

A STRANGER TO MYSELF

Alienation in the Spiritual Exercises.

'What I do is me: for that I came.'

Gerard Manley Hopkins

What did I come into this world to do?

The honest man, I take it, comes to his spiritual guide with some such question as this. The praxis set out by S. Ignatius under the name of Spiritual Exercises gives the one to whom this question is addressed some indications as to what he should say and do in reply. It is his vocation to support the desire of the man who in asking so radical a question has exposed himself in his weakness to the uncompromising demands that may be made of him.

We were once the weak, generous ones who asked this question and sought someone who would guide us. Now we are the strong knowing ones and others come to us with their pleas. How are we to respond?

This paper tries to tease out some of the implications of choosing to respond to our questioner by inviting him to do the exercises. Its particular focus will be the danger that in the process of doing the exercises the sense of the original question may be lost.

In 1939 Fr. Michael Egan, mathematician, poet and mystic, wrote an article called "The Prayer of Stupidity". It was an article often recommended by spiritual fathers to those who were finding it difficult to persevere in their daily prayer. Many people found comfort in the fact that someone of Fr. Egan's eminent wisdom saw value in sticking with a form of prayer which brought them little warmth and less light. In hands less skilful than Fr. Egan's the doctrine often had a powerfully inhibiting effect. Many people came to accept it as pretty inevitable that they would have to settle for stupidity in their prayer, and that God would reward them for persevering in it.

But recently, in rereading the article, I could not help wondering if there were not a close connection between this terminal state of stupidity and a remark that Fr. Egan attributes to a fellow-Jesuit talking of the way that his generation had been introduced to Ignatian prayer: 'They took from us what our mothers had given us.'

Fr. Egan goes on to justify this weaning from a spirituality which might have been over-dependent on sensible consolation. And he is no doubt perfectly right to do so. But I wonder if in doing so he gives its proper weight to the pain and the anger and the sense of having been cheated that is to be heard in that remark. Is it fair to assume that this man was simply bemoaning the loss of his infantile piety? It seems to me that his bitterness is directed against the charlatans who persuade him to abandon everything he had in return for the gift of God's spirit and who then found that they were able to provide nothing more than a stone. Even in 1939 there were some people who felt obscurely that

there was something wrong with being told that the way of stupidity was the normal way to God.

Let this unknown rebel stand as our alienated Jesuit. He is not the unique member of his species. Another, held in honour in community legend, used to talk of "Ye and ye're society." And with these two is a mass of Jesuits - and for Jesuit read religious - who feel that they have never belonged to the society and who go through life nursing a sense of resentment and disappointment which shows itself in hatred, distrust, illness - and a stupidity that carries over from prayer into life.

If you have experienced none of this in the society, then you may prefer to read no further. If you do you will certainly feel that disloyalty is compounded with blasphemy at hearing the Spiritual Exercises called into question as one of the major causes of this anger and disaffection.

How can such a charge be seriously maintained? We may smile at the innocence of the nun who says: "Father, you have such a wonderful spirituality, I don't know why you're not all saints". But we still think it is carrying things a little too far to blame the spirituality for the systematic deviations from normality and health that we can't help seeing all around us. If we trace these deviations to a sense of alienation how can we make the exercises responsible for them. If we want to use such terminology we can surely say that the exercises are specifically an antidote to alienation. Alienation is a sense of being cut off from you own experience, from your own history, from your own body. It is a feeling that in some way your initial desire has been betrayed. But Maurice Giuliani could write in an early Christus article that Ignatian spirituality was aimed at putting people in touch with their own spiritual experience so that they no longer fight as mercenaries for a reward but as their own men who have seen in their own experience the value of their cause.

I mention the name of Maurice Giuliani with reverence as that of a man to whom I owe not only my first real interest in the exercises but also as one to whom I owe a deep personal debt. But I think it is wrong to say that the renewal in the exercises which owes so much to his work in Christus has led to the elimination of the evils to which I referred.

Since this is a position more often associated with enemies of the Society of Jesus and of Ignatian spirituality let me attempt to justify it and to suggest a remedy that lies not in the abandonment of the exercises but in a reappraisal of those who give them. And lest I be misunderstood the reappraisal concerns not so much their learning in matters Ignatian but the way in which they respond to the desire of the one who seeks them out and who alone puts them in the position of being spiritual guides.

Let us begin with a consideration of the *id quod volo*. Peters can write that:

"Demandar lo que quiero y deseo with slight variations is the backbone of the exercises as far as the exercitant is concerned."

Not the heart, but the backbone. And I wonder at the humour of Ignatius in choosing this way of expressing a set of demands which is for the most part very foreign to what the exercitant wishes and desires. In the pages that follow I will try to explore some of the ways the director can attempt to articulate these demands with the original desire of the exercitant.

First then the references to the id quod volo or its variations in the text of the exercises. They abound.

Usually the exercitant will meet the expression for the first time in the second prelude to the first exercise of the first. It may be helpful to recall the text:

"The Second Prelude; I will ask God our Lord for what I want and desire.

The petition made in this prelude must be according to the subject matter. Thus in a contemplation on the Resurrection I will ask for joy with Christ in joy. In one on the passion I will ask for sorrow, tears and anguish with Christ in anguish.

Here it will be to ask for shame and confusion, because I see how many have been lost on account of a single mortal sin, and how many times I have deserved eternal damnation, because of the many grievous sins that I have committed,"

(Puhl translation, No.48)

In this way, right through the exercises, each period of prayer will be marked, in the second or third prelude, by a demand of this kind. (See no.'s 55,65, 104,139,152.)

But it is not only the strict time of prayer that is marked in this way. A closer reading of the text will confirm Peter's judgment that we are dealing here with the central axis of the exercises.

The Additions are determined by what I desire. I seek to arouse myself to shame, or refrain from thinking of pleasant topics, or undertake various kinds of penance in order to obtain the fruit that I have set before me. (See no.'s 74,78,87,89.)

The Colloquies which are sometimes presented as if they were periods of spontaneous prayer are also ordered to the obtaining of particular goals. The triple colloquy of the first week bids us ask for feelings of abhorrence, and horror; the colloquy of the Kingdom for the grace of imitating Christ abused and poor; that of the Contemplatio tells us to offer ourselves entirely to the Lord. (See no.'s 63,98,234 and cf.147,199,257.)

The Particular Examen included in the text of the Exercises shows how one's whole day can be organised around the elimination of faults which would prevent one from obtaining the desired fruits, and indicates the changes that are required from time to time. (See no.'s 24, 25, 216)

In addition to these particular areas the spirit and the letter of the id quod volo permeates the totality of the exercises. In the Introductory Observations, in the Foundation, in the Election in the Rules for Discernment, for Alms Giving, for Food, in the description of the Methods of Prayer - nowhere does one escape from the imperious demand that one know what one is looking for as one engages oneself on an exercise. And in only one place could I find the id quod volo in a conditional clause: in the note at the end of the Three Kinds of Humility.

"If one desires this kind of humility...."(No.168) There is no room for "ifs" in the other demands. They stand as absolutes.

This is a powerful arsenal with which to face the one who seeks our guidance. It is also a most formidable apparatus into which to venture if your only baggage is an untutored desire. So we return to our question: How can the original desire mesh with this network of uncompromising demands?

One approach is for the director to see himself as a match-maker or a careers guidance officer. This is the approach consecrated by those no-nonsense vocation pamphlets who define the basic requirements for the priesthood or the religious life as good health and adequate intelligence. No doubt there are good marriages that have been arranged without much reference to the desires of either party. And we have all met people who have entered religious life because they were told that that was the will of God for them as seen by their spiritual fathers. Some have been happy. But when will the full story be told of the burden of misery carried by these men and women who have found themselves with a spiritualised version of a mother's vocation launched on a life to which they were not called? Urged into a novitiate, cajoled through formation, persuaded to go through with ordination or final profession, they might have hoped to find in some retreat-giver a man who could hear what they were trying to express of their sense of utter alienation. If they were listened to at all it was usually to be told to forget their scruples and to carry on.

These are not simply stories of the bad old days. It is easy for a retreat-giver to find himself at the service of a religious organization. But what becomes of his responsibility to the person who has put his trust in him if he himself is an instrument of authority?

The second approach is the one the practitioners of the first think they are being asked to adopt. If it were I would applaud their refusal to change. It could be cruelly, and inaccurately, called the Rogerian method. It does not believe in confrontation with the client. Nor does it believe in original sin. And it deals with the thorny problem of the demands that constitute the *id quod volo* by leaving them out of the exercises. Or if this cannot be done by stressing positive feelings and leaving the more negative demands discretely in the background.

Rogerian psychotherapy is one thing in the hands of a trained therapist. In the hands of the amateur it often becomes a device which allows him to avoid committing himself on any issue and which leads to a paralysis of common-sense. Carl Rogers is to spiritual direction what Benjamin Spock is to child-rearing. Can we expect at some future date a public expression of regret at the part that client-centre therapy has played in producing some of the less admirable features of younger religious?

It is hard to see how non-directivity of this kind can avoid making the exercises innocuous. The exercises have a backbone. It can't be ignored.

The third approach is the one adopted by today's master retreat-givers. Its catch-word is discernment. Its adepts have been to school with Ignatius. They know the Directories. They have studied the spiritual masters of the society and are on the way to establishing what constitutes the authentic tradition of Ignatian prayer. As well as this they have entered into dialogue with theologians and scripture scholars and experts in the human sciences. It may well be that there has never been in the history of the society a greater number of men capable of giving the exercises according to the mind of St. Ignatius.

And the men and women who have been lucky enough to find one of these men on their path have found that their own experience and history is attentively considered as a guide to finding the concrete will of God for them. This return

to the sources is a great step forward and has brought a sense of peace and purpose into many lives.

Advocates of this approach deny that that they are limited by the pre-Galilean world-view of Ignatius. They point to their use of psychological techniques and to their willingness to dialogue with the human sciences. But it seems to me that they are, by and large, insensitive to the changes that have been brought about in men's awareness of themselves by the development of the sciences of the spirit. This is not to deny that these new sciences have need of theology and spirituality. They have. But to neglect the vast progress that mankind has made in these areas is to condemn oneself to a ghetto.

Rene D'Ouince tell us of Teilhard de Chardins reaction to the fears that were being expressed in the early 1950's that the worker priests would lose the faith. "The danger is not that they will lose the faith. The danger is that they will find it!"

Vatican II confirmed that the Church had much to learn from the world. But I still seem to detect in many places in the Church those delusions of omnipotence and omniscience that the council tried so hard rectify. And it seems to me that these same delusions are not always absent from the rhetoric that surrounds the renewal of the exercises.

I think it is not unfair to say that our new-style retreat Givers convey the impression that they have in the exercises an unrivalled instrument for resolving the perplexities of those want to know what God's will is for them during their passage though this world. And they would be deeply shocked to discover that there are men who reject the exercises not because they find the price too high in terms of self-sacrifice but because they honestly feel that the exercises are largely beside the point.

It is not simply that the exercises are out of date. This in itself is a serious draw-back. When you are trying to find the concrete will of God in your regard the date is important. Teilhard has taught us this. There are perennial truths in the Malleus Maleficarum. Freud has drawn our attention to them. But what would one say of a contemporary psychoanalyst who claimed that one could not go beyond the doctrine and methods set out in this book and that the advance of his science depended on how well he could assimilate the spirit of Frs. Kramer and Sprenger. Between the Malleus of 1486 and the Exercises of 1540 there is little more than a generation. Is it too much to hope that our retreat-givers will learn to re-read the exercises in the light of the revolutions in psychology as the children of this world have learned to re-read the Malleus?

But as I have said, this is not the central issue. The core of the theoretical and practical objection to the exercises as a means of discovering one's destiny in this world is that there is in existence for some eighty years now a science of human desire and a praxis associated with it. Neither the immature state of psychoanalytic theory nor the polemics that inevitably attend the birth of a new science can excuse us from seeing that it is with Freudian psychoanalysis that Ignatian spirituality must enter into dialogue if it is to save its soul.

Freud and Ignatius. We can find similarities in an appreciation of the complexities of human nature, in the recognition of the need for carefully selected disciples, in the legacy of a praxis which can only be learned at the hands of a master. But it may still seem fanciful to link the orthodox Catholic of the 16th century with the unbelieving Jew of the 20th century. Perhaps

the most convincing proof of the profound compatibility that does exist between the two men is the remarkable number of the contributors to *Christus* who have taken to Freud in their attempt to find a bridge between their Ignatian training and their experience of today's world. Beauchamp, Beirnaert, Courel, de Certeau, Gouvernaire, Julian, Roustang, Sedat, Vasse - I mention only the Jesuits - all have found in this most Ignatian of reviews an appropriate forum. Some of these men are little known in the English-speaking world, others like Courel, Roustang, and de Certeau are well known for their work on the Exercises, the Constitutions and 17th century Jesuit spirituality. I think we have much to learn from them all.

But it is not my intention to make any claim on the basis of who does or does not think that it is worth entering into dialogue with psychoanalysis. It would be only too easy to bring forward men of learning and integrity who would reject such a dialogue as foolhardy and even sinful.

Instead, to bring this paper to a close, I would like to propose to the consideration of retreat-givers some aspects of psychoanalysis which have parallels in the exercises. The central aspect that I would like to propose to your attention is the role of Law in the exercises and in psychoanalysis. This is an obscure area but I think that our understanding of the *id quod volo* is quite incomplete unless we relate it to the notion of Law.

In the exercises it is through the *id quod volo* that the Law is made known to us. It is not conditional because what it expresses are the fundamental demands of the Christian life. You must repent, you must answer the call of Christ, you must carry your cross, you must find your joy in the risen Lord. And this with your whole heart and with your whole soul so that it must involve your imagination and emotions as well as your intellect and will. Thus the content of the *id quod volo* is not an invention of Ignatius. It is basic Christianity. It is Christian belief that is the Law of our human nature fallen and redeemed. The question is how do we bring the desire of the concrete Christian into line with this law of his being?

A somewhat similar problem is faced by the psychoanalyst. He too is essentially concerned with the Law. The individual who comes to him is marked by certain inevitable processes: his entry into the world, his acquisition of language, his position as an object of desire within a family, his construction of a whole world of phantasms and symbols, his repression of large areas of the truth about himself, and so on. He is governed, at a deeper level than he knows, by what he has taken to be the Law in his regard - a Law that has perhaps received its truest expression with reference to what Jacques Lacan has formulated as the Name-of-the-Father.

So that the naive question with which we began: "What did I come into this world to do?" is now seen to be confronted necessarily not by an external set of demands but by the law of his own being. And there is nothing that this apparently sincere questioner wants to know less about than the true reason why he came into this world.

Ignatius recognises this aversion to the truth in the insistence with which he obliges the exercitant to keep the *id quod volo* always before him. Freud began his revolution when he realised that though the truth might be repressed it always found a way of revealing itself. His technique of psychoanalysis is nothing more than the setting up of the conditions for the perfect dialogue within which the truth can be heard when it does speak. The liberating effect of the technique is in the experience that when the truth is recognised it can come to occupy an ever larger place in the existence of the subject, and he

can safely abandon the defenses which kept him a stranger to the truth about himself.

The two approaches are, I think, quite valid. But if you are left with the feeling that Freud may have had something to say in this area you have the work of two pioneers in the field Louis Beirnaert and Denis Vasse, both Jesuits, both psychoanalysts, both disciples of Jacques Lacan, and through him of Freud.

The message of this paper is not that we should all give up and leave it to the analysts. Nor that we should postpone our retreat-giving until we have each done a prolonged analysis. It is rather that we should recognise the truth that in some areas which we considered our own preserve we have been out-flanked, out-thought, out-worked by the secular world. And that these insights which were won by others will not easily become ours. We too will have to work for them.

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