

All My Liberty

Part One – Key Meditations of the Exercises

Chapter 1: Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Life

Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

The Principle and Foundation is not only chronologically the first prayerful consideration of the Spiritual Exercises and logically the basis of all the meditations which follow. It synthesizes St. Ignatius' doctrine of Christian perfection. There is an emphasis on man's free cooperation with divine grace, a logical adaptation of the best means to a desired end, and a concept of generosity in dealing with God which many theologians consider the essential elements of Ignatian spirituality.

Three writers with whom St. Ignatius was familiar are commonly mentioned as possible sources from which he derived the wording if not the doctrine of the Principle and Foundation.

Erasmus of Rotterdam in his *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* speaks of choosing the best means of attaining salvation, "If you are running straight to the goal, whatever you meet on the way should be used if it helps and rejected if it hinders your course to the *summum bonum*." But Ignatius disliked Erasmus after only a short reading and in later life would not even handle the man's writings because they "froze the spirit of his soul." [1]

Ludolph of Saxony is a more likely source because of St. Ignatius' devotion to the Carthusian's *Vita Christi*, in which the honor due to creatures was compared with the glory that we owe the Creator.

However the most favored influence is Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, whose impact on the Spiritual Exercises was deep and unmistakable. The core ideas of indifference and a pure intention are certainly derived from a Kempis, where Ignatius read: "Son, I must be your supreme and ultimate end, if you desire to be truly happy. By this intention shall your affections be purified, which too often are irregularly bent upon yourself and things created." [2]

Thematic Analysis

Although the two words, Principle and Foundation, are almost synonymous, there is a shade of difference between them. The opening exercise may be considered theoretically or practically. In the first sense it may be called "the Principle from which everything else in the Exercises is more elaborately deduced, which intimately affects all the subsequent matter and to which the whole of the exercises may be reduced." Taken practically, it is the Foundation "on which the whole weight of the Spiritual Exercises, the whole structure of the spiritual life is built. This doctrine on the end of man is the basic truth on which depend the other truths to be proposed and from which they inevitably and securely arise as its fruit." [3]

We can distinguish four elementary truths in the Principle and Foundation which form the master plan of the Exercises:

1. *End of man* for which he was created.
2. *Means to attain* this end.
3. *Difficulty in the choice* of these means.
4. *Indifference of will* in order to expedite the choice.

The connection between these elements is perfectly logical. Given the fact that man was created to save his soul by praising, honoring and serving God and that all other things were made to help him attain this end, the first conclusion is that creatures should be used according as they help in the prosecution of man's purpose in life. Implicit

at this point is the reality that man as a free agent must choose among various creatures, and that on this choice depends his eternal salvation. It is further implied that the choice will not be easy to make and therefore a second conclusion follows: in order to facilitate the right choice we must cultivate a spirit of indifference or detachment, and not allow mere natural tendencies to determine the selection of creatures.

The same theme reappears at strategic points in the Exercises. During the First Week the history of man shows a reversal of the Principle and Foundation, a departure from God in sin and its terrible consequences in death and hell. In the Second Week there is a Christological concretization of the Foundation in the contrast between Christ and Satan and its psychological synthesis in the Three Classes, the Three Degrees and the Election. In the Third Week the Passion of Christ to confirm the Election, following the example of Christ who chose the opposite of that to which we are naturally inclined. The Fourth Week is additional motivation, closing with the Contemplation for Obtaining Love, where the service of God (from the Foundation) proves to be really love, and “the other things on the face of the earth” are shown to exist only to help us grow in the love of God.

Theological Issues

Since the main issues of the Principle and Foundation are the common possession of the whole Exercises, they will not be treated exhaustively here but are taken up again in the analysis of subsequent meditations. Also to be noted is the approach to questions involving an interpretation of St. Ignatius’ mind on a particular point, which can be discovered only by an appeal to historical sources. Once this has been established, we may analyze the meaning of certain concepts like indifference, detachment and the purpose of creatures according to standard ascetical norms.

The Principle and Foundation is Supernatural: From both internal and external evidence it is clear that the truths enunciated in the Principle and Foundation are supernatural, being derived from revelation and referring to an order of reality above nature. Nowhere in the Exercises does St. Ignatius suggest a transition from considering man only philosophically in the Foundation and then theologically, according to faith, in the subsequent meditations. Moreover, by recognizing that man has a “bias” in the direction of things naturally pleasing but not necessarily conducive to his last end, St. Ignatius implies that existence of a fallen human nature, which is clearly a supernatural concept. Accordingly, the salvation of one’s soul, in the Foundation, means the Beatific Vision; the praise and service of God involve the whole body of Christian faith and morals; the “other things on the face of the earth” which are to assist man include supernatural realities like the Church and the sacraments; and the acquisition of indifference requires the help of divine grace.

Two Aspects of Man’s Relation to God: There are two ways in which the creation of man may be considered, depending on what aspect is emphasized. The stress may be placed on the truth that “Man was created,” or on the fact that he is “to save his soul.” In the first case, God is viewed in relation to man as the efficient cause of his existence, in the second as final cause. Both are equally true and both should be treated in the Exercises, but they represent different viewpoints and in practice will have to be balanced and adapted to the retreatants’ needs. The difference can be expressed schematically:

	<u>GOD AS EFFICIENT CAUSE</u>	<u>GOD AS FINAL CAUSE</u>
<i>Meaning</i>	God made man out of nothing by an act of His sovereign will.	God made man for union with Himself in the Beatific Vision.

Divine attribute emphasized	God's power and wisdom	God's infinite love.
Consequences for man	Complete submission to God as Creator and Lord	Gratitude to God for His infinite generosity.
Response on the part of man	Fidelity to the laws of God in perfect obedience	Desire to grow in union with God and to share this union with others.
Motive stressed	Reverential fear of God's justice, for infringement of His rights.	Love of God's goodness, to be possessed for all eternity.

Attention should be drawn to the value of taking cognizance of the final cause of creation. Man's origin can be known by reason alone, and by itself says nothing about his elevation to the supernatural order or the real destiny to which he is called; whereas a proper understanding of his destiny in the Beatific Vision gives added, profound intelligibility to the praise and service of God which are the necessary means to its attainment. A certain emphasis on beatitude as the end of man also puts the right corrective to any suspicion of advantage to God from our obedience to His will; once it becomes evident that God did not create man to profit from his service but to benefit the man who serves Him. In the words of the Vatican Council, "The one and only true God created both orders of creatures in the same way out of nothing, the spiritual or angelic world and the corporeal or visible universe, and afterwards He formed the creature man, who in a way belongs to both orders, as he is composed of spirit and body—in order to manifest His perfection through the benefits which He bestows on creatures, not to intensify His happiness nor to acquire any perfection." [4] Creation is the ultimate of divine altruism.

The Meaning of Indifference: Ignatian indifference is a quality of the will, and

specifically the perfection of freedom from internal determination caused by an inordinate love or fear of created things. The immediate source of this inordination is concupiscence, both carnal and spiritual. In carnal concupiscence where the sense appetite does not fully submit to the rational will, the latter inclines to embrace whatever pleases and shun whatever gives pain to the senses independently of the dictates of right reason. In spiritual concupiscence the disorder is the same, except that here the will tends to seek whatever pleases and avoid whatever pains the spiritual faculties, the mind and will, independently of right reason and the teachings of faith. However the ultimate explanation of this conflict between subjective desire and objective good lies deeper than original sin which deprived man of the gift of integrity, with immunity from concupiscence; it is mysteriously bound up with man's condition in the state of probation, where he has the power of choice between moral good and evil.

There are two kinds of constraint which militate against volitional freedom and, on occasion, may suppress it completely; the external coercion of physical force, of which there is no question in the Foundation, and the internal compulsion of natural tendencies which desire autonomous expression without subordination to higher values. St. Ignatius recognizes the power of these internal desires and therefore urges their habitual control as the *sine qua non* of Christian perfection. In proportion as a man frees himself from their tyranny, he enjoys indifference or liberty to follow that which his mind, enlightened by revelation, tells him is most conducive to the end for which he was created. Consequently, "to make ourselves indifferent" means the cultivation of both intellect and will: of the intellect to have it see with conviction the destiny to which man has been called and the necessary means to be taken to arrive there; and of the will to deliver it from domination by its impulses. For although indifference belongs primarily to the will, it also includes the perfection of the mind which clearly perceives what is objectively good or evil on the

road to salvation and so presents its vision to the emancipated will for acceptance or rejection.

Indifference a Matter of Precept or Counsel? A disputed question arises on the necessity of this indifference, whether it is obligatory under pain of sin, or only a counsel offered for acceptance by more generous souls. Those who favor the first opinion say that, "Universal indifference is a disposition necessary to perform duties indispensable for salvation," and "to fail in indifference with regard to a single creature is to withdraw from our last end." [5] Warrant for this attitude is found in the standard text of the Foundation, which says that "it is necessary that we should make ourselves indifferent." [6] Another group believes that Ignatian indifference is "neither a necessity of salvation nor a necessity of duty," that "it is a question of fulfilling a condition, not absolutely for attaining our end ... but for the observance of the rule of wisdom and of perfection in the use of creatures." [7] The argument is based on Nadal's *Apology* for the Exercises, where this confidant of Ignatius states that "we should never have thought it a sin to fail in indifference; we say only that it is preferable to make oneself indifferent in order to achieve the purpose of the Exercises ... If, therefore, we say that indifference is necessary, we are only giving a counsel, we are not imposing an obligation." [8] Unless understood as a counsel, what room is there for the heroism demanded by the Spiritual Exercises, and how explain the Third Class of Men or the Third Mode of Humility if indifference obliges everyone under pain of sin?

The two positions can be reconciled, provided we take neither one exclusively. In favor of the first opinion it must be granted that a certain degree of indifference towards creatures is necessary to keep the moral law and the basic precepts of the Gospel; unless controlled, our natural tendencies will betray us into sin. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that this is the only kind of indifference taught by the Principle and Foundation. In support of the second opinion it is equally true that the specific indifference

ambitioned by the Exercises extends to creatures which may be chosen or rejected without sin. Here the mistake would be to overlook or underestimate that prior indifference which safeguards obedience to the commandments of God, since the spiritual perfection of the counsels presupposes that the substance of sanctity in the precepts has been firmly secured.

Creatures as External Graces of God: A legitimate interpretation of the function of creatures in the plan of God considers them so many graces given to man as the instruments of salvation. If we ask what purpose the Creator had in making "all other things on the face of the earth," we are told, "to aid man in the prosecution of the end for which he was created." If we further ask the meaning of grace, we call it a supernatural (undeserved) gift received by a rational creature from God in order to attain the Beatific Vision. In other words, the two coincide, so that we may look upon the activity of God as embracing all time and all things, operating without ceasing and with divine surety for the salvation of souls. Every creature, no matter how trifling or apparently fortuitous, is really, in its way, a predestined means to lead men to their supernatural end. They are all graces, technically called external, to distinguish them from internal graces which are immediately and specially received from God in the intellect and will.

In answer to the question, then: What is an external grace?, we say it is every creature that is not an internal grace of God, as explained by St. Thomas in his commentary on the words of St. Paul, "We know that for those who love God all things work together unto good, for those who, according to His purpose, are saints through His call" (Rom. 8:28). According to St. Thomas, "The Apostle is here showing how the Holy Spirit assists us through external events, directing them to our good ... Evidence of this is the fact that whatever there is in the world, although it be evil, conduces to the good of the universe. For, as Augustine says, God is so good that He would not permit anything evil unless He were so great as to

draw something good out of every evil.” However, the beneficiaries of this providence are not said to be all men, but “those who love God.” As regards these, “whatever happens either to them or to other things, all turns out to their benefit ... (so that) also the wicked actions of sinners conspire to the advantage of the just.” Even their own sins are not excluded from this economy. “So far does God make all things cooperate to their gain that if any of them should deviate or stray from the right path, this also He uses to their profit ... since the just man rises from his fall more cautious and more humble ... Such persons learn how fearful they must be in the midst of (spiritual) prosperity and not presume to remain faithful on the strength of their own virtue.” [9]

The number and variety of external graces defy classification. As a general principle, the love of God transforms everything which is good, and not only such things as appear good to us. This includes temporal afflictions and adversities which God uses to convert and sanctify our souls. No matter how painful, they are a grace of God, always intended as such for the one suffering and sometimes used by Him for the conversion and sanctification of others. Included also are the actions of other people. Their ordinary words and conduct are intended to occasion supernatural effects in our souls. This will be hard to see where the actions are offensive or the offender is not personally wicked and may even be highly virtuous. It is of special importance to see God operating in the opposition and perhaps criminal actions of others. Yet, as seen from Scripture, He permits these things in order to draw good out of them. St. Paul’s eulogy on the great believers of the Old Law, Noe, Abraham, Moses, Jacob and Joseph, is an application of this principle. The Lord tries His servants by sending them trials, and their sanctification depends on the measure of faith which recognizes in these temporal obstacles the workings of divine grace, no less than in the pleasant circumstances of daily life.

Perfection of the “More”: The term “more” appears in the last sentence of the autograph text of the Exercises and is generally accepted as authentic. A literal translation of the Spanish reads, “... solely desiring and choosing that which more leads us to the end for which we are made.” Consequently, the expression “which *most* lead us to the end,” as found in some English versions, gives an interpretation of the text. According to Father Nadal, “the closing phrase of the Foundation so envisions our indifference that we choose and desire those things which lead us more to attain the end of our creation.” [10] It may be described as a statement of the perfection of indifference, following the doctrine of St. Thomas that: “A man’s soul is so much the more perfectly drawn to God as it is more detached from affection for temporal things.” This is the end product of Christian spirituality, since “all the counsels by which we are invited to perfection have this end in view: that being detached from the love of earthly goods, our souls may tend more freely to God.” [11]

Besides describing the perfection of indifference, the last sentence also proposes the surest means of becoming indifferent. St. Ignatius recommends two acts of the will—desire and choice—which, if consistently applied to objects that are more conducive to the end of our existence, gradually neutralize the natural inclination we have to follow creatures without reference to their Creator. Deceptively short, it reduces to practice the main function of the evangelical counsels in the scheme of salvation. By their means, says St. Thomas, a person “more freely attains to the end for which he was created.” [12]

The closing words of the Foundation also clarify what indifference is not. It is not mere passivity in the presence of creatures, allowing them to pound the will with opposition, nor mere stoicism which resists their seductive attraction with no supernatural end in view. It is an active dynamism that positively seeks out those creatures which the mind, illumined by faith, determines are more conducive to the Beatific Vision. Behind this

clarification stands the implicit principle that there are degrees of efficiency among creatures as instruments of sanctification, and that consequently it behooves us to train the mind for recognizing which are the more efficacious and to develop the will habitually to embrace them.

Therefore, a logical relation exists between indifference and the *tantum-quantum* rule which takes on a depth of meaning not otherwise apparent. When St. Ignatius urges us to use creatures in so far as they assist and abstain from them in so far as they hinder our salvation, the issue involved is more than obedience to precept or the avoidance of sin. It includes the delicate appraisal of every creature for its efficiency in leading us to our appointed end, and its choice or rejection should depend on the degree to which it answers to this requirement.

Chapter 1

References

[1] *Monumenta Historica*, “Monumenta Ignatiana: Exercitia Spiritualia,” Madrid, 1919, p. 131.

[2] *Imitation of Christ*, Book III, Chapter 9.

[3] *Opera Spiritualia Joannis P. Roothaan*, Vol. II, Romae, 1936, p.32. In the same context, Roothaan stresses the importance of the prayer of petition from the very beginning of the Spiritual Exercises, “earnestly begging God for light to clearly understand the primary truth expressed in the Foundation, and grace for the will spontaneously to accept the practical conclusions derived from its serious consideration. Above all the exercitant should apply this truth and its essential consequences to himself.” *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[4] Denzinger *Enchiridion*, 1783, (Subsequent references to this collection of ecclesiastical documents will be identified only by their editor,

Denzinger, and the corresponding number of the document.)

[5] Victor Mercier, *Manuel des Exercices*, Poitiers, 1894, p. 205. Also Janvier Bucceroni, *Exercices Spirituels*, 1904, p. 64.

[6] Mercier, op. cit., p. 33.

[7] Pierre Bouvier, *The Authentic Interpretation of the Foundation*, Bourges (MS edition), 1922, pp.24-25.

[8] *Monumenta Historica*, “Chronicon Polanci,” III, Madrid, 1895.

[9] S. Thomas, *Commentaria in Epistolas S. Pauli*, Vol. I, Liège, 1857, pp. 160-161. In his treatment of the subject here and in the *Summa Theologica* (Ia IIae, q. 79, a. 4; IIIa, q. 89, a.2), St. Thomas carefully refers this special supernatural providence, which derives eventual profit even from sin, to the elect, i.e., “who according to His purpose are saints through His call.” He argues to their being the object of the good intended by God when permitting evil because they represent “the most noble parts,” of the universe, much as “a doctor might allow the foot to be injured in order to heal the head.”

[10] *Monumenta Historica*, “Epistolae P. Nadal,” IV, Madrid, 1905, p. 835.

[11] Ia IIae, q. 108, a.4.

[12] *Ibid.*

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