

THE RETREAT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

By LAURENCE J. MURPHY

IF ST IGNATIUS were to see the title of this paper he would surely repeat what he wrote in the rules for thinking with the Church: 'we must be very cautious about the way in which we speak of all these things and discuss them with others'.¹ On the other hand I have no doubt that the topic would interest him greatly. His appeal for caution would be well warranted, since it must be evident to all that it is concerned with a most delicate and complex area of human experience. His interest in the subject would come from the fact that, as well as being author of the *Spiritual Exercises*, he was about as close to being a christian developmental psychologist as the sixteenth century could admit.

Ignatius, like contemporary christian psychologists, was a keen observer of interior movements; and he used the language of his time to write about them. When he comes to interpret the meaning of these movements as signs of God's action, or of what he liked to call 'the enemy of human nature', he has few rivals in christian history. More than that, when it comes to elaborating an approach for observing and interpreting the movements in himself or in others he displays the master's touch: he could rightly claim to be a developmentalist. Throughout his *Autobiography* he identifies himself as 'the pilgrim'. Life for him was truly a pilgrimage, a patient searching for God and God's will, even in the details of his life. The Exercises themselves move along in stages, indicating the growth and progress to be hoped and prayed for in the mind and heart of the one doing the Exercises. The group of like-minded men who gathered around him, and who later formed the Company of Jesus, knew that Ignatius's favourite title for the nascent Society was *via quaedam ad Deum* — a pathway, as it were, to God.² However, it is when we come to the most mature elaboration of his spirituality as seen in his Constitutions that we are most struck by his developmental approach to man on his journey to

¹ Exx 366.

² Cf 'The Formula of the Institute', in *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (tr. and ed. G. Ganss, St Louis, 1970), p 67.

God. Here we find no comprehensive treatment of any one topic but rather directives, guidelines and a spirituality suited to each stage of spiritual and human development of a candidate, novice, scholastic and formed member of the Society of Jesus. From his numerous letters and the fragments of his Spiritual Diary we gain some appreciation of his own interior life and familiarity with God, and of the heights of mystical union to which God had led this poor pilgrim. There can be no doubt in our minds that Ignatius viewed life as a journey, a pilgrimage, a pathway which each one must travel, passing through many stages, never standing still, always growing, maturing, developing under the gentle inspiration of God's Spirit, always desiring and choosing what is more conducive to the praise, reverence and service of God our Lord,³ until that day when we shall see him face to face.

Holiness and psychological development

Part of the complexity of our subject lies not just in the area of psychological development itself, but in the possible connections between growth in union with God on the one hand and human and specifically psychological growth on the other. Does growth in holiness depend on our psychological make-up?⁴ Is the life of grace in any way relevant to our psychological growth? Do psychological factors influence our growth in union with God? Are spiritual freedom and psychological equilibrium the same reality? What role does emotional maturity play in the capacity to respond to God's grace? Most important of all, perhaps, do any of these factors touch our apostolic availability and effectiveness in working for others? These and many other questions of a theological and psychological nature begin to emerge. The credibility of the ministry of the Spiritual Exercises in the next decade will depend to some extent on providing ourselves with some convincing answers. What is needed more than anything else in this rich but complex area of religious experience is an inter-disciplinary approach between theologians better grounded in 'the resources of a more sophisticated and developed psychological science' and psychologists who are not content to 'remain naive and misguided (but) . . . informed by a significant degree of theological knowledge'.⁵

³ Exx 23.

⁴ Cf Beirnaert, Louis: *Expérience Chrétienne et psychologie*: esp. 'La sanctification dépend-elle du psychisme?' (Paris, 1966), pp 133-42.

⁵ Meissner, W. W.: 'The psychology of religious experience', in *Communio*, vol iv, no 1 (Spring 1977), pp 36-59.

As retreat-givers and spiritual directors, as christian educators, as people engaged in formation work and counselling, as members of families and religious communities, we meet a great variety of people. Does their growth in holiness depend on their psychological structure or make-up? It would seem not. We all know men and women whom we sense to be holy, but who sometimes are psychologically wounded in varying degrees. The work of making holy is God's work first and last. 'No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me'.⁶ Here we are face to face with the mysterious workings of God himself in a human being, the work of his own hands. How often with such people do we perceive their loveliness in the eyes of God, their faith and hope and love! How easy to believe concerning others the words of St Paul: 'This is the will of God, your sanctification'.⁷

Now in regard to this work of God, this work of making holy or sanctification, psychological make-up has little enough to say. If holiness means passing from death to life, if it entails the necessity of dying to sin, then the condition of every person is the same.⁸ Holiness seems to consist in the co-operation of the human will with the presence of sanctifying grace and infused virtues, and as such 'does not depend intrinsically on the psychological dispositions of the individual, provided that his freedom is not completely eliminated; in fact, God alone can sanctify souls who do not refuse his fully gratuitous action'.⁹ However, in speaking about this complex reality, it seems necessary to make some distinction between subjective and objective sanctity.¹⁰

To put it more concretely, supposing I am directing retreatants. It seems to be pertinent to ask what are their expectations, and mine as well, in making the Spiritual Exercises; because if their expectations are limited to growth in subjective sanctity, then however laudable that may be, it would seem that some of the necessary dispositions for the directed exercises are lacking. St Ignatius, in the Directory dictated to Fr Victoria, gives clear indications that if certain dispositions are not present, then the director should not give them the full exercises 'especially when he has others to give them to, or other

⁶ Jn 6, 44.

⁷ 1 Thess 4, 3.

⁸ Cf Beirnaert, *op. cit.*, p 136.

⁹ Rulla, L. M. *et al.*: *Psychological Structure and Vocation* (Dublin, 1979), p 148. The authors offer some helpful distinctions which I am using here.

¹⁰ Cf Rulla, L.M.: 'The discernment of spirits and christian anthropology', in *Gregorianum*, vol 59, no 3 (Autumn 1978), p 541.

legitimate occupations'. Dispositions, expectations and criteria for suitability for the directed retreat are closely inter-connected. The dispositions described by Ignatius in this Directory deserve close attention. They concern the person's affective maturity, intellectual ability and potential inner freedom.¹¹ Their crucial importance is emphasized by Fr de Guibert, who writes: 'About this primacy of grace and its union with the most diligent employment of human means, Ignatius wrote a laborious page at the end of the first draft of the Examen. Perhaps nowhere else has he ever expressed his intimate thought on this important subject with such precision and vigour'.¹² This text of St Ignatius is so enlightening that it is worth quoting at length.

Let us suppose two persons, of whom according to the ordinary way of the Lord, one possesses great interior and exterior natural gifts, and the other lacks these gifts. If the Divine Majesty should infuse his graces and spiritual gifts equally in these two persons, and if each of them has equal capacity for receiving these gifts, the one possessing these natural gifts will be a better instrument for the universal and spiritual good of souls than the other who is not provided with them. Therefore, if we reckon every gift at its true worth, we must give first place to the graces which make souls acceptable to their Creator and Lord [the graces *gratum facientes*], and the second place to those that are gratuitous [the graces *gratis datae*], and finally the third place to those which are natural gifts, it is abundantly clear that all our well-being is to be found in the first kind of graces. However, granted that we possess the first kind, it follows that the second and third kinds will be of great service in helping many others. As a result, out of love and reverence for God, we ought to depend entirely on the graces of the first kind; and then to use all the appropriate means at our command to obtain the gifts of the third kind: and this in regard to interior things, in order that we may be better able to draw people to the graces of the first kind, with our Lord helping and working in all of us and in all things, so that in all things his Divine Majesty may be praised and glorified. We see, then, in our consideration of the value and moment of the gifts of the first and third kinds, that we would deceive ourselves by expecting to receive from the hand of our Creator and Lord the graces and spiritual gifts of the first kind, unless we took the appropriate means at our disposal. And if we were unwilling to expend or employ the gifts of the third kind when it was within our power to do so, since to this power is united the divine grace which always moves us and is present in us without leaving us at any time;

¹¹ *Directoria*, MHSI, vol 76 (1955), Doc 4.

¹² *The Jesuits: their spiritual doctrine and practice* (trans. W. Young, Chicago, 1964), p 147.

then in the same way we would deceive ourselves and come to grief, if ever we sought the gifts of the third kind unless we were possessed or enriched by the graces of the first kind. For it is much more calamitous and perilous to possess these gifts of the third kind when they are not accompanied by those of the first, and when we do not profit from those of the first: the reason being that the graces of the first kind are wholly intended to unite us in true love with the Divine Goodness.¹³

Here we have Ignatius the theologian speaking. Behind the contorted language lies a depth of theological reflection and psychological insight which throws much light on our topic. I will confine my attention to what seems most significant.

God is the author of *all* gifts. As theologians we tend to draw neat distinctions between natural and supernatural gifts, and between natural and supernatural ('infused') virtues. In practice, we often speak and act as though the natural virtues (for example prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance), which are rooted in the corporeal-spiritual nature of man (and 'developed by correct and constant practice in accordance with the nature of those powers and their acts') are unimportant when compared to the supernatural infused virtues (faith, hope and charity). Among Christians in general, and perhaps more markedly among religious, an emphasis on what is called the 'supernatural' can easily lead to an implicit belief that the merely natural is not from God, not gift. Not so Ignatius of Loyola. His genius lies in recognizing the essential unity of man, of the close-knit relation of soul and body, of the subtle interplay of grace and nature. Is it not revealing that this is the last point to be reflected on in the Spiritual Exercises in the Contemplation for obtaining love: 'consider *all* blessings and gifts as descending from above. Thus my limited power comes from the supreme and infinite power above and so too, justice, goodness, mercy, etc., descend from above'?¹⁴

Ignatius the theologian never for one moment loses sight of the intrinsic unity that is man as spiritualized body, or more correctly as corporeal person. This unity is such that 'in no way can the actions or states — even the most subtle or the most material — which belong uniquely to the soul or body be separated out'.¹⁵ Ignatius's clarification of gifts and graces can be understood as follows: those of the first kind ('which make souls acceptable to their Creator and

¹³ Translated from MHSI, II p 125. For a more literal version, cf De Guibert, *loc. cit.*, pp 147-48.

¹⁴ Exx 237.

¹⁵ Fransen, Piet: *Intelligent theology*, vol III (London, 1969), p 10.

Lord') are the supernatural infused virtues, faith, hope and charity; those of the second kind, which are 'gratuitous, . . . rarer and communicated less freely by him who is all powerful' and are directed towards the service of others, may be the charisms spoken of by St Paul;¹⁶ those of the third kind, 'the natural gifts . . . sometimes wholly and sometimes partially natural', can be understood as the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Now what is of particular interest to us here is to see how Ignatius is unequivocal in the primacy he gives to the first kind of graces, but equally unambivalent in the necessity of acquiring and using the gifts of the third kind. ('We would deceive ourselves by expecting . . . the graces and spiritual gifts of the first kind, unless we took the appropriate means at our disposal. And if we were unwilling to expend or employ the gifts of the third kind when it was within our power to do so'.) Perhaps painful experience confirms for us the danger of seeking the natural gifts where those of the first kind are lacking.

Returning to the title of this paper, I consider psychological development as related to the third kind of gifts, as one of 'the means which would help us'. I do not see psychological development as directly connected with the first kind of gifts 'which make souls acceptable to their Creator and Lord'. In other words, I see psychological development as related to objective sanctity and apostolic effectiveness, not to subjective holiness. It would seem that psychological development and affective maturity pertain to what Ignatius would consider as dispositions necessary for making the full Exercises.

The directed retreat and psychological development

In approaching the question of psychological development, there is no scarcity of different models offered by personality theorists. Indeed the proliferation of such studies and the great increase of books and courses on psychology and pop psychology may only add to the confusion. Consumerism is not limited to the material market place: spiritual consumerism is widespread, very often only raising false expectations of easy answers, and increasing anxiety in many.

We are specifically interested in reflecting on the dispositions of the person coming to make the Exercises of St Ignatius. In other words,

¹⁶ Cf 1 Cor 12, 8 ff.

we are interested in the dispositions of this person to the action of God's saving grace. We can observe these more carefully by studying not only the *content* but also the *structure* of the personality. An example of the content approach is that of Erik Erikson, who proposes eight stages of ego development; whilst the structural approach can be seen in the logical development stages proposed by Piaget, the moral development stages described by Kohlberg, and the faith development stages of J. W. Fowler. Erikson is interested in the content of a person's thought, namely *what* he thinks about; Kohlberg is more concerned with the structure or *how* he thinks about what is on his mind. Before suggesting an approach that attempts to include both the content and the structure, I would like to take a brief look at Erikson's stages: partly because few other theorists present us with a model which lends itself as easily to the working out of a psychology of grace, and partly because it underlines the developmental approach with which this paper is concerned.

The American Jesuit William Meissner has used Erikson's eight stages of psycho-social development to draw out a parallel pattern of stages leading to growth in what he calls spiritual identity.¹⁷ He notes:

One might suggest that, given identical grace, the ego which had successfully resolved the crises of its psychological development would find greater success in achieving growth in spiritual identity than would the ego which had failed in the successful resolution of one or more of the psycho-social crises.¹⁸

According to Meissner (and our own personal experience of spiritual direction may confirm it), the development of spiritual identity is brought about through the same functions of the person that are operative in psychological development. At each stage of development, the emerging personality is faced with a crucial problem in adjusting himself to the inter-personal and cultural milieu in which he finds himself. The healthy development of the personality depends on the successful resolution of each crisis. If the resolution of a phase fails, there is a defect in personality development which in turn will adversely affect other phases.

¹⁷ Cf Meissner, 'Psychological notes on the Spiritual Exercises', in *Woodstock Letters*, 92 (1963), pp 349-66; and 93 (1964), pp 31-38, 165-91; *Foundations for a psychology of grace* (New Jersey, 1966); 'Prolegomena to a psychology of grace', in *Journal of religion and health*, vol 3, no 3 (April 1964).

¹⁸ Cf Meissner, in *Woodstock Letters* (1964), p 168.

The crisis of trust-mistrust is the first psycho-social crisis the infant must face. This is worked out in the relationship with the mother who feeds and cares for her child. The importance of this interaction cannot be over-estimated. What the child experiences at this stage in his social interaction with the significant people in his life, his learning to accept what is given and to trust the giver: all this will be significant in the successful or unsuccessful resolution of this first crisis. The successful resolution leads to a disposition to trust others, a capacity to receive from others and a sense of basic trust in himself. It should be clear how such dispositions provide a better foundation on which faith and hope can build than the result of an unsuccessful resolution disposing towards mistrust, lack of confidence and so on. It would seem, then, and experience probably teaches us, that faith and hope build more securely on the capacity for basic trust in the personality. And the extension of this orientation to a loving Father and God is made easier. The influence seems to be reciprocal, in the sense that the disposition of trust and confidence in God will produce very positive effects on the psychological development of the personality.

The second psycho-social crisis is that of autonomy versus shame and doubt. Here the young child begins to assert himself in his relationship with others. If this crisis is successfully resolved, the foundation is laid for a mature capacity for self-assertion and self-expression, a capacity to respect the autonomy of others and of co-operating with others. The failure to resolve such a crisis successfully leads to a false autonomy that must lean heavily on the autonomy of others: this tends to be revealed in excessive demands, or the excessive rigidity associated with the fragile autonomy of the compulsive personality. Failure to reach this basic autonomy implies a lack of self-esteem or of self-confidence. Meissner tentatively suggests contrition as the psycho-spiritual complement of this stage; since contrition leads one back to a true sense of self-esteem, and forward to claim full responsibility for one's own actions.

Meissner offers us psycho-spiritual extensions corresponding to Erikson's psycho-social stages: penance and temperance relate to initiative *versus* guilt; fortitude to industry *versus* inferiority; humility to identity *versus* role-diffusion; love of the neighbour to intimacy *versus* isolation; service, zeal and self-sacrifice to generativity *versus* self-absorption; and charity to integrity *versus* despair and self-contempt. What we are proposing, then, is a theory not 'in the sense of a speculative knowledge that is ideal and independent of applica-

tions, but in the scientific sense of a combination of rules and laws organized systematically, that serve as a base for knowledge and which explain a large number of facts'.¹⁹

With the help of such a theory we begin to see that the human person is a composite of the ideal self (the person he would like to be) and the actual self. These two structures of the person are dynamically related by certain qualitative patterns which we may call consistency and inconsistency. For example, when a retreatant comes to his director, it may become apparent after a time that the values attracting him are consistent with the objective and transcendent values of Christ and with the rest of his own personality as well. This is by consistency. On the other hand, it can happen that a retreatant comes with very high ideals, whilst, unknown to himself, he is also driven by underlying needs which cannot be reconciled with the ideals he proclaims. This is inconsistency, especially as revealed in a retreatant, attracted by the ideal of serving others, but unconsciously motivated by the need for others to serve him; or in one who is consciously attracted by the gentleness of Christ, but unconsciously motivated by strong aggressive tendencies.

It seems to me, from my limited experience of giving the Spiritual Exercises and trying to help others to respond to God's grace, that this consistency/inconsistency constitutes the dispositions for being receptive to that grace. These patterns seem to establish themselves largely because the person can be unaware of the existence of any inconsistency, or that the stress or anxiety which he experiences is due to the inconsistency; or because he may not be aware of his own behaviour in his attempts to resolve the inconsistency. It is clearly very difficult, if not impossible in some cases, to cope constructively with the inconsistency.

Since these patterns of consistency or inconsistency make up the psychological pre-dispositions for the reception of grace, then we must be able to evaluate their importance for the spiritual growth of the retreatant. We need to know whether an attribute of the self, for example, a value like poverty or chastity, or a need like aggression or affective dependency, is important both for achieving his ideals and for his self-esteem. This knowledge is crucial, especially in dealing with religious men and women. How often, for example, do we meet a religious who has a positive affect towards aggression but who, consciously or unconsciously, does not consider this 'affection' as

¹⁹ Rulla, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, in the Introduction by Roger Champoux.

instrumental in achieving his ideal: emotionally he is drawn one way, reflectively in another. He will tend to blame himself, accuse himself harshly, perhaps all unconsciously find himself unacceptable to himself, because of what is going on within him without his being aware of it. However, this inconsistency is significant in the person's over-all behaviour only when the unacceptable attraction is constantly at the centre of his attention; which indicates that his 'coping mechanisms' are inadequate.

One further point which is important in spiritual direction is this: if a person's psychological make-up is such that the inconsistencies outweigh the consistencies, there will follow a tendency to subjectify all the values, to see them merely in terms of the needs of the actual self. Even the ideal of following Christ can turn out to be an 'idol': a Christ of one's own making.

Conclusions

To end this paper, I would like to draw a few tentative conclusions, some theoretical, others more practical. First, as Karl Rahner remarks:

There is a large number of anthropologically important sciences outside philosophy important for human self-understanding and hence for theology . . . this uncompromising and to some extent irreducible pluralism of anthropological sciences is of great importance for theology. These sciences, today at any rate, are partners in dialogue with theology and must be accepted as such by it.²⁰

Here I must include psychology. It seems to me that if this dialogue is to be fruitful and relevant to the ministry of the Spiritual Exercises, which is as relevant today as ever it was, then there is need for greater theological understanding of their pedagogy and an unwillingness to substitute piety for sound theology. Jesuits and others engaged in this ministry may not be satisfied with a superficial grasp of contemporary theology. To take one example to illustrate the point: how do we understand faith today? Does our theology of faith help us to grasp why it can no longer be seen as separate from the struggle for justice? Along with a sound theology, or better, perhaps, part of a sound theology, there must go an adequate, though not necessarily professional grasp of the human and behavioural sciences. As Dulles indicates in his masterly treatment of faith in relationship to justice, contemporary theologians are inclined to say with Paul Tillich that

²⁰ Karl Rahner, in *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol 6, p 238.

faith is a free, centred act of the whole personality, having ramifications in all dimensions of our human existence, including the cognitional, the volitional, the emotional.²¹ It is precisely this increased awareness in our time of the essential unity of man that requires of givers of the Exercises a sound theology as well as an adequate grasp of human psychology. Part of such theology will be a Christology of the Exercises, which 'can also form Christians who are nourished by a personal experience of God as Saviour uncontaminated by the false Gods of ideologies and systems and willing to take part in the transformation of organizations, societies and cultures'.²² I hope that this paper may at least indicate the psychological dispositions necessary for faith and hope, and the flowering of the gifts of the spirit.

In my own reflections I have reached a second theoretical conclusion. We need to know Ignatius better. His Spiritual Exercises cannot be adequately understood without a better knowledge of his Constitutions. The Constitutions contain his spirituality in action for an actual group of people. A programme for living out his spirituality is necessary for anyone who has gone through the Exercises, no matter whether they be clerics, religious or layfolk. One aspect of Ignatius's thought stands out in his Constitutions, in the Exercises and in the Directory dictated to Fr Victoria: the importance and reverence he gives to the natural gifts as dispositions for the supernatural. Where there is a serious lack in this regard, a retreatant should be gently put off if there is not much hope of change. On the other hand where a person is not well disposed but is a good prospect he should be helped prior to doing the Exercises.²³

More practical conclusions would lead me to suggest that we should use the directed retreat more selectively and prudently. If it is to be an instrument for renewal in the Church, there is an urgent need for some form of pre-Exercises to 'stir up' the retreatant, to pose questions to make him somehow uneasy (*angustiado en alguna manera*) and to want to know what he should do with himself;²⁴ the whole social dimension of Christianity would need to be opened up and, on the level of psychological development, both adequate counselling where this may be necessary and in our time, perhaps, some understanding of our emotions: this latter on a practical, experiential basis.

²¹ Dulles, A.: 'Faith in relationship to justice', in *The faith that does justice* (ed. J. Haughey, New Jersey, 1977).

²² The 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, Decree 4, 'Our mission today', in *Supplement to The Way* 29/30 (Spring 1977), no 58, p 33.

²³ MHSJ, vol. 76 (1955), *Directoria*, Doc 4, no 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, no 1.