

From the Ignatian Tradition

EXERCISES FOR INFIDELS, HERETICS AND SINNERS

Jerónimo Nadal

*In the last issue of **The Way**, we reproduced a passage from Jerónimo Nadal's **Apology** for the Ignatian Exercises. Nadal wrote this document between 1554 and 1556 in angry reaction to a critical report from an inquisitorial committee in Spain chaired by the Dominican theologian Tomás Pedroche. In this issue, we take another extract, in which Nadal faces the accusation that Ignatius removes any basis for people outside a state of grace making a good Christian choice.¹*

Nadal initially answers the charge by reminding his hostile readers that any good Election is made on the basis of the First Week, on the basis of repentance from obvious sin. For infidels, heretics and sinners, the appropriate pastoral care is sound instruction. But as Nadal's enthusiasm for the Exercises, and his pride in them, begins to run away with him, he changes tone. Perhaps Ignatius' text can be 'accommodated' for infidels, heretics and sinners. And Nadal sets out in some detail how this might be done (though Iparraguirre's inventory of exercitants in Ignatius' lifetime suggests that that these speculations were never put into practice, and that such few Lutherans as did make the Exercises were speedily reconciled to Catholicism).²

The passage is interesting for reasons that go beyond its obvious attractiveness in ecumenical and inter-faith contexts. Its ambivalence is

¹ The passage translated here comes from MHSJ MN 4, 848-852. For Pedroche's criticisms of Ignatius' statement about elections being made on the basis of God's love coming from above, see MHSJ Pol Chron 3, 515-516.

² Ignacio Iparraguirre, *Práctica de los Ejercicios de San Ignacio de Loyola en vida de su autor* (1522-1526) (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1946), 267-307, 136.

itself striking. Nadal affirms the importance both of direct instruction and of the more reciprocal, open-ended pedagogy of the Exercises, without resolving the implicit theological and practical conflicts between these two positions. Contemporary Christians have arguably not taken the matter significantly forward. In the context of this collection, it is also worth noting the generous theology of creation and of God's love informing at least some of what Nadal says about the Exercises and those outside the Church, and inspiring him to develop Ignatius' guidelines. All can be brought to recognise that God exists and that the love of this God is the source and end of our being. On that basis, at least some sort of Election is possible for anyone.

Ignatius' Statement

'Since it is necessary that an Election be made through an affection infused from heaven, out of the love of God ... (Exx 184.2, Vulgate)'

Pedroche's Criticism

This assertion is a presupposition, presented as if it were unquestionable, very well known, and wholly acceptable—as that particle 'since' shows. Moreover, as can be established from the express words of this assertion, what is being talked about is that love which charity—a theological virtue—makes flow within us; for it says 'infused from heaven, out of the love of God'. How do the Gentiles, and others

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who—to put it negatively—are infidels, make an Election, since they don't have that love infused from heaven, nor that theological virtue of charity? And how do the heretics, who also are lacking that charity communicated to them, make an Election? And how do believers who are in mortal sin make an Election? And how does conversion

occur for all these people, if to start with they cannot make an Election since they are quite deprived of charity and that infused love, given that, after all, charity and infused love are the principles of the Election?

Moreover, from this assertion it seems evidently to follow that an Election cannot come about on the basis of fear. This is against the sacred texts by which, in many places, humanity is encouraged to making evidently licit and holy choices, as can be seen when it says,

‘unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did’; and also ‘learn discipline, in case the Lord be angry and you perish from His way’.³

Nadal’s Comment

What so far is there that can so displease the theologian? What, in that which is presented here, can give such offence that so vehemently he pronounces this statement not only rash and scandalous, but also truly heretical? What are the grounds that the learned man adduces for saying that the statement is rash, scandalous, heretical? ‘How’, he says, ‘do the Gentiles make an Election, and those who—to put it negatively—are unbelievers? How do the heretics do it? How do those faithful who are in a state of mortal sin?’

Do you want me to give you a simple answer? It’s not through this means but in another way. For we don’t teach infidels, heretics, or Catholics in mortal sin to make a choice through these Exercises. Rather—if you allow yourself to remember properly what we said above and what cries out from every page of the *Exercises*—we give Elections of this kind to people who, after a general confession and holy communion, are examining their conscience as often as daily, who are going to confession and attending Mass regularly, who are giving themselves to devout meditation on the sacred gospel, who have set aside all the impediments that could alienate them from holiness, and thus are approaching the Election devoutly and piously. First convert the infidels and heretics, first set the wayward faithful in order and give them the proper dispositions so that they have the capacity for our Elections; then we’ll teach them.

Can you then, with your theology, regard us as heretics, if the only people whom we are teaching to make an Election are those whom we have, in Christ Jesus, first exhorted and helped to get rid of their sins, and to obtain grace from heaven by sacraments, by sacred meditations, and by prayers. Who, I beg you, are you ever going to regard as Catholic if

³ Luke 13:5; Psalm 2:12 (Vulgate). The manuscript has marginal notes which, as a later Jesuit cataloguer states, ‘do not seem to come from anyone in the Society’—perhaps they have been made by some kind of defence lawyer in the Inquisitorial offices. On this paragraph, the note runs: ‘The reasoning of this text is clear, because from love of the end comes love of the means. Obviously a person who greatly loves a canonry goes to Rome post haste rather than on a mule to get it—and so, in order that the Election be ordered to the supernatural end that we desire, it cannot be perfect or adequate unless it proceeds from charity.’

someone doing this is a heretic? Hold off, brother, hold off from making such facile pronouncements—it might lead to your losing your liberty and facility of judgment, and to my in turn demanding retribution. Hold on, I beg you, Father. For is there anything more lenient to be said about a person who declares as heretical what is so obviously Catholic and orthodox? Of course I won't ever think you deserve quite to be described that way—but you're not very careful, you most learned man.

If you say, 'when do you teach that infidels, heretics and bad Christians can properly undertake Elections?', the answer is: not in Exercises of this kind, but in preaching, disputations, exhortations and every kind of pious and orthodox arts—arts through which the heavenly and most merciful Father, in Christ Jesus, has given in such a short time such great spiritual effectiveness to the Society with peoples everywhere, be they infidel, heretic or faithful.

Accommodation to Infidels

And so much so, if you want to hear my opinion, that this is my belief: for all of these our Exercises can be accommodated, even for infidels, if we draw on the principles of the law of nature in the teaching of Paul (Romans 1 and Acts 17—the speech to the people on the Areopagus). Positively, they need only to be persuaded that they are being carried towards God; there is no need to persuade them of any negative. In other words, they need to be invoking the one God and not denying the triune God; and to be conforming themselves to that one God. The whole Foundation of the Exercises can indeed be easily accommodated on this basis.

Then the meditations of the First Week: confession is not to be laid down for them, nor communion, but they are to be brought to the kind of contrition that was necessary for the Gentiles even before the Gospel of Christ. Thus meditations are to be added drawing on the law of nature and on the Catholic truths confessed by the infidel, wherever there is a good affinity between the infidel and orthodox faith, or wherever some truths can be presented to them convincingly. Nothing, then, about the Trinity to start with, nothing about Christ is to be proposed to them; their meditations are to be given in an accommodated way at their true time, taking as a model the

meditations on the temporal king and the standards,⁴ and referred to the one God.

Then the Elections are to be got across to them, tempered to what they can take and understand—assuming that they have gone through the particular exercises we have mentioned properly, and provided that they entrust themselves to God, and do not deny any of those things which Christian faith confesses and preaches. On this it doesn't seem hard to imagine Muslims being persuaded, since they hold that both our law and their Koran lead to salvation.

But any infidel, provided they are willing to give assent to logical thought, will easily be persuaded to hold onto only these things which are either manifest through the law of nature and reason, or else to what they confess particularly through their own law. For if anyone commits themselves to the one supreme truth, they really can't go wrong.

The Election is to be proposed to them in really general terms—it is not that we should command them to be doubtful about the persuasion of their own law or their faith, but rather that, setting aside any law, they should invoke and take counsel with God, that He may open the truth to them. If, however, they can be brought to having three laws put forward to them, that of the Jews, that of the Christians, and that of the Muslims, and to reflecting on these, this will be far more useful. And when this person has been brought to the point that they love God above all things, then I will tell them that out of this love they should tackle the Elections.⁵



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⁴ The phrase is obscure. Nadal seems to be suggesting that a retreat-giver working outside Christianity should, where the biblical content of the Exercises might raise problems, imitate Ignatius' imaginative developments of Gospel tradition as exemplified in the Kingdom and the Two Standards.

⁵ Here Nadal is directly addressing Pedroche's objection.

Accommodation to Heretics

Of the heretics, given their perversity, it is really much more difficult to speak. But they too can perhaps be reached through these Exercises. Indeed, they will easily receive the whole Foundation and the whole First Week. And if there is no compulsion arising from its being Holy Week and Easter, they can accomplish the First Week without confession or communion—it is not, however, necessary for them to deal with the truths in which they offend, just as has been said regarding the infidels. At this point, if they have really exercised themselves in penitence, I hope they will manage this anyway. For as they move away from these sins, which are the reason why God gave them over into error and into perverse feeling, they will be the more fit to recognise the error of their understanding, and to admit the light of faith.

If this plan doesn't work, the heretic is to be exercised in meditations on the life of Christ, always abstracting from these errors into which they have fallen. Moreover, the straightforward story of the contemplation and the Application of the Senses is to be used, not an inquisitive investigation seeking out subtle insights: it is in humility that their spirit is to be primarily exercised. If by these meditations they do not become more free from what has taken their fancy, then peacefully and quietly we should move on to disputation. In this case, as if according to the third 'time' of Elections, the person should put their arguments forward, and the instructor set Catholic truth against that. The two should be put together by the instructor, and the conclusion drawn. If this does no good, we must resort to prayer, provided that they truly desire or expect to be helped. Finally, if no movement occurs, they are to be shunned, unless they can be handed over to the judge; for they are condemned by their own judgment.⁶

⁶ It is noticeable that Nadal is less generous to Protestants than to infidels: his strategy is to reconcile the heretics; Protestantism arises from a moral fault rather than from a serious set of theological convictions; if the gentle approach of the Exercises fails, civil punishment as the best final recourse. Another passage on the topic, from Nadal's *Spiritual Diary*, is worth quoting here: 'The Society's Exercises can be accommodated to Lutherans, since they are based on things that are universal. Nor is it necessary to make a general confession or take the Eucharist. They need only to place themselves under the Spirit of the Lord and the Church, or at least not to fight against that Spirit; but they should take their stand on seeking what is common to us and to them. "One faith", says Paul, "one baptism". Whatever faith, therefore, there is in the Church of God is one; this truly Catholic faith is hardly questionable. Therefore it is a figment of the Lutherans' imagination that they might be saved by another faith.' (MHSJ MN *Orationis observationes*, nn. 228-229)

Accommodation for Sinners

You see how our Exercises can be extended just anywhere, to the infidels and also to heretics. About those who are in mortal sin, it is really easy to say what happens. For these we lead to the right Exercises, and when they have been purged and justified, we will give them the Elections. If they want to take counsel about their state of life before they have wept over their sins and before they have come to the sacraments of penance and of holy communion, then we confront them. For they should not be asking questions about how they are going through life, and about the path along which they might go to heaven, if they are not first alive, and alive in such a way that they can make the journey. For with a dead person what is there to give them as counsel except that they should be alive? And in this matter nothing is controversial and nothing can be doubted. You are dead in sin: ‘Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’; ‘do penance, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near’.⁷ Do you want to live, feel, walk in death? Is it in darkness that you want to see the light? Recover your life, take up the light by which you will see where you are to go, and receive the strength which will enable you to move forward.

The Importance of Love

I have given teaching about how infidels, heretics and sinners should and can make an Election. However, I will add a few extra points about these things. Again I confirm that for these people everything has to be elected out of love. For all things are to be understood in terms of their purpose; it is on that basis that we must embark on our deliberations, elections, on all that we do, so that the Election be whole, that what we do be whole and absolute. For, if someone is led by some other principle, such as fear, coercion, affection or argument, the value of any of these can only be to lead the person to achieve their end and contribute to showing what the perfection of an election consists in. Actions like this are, after all, the beginnings; they are, so to speak, unformed and not yet whole; this is plain in the sinner who acts from

⁷ Ephesians 5:14; Matthew 3:2 (Vulgate)—note that the Greek’s use of ‘repent’ rather than the Vulgate ‘do penance’ was a significant point in the Reformation controversies on justification.

the servile fear by which the sinner is impelled to attrition,⁸ and in the infidel, who is led to baptism by being terrified at the sinners amidst whom they see themselves trapped, as the Council of Trent clearly explains. And finally in the heretic, when through the horror of the fire and the force of argument they begin to see the path to salvation and to make confession.

Given all this, it is plain: even though there are other bases on which Elections can begin or be fostered, nevertheless this principle is what is to be desired, taught and alone sought—that there is one beginning and end of all things, which is true and solid and perfect. And who is there who should not encourage all people to this principle? What else did Christ teach, what else did the apostles teach, what else did the saints teach, what else has the Church always taught, what else does it, will it teach, except that mortals should love God above all things, love God out of their whole heart, their whole mind, their whole soul, their whole strength? What else is this, you most learned man, apart from the establishment of the first command, the first principle, the first end from which all things come and to which all things are being led?



⁸ This technical term denotes an imperfect form of contrition, motivated by fear. See Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, c. 6; Exx 370.