of life" impinges on the consciousness of the common human person as a challenge or an invitation or even an urge from within to sort of new direction or orientation, in general terms, given to that person's entire life, so that there is evidence of a perceptible change of behaviour in the various aspects of his/her everyday living.

### 1. "Reform of Life": Christian and Ignatian Understanding

In Christian parlance, and indeed in specifically biblical terms, "reform of life" has to do in some real fashion with what we call "conversion", a genuine "turning-point" in life. Scripture designates it as *metanoia*: a veritable "change of direction" given to a person's life in all its aspects.

In the context of the Ignatian Exercises, it has come to be interpreted, when clearly distinguished from the Election or Choice of a state/way of life, as the ongoing renewal to be effected, within an already determined state/way of life, on areas or points which, through the process of the praying and discerning experience of the Exercises, have been consistently shown by the Lord to be needing *either* correction and amendment or a new and fresh buttressing-up for the future, in order thus to respond to the Lord's here-and-now call for the concrete person of the exercitant in question.

Such an interpretation of "reform of life" in and through the Ignatian Exercises is then most frequently further crystallized as follows: it would entail

a certain number of concrete "resolutions", which would specifically express the programme of the ongoing reform or transformation which is to be wrought within the exercitant's personal life-situation. A genuine and firm commitment to living out *this* "programme of reform" would then constitute the exercitant's response to God's will for him/her in the here-and-now of his/her life. As such, it would be the clear expression of the aim and goal of *these* Ignatian Exercises, i.e., the "fruit" of *this particular retreat*.

Within the framework of precisely such a concretization of "reform of life," exercitants have insistently been taught and exhorted to carefully note - we all know this from our own experience - that if such a "reform of life" is to be truly effective and no mere "pie-in-the-sky" or a sort of "nine-day-wonder", then these "resolutions" had better be few and very concrete, realistic and truly practicable, etc. Very understandably so...

The moot point here, however, is the significance - one could well say, the validity itself - of this sort of concretized interpretation of the "reform of life" in the context of the authentic dynamics of the Ignatian Exercises. These profound dynamics of a deepening inner freedom under the action of God himself, to whom the exercitant makes himself/herself open and available in the course of the progressive stages of the Exercises, are well-known and appreciated today, thanks to the many modern and contemporary studies that have revealed their rich theological, spiritual and psychological insights. These dynamics entail a sustained praying experience on the objective process of salvation history (four to five hours each day, for some thirty days if the Exercises are made in their entirety), leading to a discerning experience under regular and competent guidance/accompaniment. This involves in actual practice a review of prayer after each hour or period of prayer - a review which takes diligent note of the inner experiences or impulses gone through in prayer -, then a sharing of such experiences with the person accompanying the entire experience of the Exercises. Such an accompaniment consists in *helping the exercitant first*, to be genuinely aware/conscious of, and understand, his/her real experiences, *then*, to accept them for what they really are, so that sifting through them the exercitant is gradually helped to discern or recognize in the succession and progressive orientation of his/her experiences what God is calling him/her to, in the here-and-now of his/her life.

Now, quite frankly, does the making and taking of the few and very concrete, realistic and practicable "resolutions", to which we have referred a while ago,<sup>4</sup> require or demand the profound and exacting dynamics which we have just hinted at and somewhat spelt out? Well, honestly, the whole matter strikes us as grossly out of proportion! What comes to mind spontaneously is the quip of the Latin poet Horace who almost sneers at fellow poets and writers who, after proclaiming a grandiose plan and project of literary excellence, end up producing no more than an extremely mediocre piece of writing: "*Parturiunt monies*", he says, "*nascetur ridiculus mus*" [The mountains are in the birth-pangs of labour; what is going to be born is a ridiculous little mouse!!]. Is it not true, in fact, that a day — or even half-a-day - of seriously undertaken recollection, which includes prayer, reflection and even, perhaps, some consultation would suffice for the making and taking of the kind of "resolutions" we have mentioned earlier? What alone would be truly proportionate, and correspond in adequate measure, to the deep and demanding dynamics of the Exercises, it seems to us, would be the taking hold of one's whole and entire being and life - the totality of it - to hand and turn it over to God. This is what a "conversion" is in its profound biblical sense, a *metanoia* or complete change of direction, as we said earlier. Little wonder that St. Ignatius himself opens his text of the Exercises with a very pertinent description of the nature and purpose of these Exercises as "every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the ordering or orientation or arrangement of my life (*la disposition de mi vida*) for the salvation of my soul" (*Sp. Ex.* 1: 5,6). In other words, Ignatius himself intended *the purpose or goal* of the Exercises to be "*seeking and finding the will of God in the arrangement or ordering or orientation of my life for salvation*".

One way in which "the will of God in the ordering or orientation or arrangement of one's life for salvation" is most certainly to be interpreted is *the state of life* to which God calls a particular person, since it truly involves

the taking into that person's hands of the entirety of his/her life to hand it over to God, in response to God's initiative of love calling and challenging him/her to make precisely this kind of all-embracing response and life-commitment. But one's state of life is, with equally emphatic certainty, *not* the only, nor even the most profoundly radical, way of interpreting what St. Ignatius has so insightfully formulated, taught by the Divine Pedagogue himself, as the aim and purpose of his Exercises: "seeking and finding the will of God in the ordering or arrangement or orientation of one's life for salvation".

Indeed, at its deepest and most radical level, such a "call" or "will" of God is what the Word of God characterizes consistently, right through its striking witness, as the "name" by which God calls each single person in his/her unrepeatably uniqueness - we could well denote it as that person's truest and deepest self, that person's God-given identity at the *njery core of being*. Scriptural phrases like, "The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name", or even, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I consecrated you" (see successively, Is 49: 1 and Jer 1: 5) clearly indicate that such a call of God is given and written into the core of each particular person's *being*.

Suffice it here to illustrate this in the preeminent case of the God-man Jesus Christ. Even merely thumbing through the gospels, we are struck how one single word appears to sum up the whole and entire sweep of Jesus' prayer, life and mission: this word is "Abba". Notably in the Gospel of St. John, for example, Jesus is shown, from Chapter 5 to Chapter 10 in controversy with the scribes and pharisees. The only response Jesus constantly has to their concerted attacks and accusations is to appeal to his "Abba".<sup>8</sup> Besides, I wonder whether we have noticed in the gospels that when Jesus is full of joy, the word that first leaps to his lips is "Abba" (Lk 10: 21 - "Jesus, exulting in the Spirit, said: 'I praise and thank you, Abba, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent of this world, and revealed them to little ones'"). Again, when he is in the depths of desolation in the garden of Gethsemane, it is no different: Jesus' prayer opens with a cry of his human heart in agonizing pain: "Abba, if you are willing, remove this chalice from me; nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22: 41). It is the Lukan gospel in particular, which often shows us Jesus, after a tiring day filled with having preached and taught and ministered to the

needs of the crowds, retiring to spend the entire night in a deserted place or on a mountain-top in absorbing communion with his Abba (see, for example, Lk 6: 12). *Abba*, it is always *Abba* that comes through the gospel witness, as the secret that unifies and integrates Jesus' prayer, his mission and ministry, his relationships - the inspiring pivotal centre of his whole life and activity. But, it is well worth remarking - indeed, emphatically underscoring - that *Abba* is the God-man Jesus' *response to* the unrepeatably unique "name" by which God, his Father, calls him in the depth and core of his being. This "name" - *my Beloved Son* - spoken unfailingly into the inmost fibres of Jesus' heart and being, surfaces in the gospel account at key moments of his life and mission as the God-man, such as, his Baptism at the Jordan (cf. Mk 1: 11; Mt 3:127; Lk 3: 21) and his Transfiguration on Mount Thabor (cf. Mk 9: 7; Mt 17: 5; Lk 9: 35): "You are my beloved Son; in you I find my delight". It is this "name", unrepeatably unique, that is God the Father's "personal call" or "personal vocation" addressed to his Son, the God-man Jesus Christ - and this, on the deepest level of "being" at the hub-centre of Jesus' heart, *not merely* on the level of "doing" or "function".

This last point is crucial for an authentic understanding and grasp of what we are here offering on the radical meaning of "reform of life" in the Ignatian Exercises, and on its far-reaching consequences for life-transformation in depth. A simple and concrete example will serve us admirably to clarify our intent. If we were to take a group of ten Jesuit priests, and focus on the levels of "vocation" in each one of them, we would be able to individuate the following: each of these ten Jesuit priests is a "Christian"; each of them is a ministerial "priest"; each of them is a "religious"; and each of them is a "Jesuit". All these levels, we note, are hierarchically-structured levels of "vocation": the Christian, the priestly, the religious and the Jesuit "vocation". In addition, however, each of these ten Jesuit priests has been and is called "by name" in an unrepeatably unique way "from his mother's womb", and indeed by God himself. That is, each of them has a "personal call" or "personal vocation" from God. This radical level of "vocation" is not, yet another hierarchically-structured level: it is, rather, the "spirit" which, for each single, one of these ten Jesuit priests, animates the four various levels of hierarchically-structured "vocation" we have individuated. In other words, God's "personal call" to each of these ten is the *unique way* in which *he* is

Christian, priest, religious and Jesuit; each single one of them has *his* particular, *personal* and *unrepeatably unique way of being and li-ving* as a Christian, a priest, a religious and a Jesuit.

How far-reaching this is for life-transformation in depth cannot be lost on any of us! Indeed, if we just get in touch with what the New Testament witness so consistently and powerfully inculcates on the distinctive character of being "Christian" - what we might designate as the unique criterion of "Christian discernment" -, we realize that each single one of these ten Jesuit priests has *his* own unique and *personal way* of "handing over self in love" in every area of his ordinary day-to-day life, in every single human experience of his everyday living. In terms that connect vitally and intimately with the inner process and dynamics of the Ignatian Exercises - a dynamics, as we have said, of deepening inner freedom — each single one of these ten Jesuit priests has his own *personal* and *unique way* of being *interiorly free* - that is, *free from* self and selfishness of all forms, to *be free for God* and, in God, *free for his* brothers and sisters in loving service.

## 2. God's "Personal Call or Vocation" and Life-Transformation in Depth: Radical "Reform of Life"

In the very last sentence of his documents on "Election" (*Sp. Ex.* 169-189), St. Ignatius has admirably and in lapidary fashion summed up the *key* to the entire dynamics of the *Spiritual Exercises*-. "Let everyone keep in mind that in all things that concern the spiritual life, progress is in proportion to getting out of self-love, self-will and self-interest" (*Sp. Ex.* 189: 10) - in other words, a progressive process and dynamics of deepening inner freedom.

It is this core of inner Christian freedom that is, in fact, at the heart of life-transformation in depth, precisely because it is the inner spirit of effective unity and integration of the whole gamut of a person's life. In order to grasp this, let us look closely and successively at a determined concrete person's: (a) prayer; then, (b) at his/her pastoral or apostolic activity, then again, (c) at his/her relationships; and finally, even (d) at his/her relaxation and recreation.

.What is the essence and core of genuine "prayer"? As students of Christian spirituality, who firmly hold and believe that God, who is love, as self-communication or one who is always coming into our lives to save and redeem them in love - "he comes, comes, ever comes" in persons, events, situations and circumstance of time, place and action - "prayer" for us cannot be, and is *not*, something we give to God. What can *we* give to *God*? It is *God* who wants to give - and takes the initiative in giving — his life, his love, indeed himself to us. Prayer, therefore, is really *actively opening our hearts to God*, so that God can communicate himself to us. Now, "actively opening one's heart to God" entails being *free from* one's selfishness, to *be free for* God and, in God, for others. If, indeed, every single Christian, as in the example we had earlier taken of the ten Jesuit priests, has his own personal and unique way of "handing over self in love" or being "interiorly free" through God's personal call or vocation to him/her, then *this* his/her personal call or vocation itself becomes the inmost secret of his/her "prayer".

b. Coming to the person's pastoral or apostolic activity, it is the great apostle St. Paul himself who communicates in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, which is all about "apostolate", a veritable definition of "apostolate" or apostolic activity in *2 Cor 4: 7-12*. "We have this treasure (i.e., the apostolic ministry) in earthen vessels", he says, "to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (*2 Cor 4: 7*). Spelling this out in the succeeding verses, Paul reveals to us that apostolate is, in effect, "the power of God at work in and through us, apostles". In other words, this *power of God* can effectively work in and through the apostle, only if the apostle or apostolic instrument is *interiorly free* to allow God's power to pass and flow through him/her as through a free and open channel. Once again, therefore, if God has gifted each single apostle with a uniquely personal way of being "interiorly free" through his/her "personal vocation", then it is *this* his/her precise personal call or vocation that becomes the deepest and inmost secret of his/her apostolic or pastoral activity.

Of utmost significance in this context is what St. Paul himself, *the* apostle "par excellence", has to communicate to us at the start of his great letter on the apostolate - as we said, his Second Letter to the Corinthians. "Blessed is

the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all *consolation*, who *consoles* us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to *console* those who are in any affliction *with the same consolation* with which we ourselves *are consoled* by God" (2 Cor 1: 3-4). From what we have said earlier of "the name" by which God calls each single person at the core of his/her being, we gather that this "personal call or vocation" is, in fact, the *fundamental spiritual consolation* (i.e., at the level of the person's inmost being) of that particular unrepeatably unique person. Accordingly, what St. Paul is equivalently proclaiming in this marvellous text just quoted, is that, from his own experience as "Apostle", every apostle's personal vocation or call from God is *itself the power of God's consolation* at work in and through that apostle's interiorly free heart to console and strengthen those to whom that apostle reaches out in God's name.

c. As for the person's "relationships", we would do well to pause for a moment and ask ourselves *when* a relationship is genuinely good and healthy. If in a particular relationship between two persons, each party feels bound and constrained to live up to the expectations of the other party, we have a deep sense that such a relationship is far from healthy; in effect, it is the "enslavement" of mutual dependency. But if in the same relationship between the two persons, each party is helping the other party to live up *only* to God's expectations, such a relationship is beautiful and healthy, because it is *free-*, it can be bonded in close and deep union, welded together by the Lord himself. Once again, then, it is precisely the person's secret of inner freedom, that is, his/her personal call or vocation from God, that becomes that person's deeply personal and inmost secret of relationships in the whole texture of his/her life and activity.

d. And what about the person's moments or periods of relaxation and recreation? Though we spontaneously tend to associate our moments of "relaxation" with "doing nothing", we know in our heart of hearts that our realistic experience gives the lie to such spontaneous images or mental constructions. We could be doing absolutely nothing, but if at these moments our hearts and minds are filled with fear or gripped by anxiety or preoccupations, we are anything but "relaxed". Is it not true, then, that precisely in that

core of being where we are centred and rooted in our God-given identity - unique to each one of us - and where indeed our "inner freedom" resides, that we are genuinely "relaxed", and that, further, *there lies* the inner sanctum where we "re-create" and "refurbish" our life-energies in depth? Thus, we are back again at God's personal call or vocation to a determined person as the deepest secret of his/her "relaxation" and "recreation" (re-creation), for the very reason that it is that particular person's secret of "interior freedom".

In actual fact, therefore, we have shown that the *whole sweep* of any single person's life and living - as much that person's "prayer", as "pastoral or apostolic activity", as again his/her "relationships", and even his/her "relaxation" and "recreation" - *is wondrously unified and integrated thanks* to the "name" by which God calls that particular person in the depths of his/her being - thanks to his/her *uniquely personal* call and vocation from God; and all this, for the precise reason that this unrepeatably unique call from God to that *particular* person is the inmost secret of his/her "interior" or "spiritual" or Christian *freedom*.

It is no secret to any of us that one of the deepest cries of the human heart is for unity and integration. We know from daily experience - especially we, active apostles - how thoroughly scattered, broken-up, dissipated and dispersed we find ourselves at the end of every single day. "How we wish", we cry in the depths of our being, "that we could, all day long, be doing *only one thing in depth*". We sense in precisely this, which we yearn and long for, that all our life would be thus transformed in depth. How right we are! For, what we have striven to spell out is that every single person can, in actual fact, be experiencing such unity and integration in depth, if only he/she would first discern the "name" (or, "personal vocation") by which God has called, and still keeps calling, him/her at the deepest core of being, and respond to it by regularly and faithfully living of it day-in and day-out.

To avoid drawing out interminably this section on God's personal call or vocation effecting "life-transformation in depth", let us just hint at the deeper

psychological and theologico-spiritual perspectives involved in such radical "reform" or "transformation" in depth. Ever since the great Viennese psychotherapist Victor Frankl published his findings on "Logotherapy" - that is, making people whole by facilitating their finding "meaning" in their lives - we have whole volumes of learned writings on the philosophy and psychology of "meaning." What we have come to realize in greater and greater depth is that it is "meaning" that eventually "unifies and integrates" in depth. If then, as demonstrated by experimental psychology itself, or even by the modern schools of psychological counselling (such as "Transactional Analysis", or the "Intensive Journal Workshop of Ira Progoff," or again, "Psychosynthesis"), "meaning" tends to achieve, in ever greater depth, unity and integration at the core of a person's being, we students of Spirituality hold and cherish firm convictions that spring from our specific field of study and experience. Convinced as we are of the vital and intimate link existing between Psychology and Spirituality - profoundly akin to the link between Nature and Grace in the plan of the Creator, author of both "nature" and "grace" -, we believe that spirituality is the highest or deepest level of psychology, whichever way one wishes to look at it. As such, we hold that the "name" by which God calls a particular person is, from the perspective of "meaning", *the unique God-given meaning in a person's life*. If then "meaning" for a person, as drawn out through psychological help, can effectively aid him/her towards deeper and deeper unity and integration, what would *the unique God-given meaning in a person's life* not do for the unity and integration in inmost depth of the entire gamut of this person's life - and therefore, for his/her "life-transformation" or "reform" in depth -, called as he/she is by God, and indeed called uniquely and unrepeatably "by name"!

Moving finally, in this section, to the deepest theologico-spiritual perspectives of radical "transformation" or "reform" in depth, it would help us to dwell for a moment on "call" or "vocation" from God. St. Paul's unequivocal affirmation of the unique mediation of Jesus Christ in 1 Tim 2: 5 ("There is one God, and one mediator between God and human beings, the man Christ Jesus") may be spelt out equivalently as follows: no call comes from God to any human being except in and through the person of Jesus Christ (*objectively*, that is); and no human being makes an answer to God's

call except in and through the person of Jesus Christ (that is, again, *objectively*). In other words, all "calls" or "vocations" from God are *in* Christ Jesus: the personality of Christ Jesus is so infinitely rich that it embraces and compasses all "vocations" or "calls". If, then, every single person has, in the "name" by which God calls him/her, an unrepeatably unique personal "call" or "vocation" from God, such a "vocation" is *in Christ Jesus*. In other words, this unrepeatably unique person has a facet or "face" of Christ Jesus which is specifically and uniquely his/her own, so that he/she can, in very truth, speak of *his/her* specific or proper "Jesus" - not just "piously", but in a deeply scriptural, theological and spiritual sense.

Not without profound significance is the recurring Pauline phrase for Christian baptism, "to be baptized *into* Christ Jesus (*Jyaptizein eis Christon lesouri*)"- cf. Rom 6: 3; Gal 3: 27. To be "plunged into" (= *baptizein eis*) Christ Jesus - obviously, not physically, but really "in mystery" - means *really* "to put on" or "to be clothed with" the Lord Jesus "in mystery" (cf. Gal 3: 27). No wonder, the same great apostle Paul will characterize God's plan and design for each maturing Christian person as "being shaped and moulded to the image and likeness of the Son", Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 8: 29), or again, "growing to the stature of maturity of the adult man Christ Jesus" (cf. Eph 4: 13) - not some "general Jesus Christ", as it were, but for each unique person, in God's own plan and design, *his/her personal Jesus Christ*.

What this entails for the "transformation" or "reform" of a particular person's Christian life in depth, is astoundingly far-reaching. For, if Christian life is essentially, at its core, a deeply personal living relationship of love with the person of Jesus Christ, then the fact that the "name" by which God calls a particular person is not some "thing" or even some abstract personal ideal, but a *real living person* - the person of the living Risen Jesus in an unrepeatably unique way for that particular person -, effectively means transforming all of his/her Christian life and activity in depth. For Christian life and activity, lived in this fashion in all its everyday details, becomes in very truth a maturing, profoundly interpersonal, love relationship between the person of Christ Jesus and that particular person. And, far from being or tending to be closed in on itself, such an interpersonal love relationship inexorably opens out into all that person's family, social, civic and political responsibilities and commitments in Christian life and mission, precisely

because the "name" by which God calls him/her - viz., his/her personal "call" or "vocation" from God - is his/her unrepeatably unique way of handing over self in love, namely, of being free from self and selfishness, to be free for God and, in God, for his/her brothers and sisters.

In fine, a last word in this section may profitably highlight the fact that God's personal call or vocation to a determined particular person — or the "name" by which God calls such a person - is the deepest and inmost secret of radical "reform" or "transformation" of this particular person's life in depth, because of the amazing fusing-together, or coalescing, or merging into one, of the three levels at which we have spelt out the far-reaching significance of the "name" by which God calls each single person at the core of being: this precise unrepeatably unique call of God to the person is the radical secret of unity and integration at the heart of that person's life, *because* it is the unique God-given "meaning" in that person's life - nothing so unifies and integrates, we know, as "meaning" does. Further, it is the unique God-given "meaning" in that person's life, *ultimately just because* it is that particular person's "personal Jesus" - for, not only is Jesus Christ the "*logos*" of the Father, and *logos has* for its primary signification "meaning", whereas "word" is its derived signification; even more profoundly, for the Father there is no "meaning" outside Christ Jesus, as St. Paul's marvellous Christological hymn in Col 1: 12-20 spells out in cosmic sweeping dimensions: everything that has been created, has been created *in* Christ Jesus, *through* Christ Jesus, *for* Christ Jesus; everything that has been recreated, renewed and reconciled, has been recreated, renewed and reconciled *in* Christ Jesus, *through* Christ Jesus, *for* Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus is the *alpha* and the *omega* of all creation and re-creation; he is the only "meaning" there is for the Father.

### 3. The Heart of all Spiritual Formation: Basic and Ongoing

Should people seek to ask what the place of St. Ignatius in the Church is, our unhesitating answer is: Ignatius is not primarily a celebrated theologian, nor even a renowned psychologist - though professional theologians and psychologists make no secret of the fact that they discover remarkable theological depth and amazing psychological insights in his writings. But Ignatius stands out in the Church, preeminently and for all times, as a great

*spiritual pedagogue*, a *spiritual director*. And this, thanks to his "tiny, yet immense" book of the "Spiritual Exercises", in which he has transmitted his own experience of the Divine Master's Pedagogy (see note 5 above). What we have developed at length in this article is our own way of bringing into marked focus the extraordinary pedagogy of *spiritual formation* of which the Ignatian Exercises give resplendent evidence.

When we focus on the issue of *spiritual formation* — let us say, just to exemplify our point, in seminaries that train for the ministerial priesthood, or in religious houses of formation - what comes to mind almost spontaneously is a whole series of spiritual exercises and practices, like personal and community prayer, reading of the Word of God or "lectio divina", the celebration and reception of the sacraments, ascetical and penitential practices, etc. - in a word, a whole required programme of spiritual initiation and deepening through these several practices and exercises. While this is certainly an aspect, even an indispensable aspect, of *spiritual formation*, we may completely and effectively miss the mark and be off-track with regard to the distinctively *spiritual* character of such formation, unless we spotlight the intention, objective and end-in-view of all such exercises and practices: namely, the acquiring of a "style or quality of life", a "*spirit*" which effects unity and integration of life, a "new heart and new spirit" in biblical terms, or what is often designated today as an all-embracing *life-horizon* or perspective.

An example from real life may best help to illustrate what exactly we are getting at. An expert dancer on the stage, or an accomplished pianist performing in a concert hall, evokes in us such utter admiration that we spontaneously exclaim: "how *freely*, how *gracefully* he/she dances!" Or, "what an amazing *grace and freedom* with which this pianist is performing, almost making the piano talk!" Where does such astonishing *freedom* and *grace* come from? From hours and hours on end, we know only too well, day-in and day-out, of submitting self to the grinding discipline of the ground rules of dancing or piano-playing: "step-one, step-two, step-three" repeatedly practiced and exercised over and over again; or the musical scales, "do-re-mi-fa. ..", played backwards and forwards, thumped out hundreds and thousands of times repeatedly. But neither the dancer nor the pianist submit self to this grinding, grueling discipline for its own sake - no! Its whole purpose and

end-in-view is to release a "flexibility", a "*freedom*" a *personal stile, art and grace*, which singles out and characterizes the expert and accomplished artist, the master pianist or the professional dancer. The ground rules of dancing or the laws of piano-playing are now no longer merely within the learned books which expound them at length, nor even in the scholarly teacher who explains them. They have not become not even for the accomplished artist an *interior law*, an interiorized, assimilated, personalized "*heart and spirit*", a *personal style*, which is what "inner freedom" is all about.

But there is *&ven more* that we need to draw out from the illustration we have chosen. Let us take two highly skilled pianists who are both playing the same masterpiece of Chopin. In our poor human language we are wont to say, "Oh! This master pianist has *his own* personal 'interpretation' of this particular piece of Chopin; and the other professional pianist has *her own* personal 'interpretation' of the very same piece of Chopin". What we are *really* saying, or meaning to say, is in fact: "The first master pianist is somehow expressing *his unrepeatably unique self* in playing this piece of Chopin; and the other skilled pianist is giving expression in some manner to *her unrepeatably unique self* in playing the very same piece of Chopin. In a word, what comes through in our accomplished master artist's performance is, in some true fashion, *the secret of his/her inner freedom* - that is, in some real way, his/her *truest and deepest self*, his/her *unrepeatably unique self*. All this, for a human example, drawn from the experience of pedagogical training of the human spirit in the performing arts.

It is not difficult to recognize, in what we have just spelt out by means of an illustration, the whole process and progressive development of the Ignatian Exercises towards releasing and liberating, through a deepening dynamic of "inner spiritual freedom", that precise goal of all *spiritual formation*, which is the discernment of *the personal secret of inner spiritual freedom* of the person being formed, for *the secret of his/her handing <yver*

*self in love* - in other words, the deepest and inmost secret of radical and effective "reform of life" or "transformation of life" in depth for him/her.

Even the process of *spiritual pedagogy*, or what we have earlier detailed as the progressive dynamics of the Ignatian Exercises, finds an amazing parallel in the human illustration we have taken from the world of the performing arts. The necessary starting-point of this *spiritual pedagogy* is evidenced in the initiation or apprenticeship through the series of varied *spiritual exercises and practices*, but here specifically focussed in their development on the objective, normative process of salvation history. Such exercises, however, are geared to the *inner experiences* had by the trainee/exercitant, of which diligent note must be taken by him/her, with a view to *sharing these real experiences with the competent guide or person accompanying the entire experience*, so that this particular person (trainee/exercitant) can be effectively *helped* to sift through his/her experiences in order thus to *trace*, in their ongoing succession and orientation, *that emerging pattern* of the Lord's unrepeatably unique call to him/her - that is, his/her secret of "inner spiritual freedom" which unifies and integrates the whole sweep and gamut of his/her life.

That such a process of *spiritual pedagogy* is of capital significance not only for basic or initial spiritual formation, but for what we are today terming "ongoing or continuing" spiritual formation - that is, in fact, for the entire span of a person's life - is yet another precious contribution of the Ignatian Exercises. If, as the crowning "Contemplation to Attain Love" in the Exercises presents God as one who is "working and labouring (for me = for each human person) in all creation" (*Sp. Exs.* 236: 1,2) - namely, God as one who is continually active and at work, the one who "comes, comes, ever comes" in love to save, redeem and reconcile -, then *in the <very secret of "inner spiritual freedom" of a particular person*, discerned through the Spiritual pedagogy of the Exercises and subsequently kept alive after such a fundamental transforming experience, *lies the effective way of always encountering and responding to the God*, who never ceases to challenge in love every single person on his/her ongoing pilgrimage of faith right through life.

By offering, in the final section of *this* particular article of mine, St. Ignatius as a master spiritual pedagogue through the developmental process of his Exercises, we have wanted to detail how this master, taught by God,

leads every single personal exercitant who seriously undertakes the journey of the Exercises, in and through his/her own personal experience under the direction of God's Spirit, in a paschal passage from the Old Testament dispensation of "slavery" to the New Testament dispensation of the "freedom of the children of God" - a paschal passage from the level of "flesh" to the level of "spirit", to use the vigorous biblical language of St. Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Romans (cf. Gal 4-5; Rom 8), which proclaim the Charter of Christian freedom. Indeed, did not God himself reveal through his prophets (cf. Jer 31: 31-34; Ez 11: 17-20; 36: 24-28) that he would take the law which was written on tablets of stone and put it within our hearts in a new dispensation of a new covenant, when he would give us "a new heart and a new spirit" - his Spirit, that makes us "free children of God"? Little wonder that the same great apostle who proclaims the "Charter of Christian freedom" also categorically proclaims: "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3: 17).

#### Concluding Remark: "Resolutions" Revisited

If we have earlier seemed to set aside decisively a presumed Ignatian understanding of "reform of life" as the mere making and taking of a set of few, very concrete and realistic "resolutions", however well-intentioned such an interpretation has been and even is till today, we wish finally to clarify our intent - perhaps, some might say, to reinstate "resolutions"! Be that as it may...

Our experience has firmly taught us that it is not the well-intentioned "resolutions", as such, which are really in conflict with effective and realistic "reform of life". It is that the "resolutions" we have made and taken very seriously and honestly, were made and taken in a manner vitally unconnected with "meaning" in life - in other words, that they have been focussed on the level of mere "doing" or mere "function", and have had no vital link whatsoever made with the deepest and inmost core or level of our "being". Our repeated experience has been that such "resolutions" have been short-lived, in the sense that we have been able to be fairly faithful to them for a month, two months, or some such rather limited period, precisely because they have not been the concretization, in the real details of everyday living,

of what is much deeper and more radically rooted in the "heart" or at the core of a person's *being*. No wonder they have been appraised to be mere "cosmetic" and decorative "resolutions", which fade away after having "embellished" a person's life and behaviour for a while.

This brings us back to the heart of the matter. If by "reform of life" we are to understand a "transformation of life in depth", in keeping with the extraordinary spiritual pedagogy transmitted to us by the Ignatian Exercises, then any "resolutions" made and taken in these Exercises can only be concrete expressions, in the here-and-now, of a particular person's *unrepeatably unique God-given meaning in life*, which constitutes the secret of unity and integration of the whole gamut and sweep of his/her life —and this, we have shown to be, in the profoundest theological and spiritual sense, the uniquely "personal Jesus" of that particular person. For, if Jesus Christ is the only "meaning" there is for God the Father (cf. Col 1: 12-20), the "unrepeatably unique God-given meaning" for a person can only be the "unrepeatably unique God-given 'Jesus'" for the same person - the "Jesus" in and towards whom he/she must vitally grow in maturing development to the stature of maturity of the adult man Christ Jesus (cf. Eph 4: 13).

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## NOTES

1. Cf. *Sp. Exs.* 189: 2, 3.

2. It is interesting to note what, for his time and circumstances, St. Ignatius considered worthy of detailing as examples: "the person (of the exercitant) will have to examine and weigh in all its details how large a household he/she should maintain, how he/she ought to rule and govern it, how he/she ought to teach its members by word and example. So too he/she should consider what part of his/her resources should be used for his/her family and household, how much should be set aside for distribution to the poor and other pious purposes" (*Sp. Ex.* 189: 6, 7, 8).

3. This particular interpretation of "reform of life" certainly finds a justification and basis in St. Ignatius' own text: "It will be very profitable for such persons (•exercitants), whether they possess great wealth or not, in place of a choice (of an already determined state/way of life), to propose some procedure for each *to reform his/her manner of Irving* in the state/way of life (already determined)" (*Sp. Ex.* 189:4).

But what clearly stands out in the Ignatian text here is this spiritual master's never-failing insistence on what he had earlier consistently and repeatedly highlighted as the "Principle and Foundation" of the Exercises in its key stages (cf. *Sp. Exs.* 5; 23; 91: 4; 169: 2, 3, 8; 177: 1, 2; 179: 1; 180; 181: 1; 183: 2; 184: 2,3; 185; 188), and again in the all-embracing recapitulation of the entire Exercises, which is their crowning "Contemplation to Attain Love" (*Sp. Ex.* 230-238), notably in that grace begged for in words so well-known now: *en todo amary servir*, "that... I may in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty" (*Sp. Ex.* 233).

Here then very concretely, in his text on "reforming life", St. Ignatius spells out the *animating spirit* of all that may be termed "working at reform of life": "each is to reform his/her manner of living... by setting before himself/herself the purpose of his/her creation and of his /her life and position, namely, *the glory and praise of God our Lord and the salvation of his/her soul*" (*Sp. Ex.* 189: 5); "really to attain *this end* (i.e., the one just mentioned), during the Exercises and during the consideration of the ways of making a choice" (*ibid.* 189: 6); "let him/her desire and seek nothing except the greater praise and glory of God our Lord as the aim of all he/she does" (*ibid.* 189: 9).

4. Let us mention, as examples of such "resolutions", those that may concern one's relationships with others; or one's life responsibilities, tasks, mission and ministry; or again, the kind self-discipline required for a life of prayer or study...

5. See what Ignatius so frankly acknowledged in his *Autobiography* in numbers 27 and 99: "God treated him as a schoolmaster treats a pupil: he taught him... God has always treated him so...; were he ever to doubt this, he thinks he would offend the Divine Majesty" (*Aut.* 27); when asked how he composed and wrote the Exercises, Ignatius with disarming simplicity confessed: "he did not write them all at once, but, noting what he had found helpful (in his own personal experience, viz., as taught by God), he thought it would be helpful for others, and so he put it down in writing for the help of others" (*Aut.* 99).

6. "Called by Name" is, we know, a rich and profound biblical theme. There is no need, in the space of this article, to marshal the many biblical passages that bear witness to this theme and its far-reaching consequences for Christian life. However, a simple sampling may prove helpful: cf. Is 43: 1-7; 49: 1.15-16; 62: 2-5; Jer 1:4-10; Rev 2: 17, etc.

7. For a detailed grasp of what we mean by such a "call" or vocation" from God at the core and level of "being", see our little work, which was originally inspired in a 1965 overpowering experience of God's Spirit that we had in the course of our annual eight-day retreat, and we then further developed thanks to the Lord's strongly confirming us from within in our striving to live of it, and in our sharing it widely through our ministry of the Spirit in its varied forms: *The Personal Vocation: Transformation in Depth through the Spiritual Exercises* (Ed. Pontif. Univ. Gregoriana, Roma 2003); or, in its American edition: *Discovering Your Personal Vocation: The Search for Meaning through the Spiritual Exercises* (Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ 2001).

8. To offer some references, just by way of illustration, cf. Jn 5: 17.30; 6: 57; 7: 28; 8: 28-29; 10: 14.29.37-38.

9. We often say, with a deep Christian instinct, that if something does not carry the sign or seal of "the Cross of Jesus Christ", it is *not* - and cannot be - genuinely Christian; how very right we are! The "Cross of Jesus Christ", in theological and spiritual terms, is always and unfailingly: *the handing over of self in love*. No wonder, Jesus one day captured this unique criterion of Christian discernment in a lapidary sentence: "If anyone will come after me, let that person renounce self, take up his/her cross, and follow me" (Mt 16: 24) - this is *not* a triple or tripartite criterion of being genuinely Christian; it is only *one*, spelt out in three expressions of it: 'renouncing self, *which is* 'the handing over of self, *which is* the 'cross', *which is* 'to follow Jesus'.

10. Though the literal text of *Sp. Exs.* 189: 10, just cited above, has a negative tone ("getting out of self-love, self-will and self-interest"), which echoes the tone of the gospel criterion of Christian discernment that we have just cited in note 9 above ("If anyone will come after me, let that person renounce self, take up his/her cross, and follow me" - Mt 16: 24), its actual and existential content is decidedly positive, being as it is all about gospel or evangelical freedom, that is, interior and spiritual freedom.

11. This is how Pope Piu XI - and, after him, Pope Piu XII - was pleased to characterize the Ignatian book of the "Spiritual Exercises".