

# POVERTY AND THE EXERCISES

By MICHAEL KYNE

THE choice of such a subject as poverty in the Exercises may seem to lack the precision of the other topics considered at this conference. This criticism is not without substance; but the choice has certain advantages. First of all, the idea of poverty recurs in different parts of the Exercises. If we can follow it through, it may provide us with an easier entry into the movement and direction of the Exercises than would a study of any one exercise in particular. Secondly, it provides an opportunity to draw attention to the essays of P. Roger Cantin, which have clarified the meaning of certain aspects of the Exercises.<sup>1</sup> An accurate knowledge of what Ignatius's text means and of the movement of the Exercises would seem to be absolute conditions for the successful adaptation of them to the usual retreat of six or eight days. If we lack this knowledge, the giving of a retreat can all too easily become a mere repetition of or commentary on a text which is treated as sacred, though its author proposed it as a method or tool; or else it becomes an occasion for giving other meditations which, however valuable in themselves, have no place in that specific process which is the reality of an ignatian retreat. This process is one of personal discernment with the help of a director through the Exercises, which themselves lead to a progressively more perfect discernment of the christian context of a choice under God.

Here, then, it is the Exercises as they are in the text which are under discussion: the Exercises, according to the mind of Ignatius and the early Society, as concerned primarily with a decision about a life according to the commandments or the counsels.<sup>2</sup> Both ways

---

<sup>1</sup> Cantin, Roger, S.J., 'L'indifférence dans le Principe et Fondement des Exercices Spirituels de S. Ignace', *Sciences Ecclésiastiques* 3 (1950) pp. 114-145; and Le troisième degré d'humilité et la gloire de Dieu selon saint Ignace de Loyola, *ibid.* 8 (1956), pp 237-266.

<sup>2</sup> The fifteenth Annotation, taken in conjunction with the definition of religion in the fourteenth (Exx 14 and 15), shows perhaps that counsels should not be taken as referring exclusively to the religious life of the three counsels, though most often this is what is in question.

of life demand, if they are to be lived fully, a man who is resolved to serve God generously; and Ignatius would seem to have wanted his retreatant to have considerable natural qualities as well. Only to such a man as this is the Foundation given;<sup>1</sup> and this directive sheds an important light on the Foundation as the introductory summary of the whole process of the Exercises. It would be wrong to see it merely as an introduction to the First Week.

#### THE FOUNDATION

From the earliest days of the Society this text was attacked, not for its first part, but for its doctrine of indifference, where poverty is mentioned. Critics claimed that this doctrine was contrary to scripture, ran counter to our proper natural and reasonable tendencies, and contradicted the real order in which all creatures are not equally useful to man.

For a better understanding of the modest answer given by the early jesuits and to an understanding of the text, two points may be made. First, a spiritual principle in the Exercises is not to be equated strictly with the same principle enunciated in another context. For example, indifference and the third degree of humility are found both in the Exercises and the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*; in the latter they are proposed with a certain emphasis as general principles in jesuit life, and particular applications are made. Yet however convinced the retreat director may be of their general value, it is not his task in a retreat to expound a specific spirituality to retreatants whose 'family spirituality' may be a different one from his own. The principle in the Exercises should be proposed in function of the purpose of the ignatian retreat only.

Secondly, it still remains true that doctrines in the Exercises are at times specifically ignatian, in the sense that they have characteristics which distinguish them from other doctrines similar in thought or expression and, maybe, richer or more important in the spiritual life in general. So it is with indifference in the Foundation. It does not teach precisely a global abandonment or submission to God's

<sup>1</sup> Contrast Annotations 18 & 19 (Exx 18 & 19). We must also note that indifference is concerned, not with sin, but only with what is 'not forbidden to our free will'. It might therefore be imprudent to propose it to a person who wanted only to avoid sin; though this would not exclude a thorough-going adaptation of the text, according to the interpretation of the late P. José Calveras, who holds that nearly all the Exercises can be given as a 'First Week' retreat, provided that they are directed to the end and purpose of that Week. In this case, detachment would be limited to detachment from sin and what clearly leads to sin; for which little discernment of spirits is required.

will revealed in circumstances existing independently of the retreatant's free will, but rather a full acceptance of all that seems to be implied for the retreatant's real life in a present choice according to God's will. Occupying the centre of the picture is an active co-operation with God which shapes the retreatant's life and action, rather than the loving union with God, where the main stress is on acceptance of the divine will. If this co-operation is to be genuine, if the retreatant is to choose according to God's will on a particular point, indifference is the disposition which he needs; and the purpose of the Foundation is to enable him to realise this.<sup>1</sup>

The simple answer to the critics was that the Foundation was concerned, not with a universal indifference sought for itself, but rather one sought for the sake of one act, a good election.<sup>2</sup> Neither this indifference nor the whole Exercises are meant to lead to perfection in a month, but simply to one good choice. This choice, if it is to be made as well as possible, requires a discipline of mind and heart; it demands indifference for the moment and object of the election. Outside the time of this choice, the retreatant may desert one of the contraries proposed (health rather than sickness, etc.), more than another, for all sorts of reasons, without sin; but, to make the choice, he needs to be sincere and generous enough to be prepared to take a decision now, solely for the greater service of God, which could imply poverty rather than riches, etc. If God wants this choice, the retreatant leaves it to him to provide for the life which such a choice implies.

Ignatius himself was tempted to think that he could not stand up to following Christ closely for a lifetime;<sup>3</sup> and in the same way the retreatant might rule out the possibility of the life of the counsels because he has the fixed idea that it would harm his health or shorten his life. Thus he is faced with the challenge at the outset of

---

On these two preliminary points I would suggest that it is important to see the spiritual principles and practices and the emphasis given to them in the rule and way of life of any group of religious to whom we give an annual retreat. If the spirit is notably different from the jesuit one, such doctrines as indifference should be expounded simply in the context of the Exercises. Secondly, this limited indifference, necessary for the sake of a choice, is more easily grasped by all at the start of a retreat. Those with more experience will know how much acceptance there must be in the life within which they seek to co-operate actively. The more passive aspect receives its right emphasis in the Third Week, where the negative forces militating against the living out of a freely chosen service to the Father are taken up into that service, transmuted and fulfilled.

<sup>2</sup> Cf the preamble to the election (Exx 16g) which is modelled on the Foundation and explains it.

<sup>3</sup> *Autobiography* n. 20. [Section and page references are to Iparraguirre's *Obras completas de san Ignacio* (BAC, Madrid, 1952)].

the retreat: does he see that what counts is the life God wants him to lead<sup>1</sup> and that his leaning to comfort, to a long life, etc., could prevent his recognising God's will, and choosing accordingly? Is he willing to accept the principle and its implications for him here and now: to pledge himself to work during and through the Exercises so that his disordered affections, even if they are not fully uprooted, do not influence this choice?<sup>2</sup>

The Foundation, then, is not primarily concerned with indifference as disposing the will, but as helping a man to know, in given circumstances, where God's will lies. This is the reason behind the old analysis of it, the end, the means, the difficulty of choosing the right means because of ignorance about the best means; and therefore the need of indifference if a man is to know what God wants.

The greatest danger lies in not seeing and judging rightly because of a disordered affection, rather than in not choosing rightly because of repugnance. Ignatius himself met this difficulty, though he – like the retreatants he accepted for the full Exercises – did not lack generosity. He always had the *magis*, but needed to seek a *caritas discreta*.<sup>3</sup> Indifference is needed if a person is genuinely to seek God's will in the retreat; nor can he make a safe decision unless he is open to the various possible directions which that will may take.

### *The two elements of indifference*

'We do not seek': an attitude of expectation in the order of intellect and will is always in our power, though it may require effort. Resistance of the will shows disordered affection: that it is not motivated solely by the service and glory of God. If there are two ways to God's glory, the 'ordered' way is that which leads to

<sup>1</sup> The Directories never pause over the contraries given as examples in the Foundation, but concentrate on the 'life' which may imply them.

<sup>2</sup> This reply may seem to limit unduly a text which is universal in form, yet it would seem legitimate if it is remembered that the Foundation is part of a retreat and not an abstract doctrinal statement. It is true that the principle of indifference, outside the Exercises, covers all free acts and choices. Either to use creatures or to free oneself from ties to them, in the measure in which they help to man's end, does require an over-all indifference in practice; but the aim of the Exercises is more modest. It is to be expected, of course, that repeated retreats will foster the wider indifference. It may be noted that Cantin rejects the translation 'in the measure' for reasons which are not convincing, though it must be agreed that the positive aspect of the measure, full use, is often played down. The arguments he quotes take no account of the stressed position of *tanto*, nor that the consideration of sin in the Foundation is deliberately excluded. He seems to overlook the whole process of discernment which will precise what is stated globally here.

<sup>3</sup> Nearly all the rules in the Exercises (for alms, scruples, food, spirits, thinking with the Church) are concerned with this discernment.

God's greater glory. Thus there is a second disposition in indifference: 'desiring only what leads us more fully to the end . . .'. It may be asked whether this is indifference or the third degree of humility. Here Nadal, whom Ignatius appointed as the interpreter of the Exercises, sets aside the Vulgate text, which omits 'only' and 'more fully', and says there is question of the choice of the more perfect only. Ignatius' autograph directory,<sup>1</sup> speaking of the Election, says that the retreatant should be fully resigned either to the counsels or to the precepts; and also, if possible, he should be brought to a disposition of desiring the counsels<sup>2</sup> more if God is better served so. The reason for this second disposition is that more signs are needed for the precepts than for the counsels: normally the retreatant should be asking himself, 'is there any good reason why I should not choose the counsels?' These two dispositions are those of the Foundation; yet a little further on Ignatius seems to call the latter disposition the third degree of humility.<sup>3</sup>

We may say, then, that the retreatant, for his own part, both at the time of the Foundation and at the Election, desires complete identification with Christ;<sup>4</sup> but, at the earlier moment, his choice of the more perfect is not effective; it is only an inclination to choose what is better in itself. Nadal, in his answer to an objection to Annotation 15, distinguishes what is best objectively from what is best for this retreatant: in general and in *praeparatione animi* we are not indifferent about the counsels, but in a particular choice we

<sup>1</sup> Iparraguirre *op. cit.* n 7, p 244.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* n 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* n 17, p 246. In fact there is a difference here from the text in n 8 ('equal' instead of 'greater service'); but despite this, Cantin seems correct in asserting the equivalence of the two passages. Following him, I have transferred the words 'if possible', which seem to indicate that complete indifference is not absolutely necessary for the choice of a state of life or reform on a particular point. There is no doubt that this absolute indifference is necessary for the spiritual life as a whole, even with regard to things legitimate in themselves (cf the Two Standards which shows how such things can lead to the breaking of the commandments); and it is also practically necessary if we are aiming always to choose what is more pleasing to God. Yet, as it is not demanded for the commandments, because then God's will is known and we have only to obey; so also it is not absolutely necessary for the choice of a programme or state of life. It is, however, 'very useful': for though we could make a right choice without it, the risks involved would be great. So Ignatius takes it for granted that only the second degree of humility is absolutely necessary for the election, though he desires the third.

<sup>4</sup> One of the many reasons against a purely philosophical interpretation of any part of the Foundation is this close relation it has to the election, which puts the love of God at the base of the choice. Early objectors said that it was based too exclusively on the love of God: the answer was that a choice to a supernatural end must proceed from charity. So it seems that any presentation of the Foundation and indifference other than in the context of the charity of Christ will be out of focus: it must be seen that the supernatural love of God is the source of the love and choice of creatures.

should be. So, as a general attitude of mind, the choice of the more perfect is implied in the indifference which waits on God's will and, if this general preference is lacking, it can only be because of disordered affection or lack of indifference. In fact, this desire of the more perfect is the more basic of the two elements in indifference, and the reason why no particular choice is made unless God's will is clear.

#### POVERTY IN THE SECOND WEEK

Though the exercises of the second week nearly always couple poverty<sup>1</sup> and being treated without respect (which is not seen solely as a consequence of the former), and develop the attitude of the retreatant to both of them *pari passu*, it is poverty which has the greater immediacy and actuality.<sup>2</sup> In its spiritual form it can be desired absolutely: and even actual poverty does not require the explicit proviso – only if this is possible without sin on anyone's part, or without displeasing God;<sup>3</sup> though of course the effective choice of it is made subject to God's will. Here, the state of poverty is considered simply as the individual's act of choice, and can be realised without others providing the matter for fulfilment of the choice, as they must for the various forms of loss of esteem.

A more exact notion of spiritual poverty in the Exercises may perhaps be obtained by setting it once more in the context of a choice between lives according to the counsels or the commandments. It is clear that actual poverty is seen as a state of life;<sup>4</sup> and whether it is chosen as part of the official religious life or not,<sup>5</sup> it involves following the counsel: 'Go, sell all that thou hast...' Spiritual poverty does not involve this universal definitive abandonment of possessions; but it appears that Ignatius found that it did involve the actual surrender of money, etc., for most of his retreatants, even if their election resulted in their following the way of the commandments.<sup>6</sup> The desire to give up in reality something of

<sup>1</sup> Most of Ignatius' ideas on poverty can be found in the brief *Deliberation on poverty* which is concerned, like the Spiritual Diary, with the question of income for the sacristy. It is given in Iparraguirre, *op. cit.*, pp 269–271.

<sup>2</sup> It is poverty which is the first step in Christ's way to true life, Exx 146.

<sup>3</sup> Exx 147.

<sup>4</sup> Exx 98.

<sup>5</sup> Exx 15.

<sup>6</sup> Cf Exx 189 and the rules for alms, especially Exx 344. The choice of the example of a sum of money for the test of the three classes, proposed to all those making an election, is surely significant. The same attitude which brings down love of poverty to concrete daily life is shown in the Constitutions e.g., *Examen Generale* c. 4. n. 26 and in Polanco's letter on poverty, written at Ignatius' order, which ends by saying that love of poverty means love of its consequences in food, dress and loss of esteem, if it is not to be simply love of a word.

monetary value, to be really more like Christ in his poverty, seems to be required as a general rule if a person is to reach a true indifference and make his decision solely according to God's will.

It is not possible to examine, in detail and in their context, all the passages in the second week which mention poverty; we can do no more than indicate elements of this poverty and the development of Ignatius' teaching as the week progresses.

*Poverty as an action against sensuality*<sup>1</sup>

Here, three themes seem to have been incorporated by Ignatius from his own experience: outstanding service of God, penance for his past life and, with growing force, the inclusive motive of pleasing God – which took the concrete form of imitating Christ and using his weapons.<sup>2</sup> Christ had become his guide and a reason in favour of full poverty which outweighed all human motives.<sup>3</sup> Poverty was seen as the expression in the life of Christ, of his redemptive mission<sup>4</sup> from the first moment of his human existence. This poverty retains its value for the individual; but once it is centred on Christ, it becomes 'open' and apostolic.<sup>5</sup>

*Poverty as an entry into Christ's work of universal redemption.*

Poverty is part of Christ's message to all: it is the mark of those who spread his message.<sup>6</sup> In the most developed of the mysteries of the life of Christ, Ignatius sees the apostles, men of low rank, called gradually to a definitive, absolute poverty<sup>7</sup> and sent out under that sign.<sup>8</sup> This mission was later confirmed by the Holy Ghost; so that apostolic poverty is marked with the approval of all three divine Persons.<sup>9</sup>

In Ignatius's life, this consideration of universal mission was of great importance. Very early on, it led to the rejection of certain exterior manifestations of poverty and penance for the sake of his

<sup>1</sup> Exx 97 – The call is first to establish Christ's kingdom in the retreatant himself.

<sup>2</sup> *Autobiography* 7, 8, 14 and 21, where the change into poor clothes is seen as *vestirse las armas de Cristo*.

<sup>3</sup> See the important passage in the Diary for 23 February 1544; Iparraguirre, *op. cit.* pp 298–9; also p 829.

<sup>4</sup> Exx 116.

<sup>5</sup> This 'openness' of a poverty which co-operates in the individual's own redemption through imitation of Christ's poverty, is perhaps already indicated in the composition of place of the Kingdom and more clearly in the development of the contemplation. Cf Exx 91–97.

<sup>6</sup> Exx 146–7.

<sup>7</sup> Exx 275.

<sup>8</sup> Exx 281.

<sup>9</sup> *Diary*, 11 February 1544. Iparraguirre, *op. cit.* p 288.

apostolic work.<sup>1</sup> It must, however, be emphasised that only the exterior manifestations which were rejected run counter to the unitive nature of poverty. Ignatius saw poverty as a source of spiritual strength effecting union with Christ as he lived on earth and now lives in the Church; as a help in persuading others to poverty and a source of edification by the disinterestedness it shows;<sup>2</sup> it is 'our way' of reforming the Church and removes strife and lawsuits with others.<sup>3</sup> So union with Christ and the sharing in his apostolic mission came together under the sign of poverty.

These notions are seen by Ignatius as applicable not only to individuals but also to the corporate body of the Society which he founded. To help others, the régime of every jesuit house must be normally a poor one, in relation to local standards of living, even if it means that individuals suffer a little in health as they adapt themselves to it. Exceptions are made for those in poor health who would be seriously incapacitated if their health were subjected to further strain. Discernment will always be the cardinal rule, but it presupposes that all in the house are ready to suffer anything in the way of God's service.<sup>4</sup> The desire of the whole Society is taken to be to 'preach in poverty', as it was Ignatius' own from the beginning.<sup>5</sup>

*Poverty as confidence in God alone, who effects his redemption in Christ and applies it through men*

This is the most fundamental sense of poverty for Ignatius. God will take care to support those who live and work for him.<sup>6</sup> Poverty in this sense is seen to be a constant throughout Ignatius' life from the early days of his conversion<sup>7</sup> up to the time of the formulation of the Institute and the Constitutions, which insist in general on immediate gifts and alms to the exclusion of settled income and claims which can be exacted in justice.<sup>8</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that so many of the mysteries of the life of Christ in the Exercises which have no immediate reference to the poverty of Christ

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography* 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Deliberation on poverty*, *loc. cit.* pp 270-71.

<sup>3</sup> Iparraguirre, *op. cit.* p 706-7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 943-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p 656.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 667-8. This letter to Peter Contarini makes an interesting distinction between the two states of life: seeking solely, or seeking first the kingdom of God and his justice. It also emphasises the demands made with regard to possessions in the way of the commandments. Cf also the *Form. Inst.* MI Const. I. p 16 [5].

<sup>7</sup> Eg *Autobiography* 35, 36.

<sup>8</sup> For the Formula of the Institute, *ibid.*, n 34; Const. eg Pt 6, c. 2 n 2 & 3.



and his apostles, or to Christ's words on poverty or his attitude to the poor – though a surprising number have – are aimed at building up this confidence in Christ's care for those who love him.

Our suggestion here is that no retreat director can afford to neglect these three senses of poverty in giving the Exercises of the second week; and that they also provide one criterion for the choice of bible passages as matter for prayer along the line of the movement of the Exercises.<sup>1</sup> Further, it may well be that the attitude to poverty – at its deepest level this inclusive attitude of confidence and the expression of it in a readiness to give up some money or advantage flowing from possession – still retains a very real relevance to the making of a choice inspired purely by the service of God.

#### THE THIRD DEGREE OF HUMILITY

All that has been said so far finds its true focus here: the subordination of individual poverty to mission is seen more clearly; and also the practical condition laid down by Ignatius for avoiding the sort of self-deception in that subordination which might lead to the separation of poverty and mission. The condition is 'supposing equal praise and glory to the divine Majesty . . .'; and it is important to recall that by this term Ignatius meant something different from the scholastic authors. He was not talking of a glory which inevitably increases with the perfection of a virtuous act: one automatically greater when a man follows Christ along his way of suffering. His glory is intimately associated with the idea of a service which goes beyond rules, of an absolute dedication to God which seeks no reward outside its exploits on his behalf. Yet, realist here as always, Ignatius sees God's will revealed through men and reduces his great deeds to such things as obedience to the pope and the efficient fulfilment of the present task of one's vocation in the Church. At Manresa he was granted the vision of God working his glory in the return of men to him through Christ and the Church, the body in which Christ still lives. It is in answering the call of Christ still effecting the salvation of men on earth, in the service of souls and the Church, that a man gives God the glory of fully ruling over men who freely submit to him.

This is a glory which can be spread and increase. It is not merely a question of the individual's perfect good act as reflecting God's

<sup>1</sup> An obvious example of biblical readings which provide matter for prayerful reflection in the context of the 'mysteries' are the Servant songs (poverty and suffering redemption). A. Gelin's *The Poor of God* (London, 1965), is useful on the theme of poverty and confidence.

splendour, but the social and corporate consequences: the perfection of the spiritual effect produced by this act. Ignatius looks not only to the act in relationship to God but in relation to the men he wants to lead to God; not only to virtuous acts in imitation of Christ, but to ensuring that by them others follow Christ more closely. It is in this perspective that he seeks the greater glory of God: that God, Christ and the Church may be better known, loved and served.

It is easier to understand the text of the third degree of humility in the Exercises, if we bear all this in mind. The way in which Christ fulfilled his mission according to his Father's will was the way of the cross. In his love of Christ the retreatant wants to decide in which way he is meant to enter into that mission. In a sinful world the probability is that this decision will commit him to the way of poverty and suffering which Christ has authenticated, especially as he is a sinner: he needs to react against those desires which make creatures hinder him instead of leading him to God. This is the way Christ himself went, to win universal redemption; it is one in which human calculations are overturned and full confidence must be placed in the Father's love and power.

So, in the Second Week, Ignatius leads the retreatant to desire more and more definitively the concrete reality of poverty, etc., which are likely to be entailed in his choice. As his knowledge and love of Christ grows, so all that costs him and is naturally repugnant to him is seen more and more clearly as presenting opportunities to repay our Lord, to be like him and to draw closer to him.

Yet at each step the retreatant will also see that this very desire must remain a mere desire, if the greater glory of God demands a different service. The cross will certainly enter his life; but it may be that, in the particular sphere of his own choice, he may be called to assist the spread of God's kingdom in this world more by foregoing the security and joy of being poor like Christ in the material conditions of his life.

It is at this point that the retreatant will make a further advance, one that will make explicit what was contained implicitly in the Foundation. If the glory of God is equal, he prefers to follow the way Christ went in actual fact. As Ignatius says,<sup>1</sup> greater indications from God are needed for choosing the way of the precepts than of the counsels. And the reason he gives is not precisely man's experience of the disorder in himself but the fact that what Christ urges

<sup>1</sup> Iparraguirre, *op. cit.* pp 244-5.

men to follow are the counsels, while he teaches that the possession of property, though legitimate enough in the way of the commandments, always presents a serious spiritual problem. The supposition that Christ's way will usually be the one the retreatant will be led to choose is taken more for granted; whilst the genuineness of a choice which does not involve close following of Christ in poverty and suffering will be guaranteed by the profundity of the desire to do so.

God's glory and its realisation remain paramount. God calls each retreatant to this task; and, because it is primarily God's work, prayer and docility to him are more important for spreading his Kingdom than any mere human means. At the same time, man must do all that he can to ensure that he uses the most effective human means for his task. Good will and merit are not enough for full human co-operation; we must make use of all God's gifts and give our full attention to the situation and to the persons who are to be brought closer to Christ.

Yet immediate results are not the necessary measure of real apostolic success: Christ's poverty and 'failure' were supremely effective. Thus when Providence allows material circumstances or slander to interfere with obvious efficiency, it is a cause of rejoicing that this is Christ's way.<sup>1</sup> On our side, we go as far in that way as we can without detriment to the service of Christ and his Church; and, whenever the concrete task is not affected by our penance and poverty, we choose them in union with Christ rather than an easier method, unless this would not improve the work. We have to do all that we can to ensure that neither material conditions nor bad repute prevent the fulfilment of our vocation in the Church; but we can be sure that what we do is purely for God's service only if we desire his way so intensely that we enter into it spontaneously whenever our work allows,<sup>2</sup> and rejoice in our union with him when our best efforts to work unhampered are defeated. The actual imitation of Christ remains the criterion of Christ the Son and envoy who did his Father's will above all, rather than Christ the model of poverty and patience; but we know that, as far as we are concerned, poverty and suffering will often be included in that will; and we desire to be with Christ in poverty and suffering, unless the Father clearly desires the contrary.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 829-30.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p 807 gives a good example of this, distinguishing how people are sent to a college when the Society is left free, and when they are sent by the pope.