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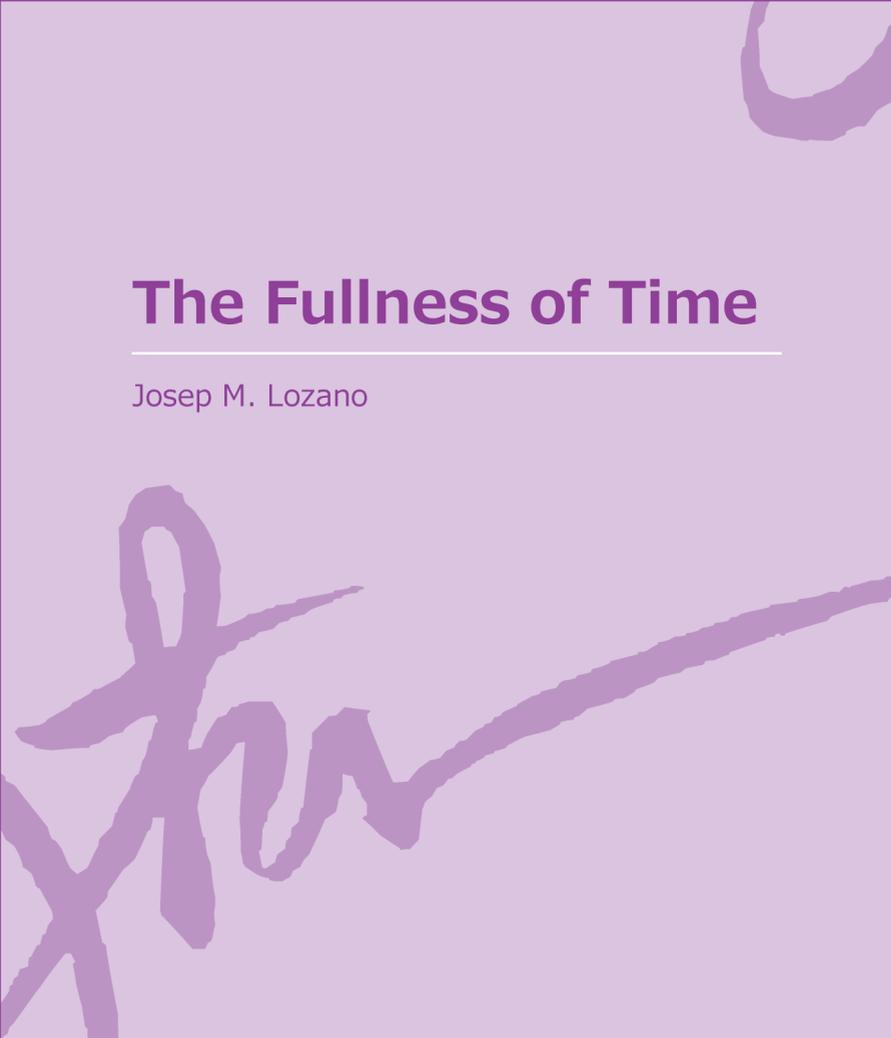
EIDES

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## The Fullness of Time

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# THE FULLNESS OF TIME

Josep M. Lozano

INTRODUCTION .....	5
1. A LITTLE RECREATIONAL SOCIOLOGY .....	8
2. LIVING IN THE PRESENT. WHERE ELSE SHOULD WE LIVE? .....	16
3. THE PRESENT WHICH IS (NOT) LIVED: SOCIAL NETWORKS .....	20
4. AND WHAT ABOUT IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY? .....	25
BY WAY OF CONCLUSION .....	34

*In memory of Josep M. Rovira Belloso,  
who, when he saw me, would always ask me  
when I would return to theology.*

**Josep M. Lozano.** Doctor in Philosophy and Educational Sciences, licensed in Theology, professor at ESADE. He has published more than thirty books and various articles in his academic specialty. Years ago he published as books *Cercar Déu enmig de la Ciutat* (To search for God in the midst of the City) (1990) and *La discreció de l'amor.* (The Discretion of Love) (1992) He has published with Cristianisme i Justícia *Apostolic Discernment in Common* (Guides no.13).

# INTRODUCTION

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The title is not mine, nor are a few other things in these pages that will be noted as we go along. But I am interested in starting here with this initial expression. We find it in St. Paul when he says, “But in the fullness of time, God sent His Son” (Gal 4:4) and “He has allowed us to know the mystery of his will, according to the benevolent design which He Himself had prepared beforehand in order to bring it to fruition in the fullness of time”. (Eph 1:9-10) In order to get right to the point of this essay, could Paul express himself today in those terms? Or if that proposition is too much of an historical leap, can we ourselves understand it? From my point of view, the answer, with some nuances that we will discuss later on, is no.

I pose the question in this way because I consider that the social, cultural and technological changes which have brought us to the point where we are living today prohibit us from speaking or using an expression that presupposes a shared life-experience of that other time. In other words, we no longer live in that totality of personal and collective life circumstances held together by the same temporal, linear or circular frame of reference. It goes without saying that in certain areas of life it remains the same (the seasons, education) but not as a whole. We don't retell it or perceive it the same way, nor do we speak in the same way about the passage of time. Time lived does not move forward as a homogenous whole or something that is repeated in cycles. Instead, it is like Emmental cheese, full of holes. According to the way that we go along and fall into them, we can find ourselves as part of *The Persistence of Memory* (the Dali painting with the pliable watches) or falling into the hands of the Red Queen (the one who told Alice that by running as fast as she could, she would stay in the same place; if she wanted

to move forward she would have to run twice as fast). We can find these discontinuities in the progressive disappearance of many patterns of conduct that until a short time ago formed the basis of shared time: promise, commitment, loyalty. Despite the fact that they have not disappeared entirely from daily valuative and practical language, they have lost their force and shared meaning. They are not the current coinage with which to begin a conversation. Today, words like the ones I mentioned literally seem from another time.

This is not just by chance, nor is it necessarily the result of the choice or intention of people. In very short order changes have been produced in almost all of the institutional frameworks of time, in basic institutions which formed a common structure where each individual found his or her space and time. From approximately a century and a half ago until very recently work was organized based on the clock; the important thing was to clock in and obey a regular schedule. (This was different, for example, from when one worked from sunrise to sundown which meant working many more hours in the summer than in winter even though, apparently, the standard of measurement was the same.) Work has progressively lost rules based on time and space, especially in certain environments. We talk about the flexible work day, teleworking, temporary contracts, work centered on projects, all in addition to the flexibility of schedules which is allowed by the technologies that we use in the present. The same thing happens in school where the many diverse educational innovations that have been recently introduced tend in the same direction. We are no longer thinking about education in terms of gathering people of the same age in the same space at the same time to do the same thing. Education is moving toward a flexibility in the models of learning which, if they have anything in common, are constantly less constricted by a single way of understanding the order of time (and also of space, of course). If we look at the Exercises of St. Ignatius – where we will end up at the end of these reflections – we will see that at the “election”, the dynamic that is the backbone of the whole process, Ignatius adds the qualifier “immutable”, (differentiating it from a person who is looking to reform his or her life). So, the least that we could say is that everyone knows that, *de facto*, today there are no immutable choices in themselves. This qualifier more and more stands out by its absence, especially when one speaks of the importance of the election.

But be careful! I am not suggesting that the various forms of time that I have mentioned have disappeared or that they are condemned to do so. I am saying that now they do not form a common or shared frame of reference and that we are living through a transition to an unknown place in which we cannot assume that the understanding and ordering of time constitute a common container of sorts for the diversity of human actions. We are in a transition that starts from a notable incapacity to think about and organize personal and collective time in function of the future (whatever one calls the future) or in function of some plausible cyclical repetition. Therefore, it is not strange that the fullness of time has changed into

1001 forms of speaking about “living in the present”, as if time and its fullness remained suspended in some variant of the “here and now”. This statement about the present can go from a rhetorical explanation of “experience” (today they tell us that everything we do should be converted into experiences, whether they be trips, classes or going shopping) to the more or less refined or banal acceptance of certain oriental traditions, sometimes diluted according to the taste of the consumer, and passing through the confusion of the present with reality or with the production and sale of emotional volcanoes for one’s free time. And it doesn’t end there.

# 1. A LITTLE RECREATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

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Alasdair MacIntyre has shown us that each culture anoints as points of reference some persons who identify with and personify what is valued in the said culture. They are archetypal figures and not concrete persons nor personified ideas. It isn't even necessary to agree with them. In fact, you can disagree, question them or bemoan the fact that they are points of reference. But even in that case they continue to exist because they are points of reference also in disagreement.

These people offer norms of how to live or of how one should live ideally and about what is of value or not. Either by identifying or contrasting with them, they help to build one's own identity. Afterwards, each one biographically personalizes what they reference. However, what needs to be seen clearly is that these persons are not inclusive of the whole range of diverse social functions. Rather they convert some functions into norms about what one has to be, how to live or about who has to be taken into account in any given epoch.

In the case of Ignatius (not speaking personally about him but about the time that he lived), there were at least three types of such characters : the gentleman (noble), the saint and the pilgrim. They constituted models of what one could be and, taken personally, they ended up being converted into models of what one would like to be or wanted to become. The fact that they were *character types* means that without further explanation everyone knew what was meant and to what ideal one aspired when they used these references. Besides that, they could show up as much in daily conversations as in more solemn and transcendental ones, just like a semantic coin of legal tender which is clearly valued.

## 1.1. Some characters from the past

When I was a child (in the decade of the 1960's up to 1968, a very long time ago) the people that they talked to me about were the priest, the teacher and the doctor. The higher value of these people was based on the fact that they answered a vocation which was concretized in a profession and vice versa. This fusion was decisive in what we are discussing here. When someone responds to a vocation, the fullness of time is given to the work. Among other things, this is because vocation appears when there is an intersection between my capacity and formation, on the one hand, and a need in the world that corresponds with betterment in the quality of human life on the other. Therefore, in a vocation the call and service flow together. Today no one talks about vocation. In the end, to both young people and those who are not so young we insist on the necessity of their asking themselves about what is *my* motivation, *my* mission, *my* dream, *my* project, *my* skill set, *my* passion, *my* talent, *my* capability. The only word that we are finally left with and that is clear to everyone is *my*.

As a consequence, social reality no longer is a personal search for answers but is reduced to being the scenario where what is *mine* is made real. Besides, what sense does it make to speak about vocation if we don't stop repeating that today there will not be a lifetime job nor even a lifetime profession? Today it is not necessary to have a vocation but only to acquire a set of skills which are easier to define than to know how to interiorize them. You have to learn how to manage anxiety based on guilt stemming from the necessity to make the correct decisions about your life and the self-exigency of hitting the bull's eye with the decisions that will determine the course of your life without having a bull's eye at which to aim. Consequently, vocation evaporates in the fog of uncertainty. All you need do is pay attention to the colloquial expressions that parents use in conversations about their children. When it is apparent that they are not convinced, either in their hearts or outwardly, of the option taken by the children, they use the bromide, "Let them do whatever they want as long as they are happy." That is a sentence that is usually said a lot less by parents who are more convinced.

Moving ahead in time, during the period of the Transition in Spain there were at least three types of character: the politician (who might be a representative with a public or organizational office or a party militant), the newspaper reporter and the intellectual. Today the term "militant" designates an extinct species. In any case, for all three the common denominator was politics and its higher moral and epic value. Either you were involved in politics or you explained it or you thought about it (let's remember that the intellectual was acceptable only if the title carried with it the adjective "committed"). These three types stood out precisely because we were dealing with a collective change, personally shared and lived. "For change" was the motto of the fullness of time and everything else was subordinated to it. It was about being a protagonist, explaining and understanding social

change. This is not anything like the way that we speak of change today when the principal verbs which are used to characterize it are “to motivate”, “to provoke”, “to manage” and “to resist” (and one never refers to the social reality but rather to the organizational one). At the emergence of the 15M Movement (May 15, 2011), if we had paid attention to the personality types from the beginning, we would have seen that the motivating force at its root was a challenge to the Transition without having to wait for a description of it by a supposedly know-it-all discussion group. Because what was one of the slogans of 15M? “They don’t represent us. They don’t tell us the truth.” This was precisely the discrediting and radical rejection – the challenge – of the characters of the Transition. Therefore, it should not surprise us that those who try to frighten us and make laments in defense of the Transition are, quite literally, from another era. (This does not deny that one or the other of them is correct, or has good reasons, or that we are not talking about the prior patterns which they model.)

## **1.2. Some present-day characters**

If we continue with this exercise in recreational sociology, we can ask ourselves who are the characters of our time and how they are situated when faced with the fullness of time. I venture a response with four examples (one of whom is a couple): the tourist, the entrepreneur, the couple represented by the sports-person-coach, and the volunteer. What do they have in common concerning the theme of this paper? Well, each one of them is the source and the principal cause of the fullness of time (that is, of their time), with the corollary that it is their own fault if they don’t obtain it. Among other things, this is because there does not exist a consciousness of a shared present time. Rather, there is a constant interconnection of many simultaneous presents. Let’s repeat that. Everyone is seeking the fullness of time, that is, everyone wishes to create their own fullness of time. None of them would understand Paul that someone would bring this fullness to everyone.

### *a) The Tourist*

You only have to listen to some conversations or to the television news to come to the conclusion that the worst thing that we can say about a person or a business is that they have ruined our vacation. Vacations are suggested to us as the fullest possible experience within our reach. I don’t use the word “experience” lightly. The majority of the publicized suggestions for vacations are presented as an offer of experiences. Nevertheless, some experiences often are not more than a bulimic accumulation, not of places to visit or to get to know, but places about which one can say that they have been there. There is no more surprising spectacle than

sitting in a room at any museum and watching the number of persons who spend more time photographing the art works than seeing them. I suppose that it is so they can see at home what they should have seen in person.

The paradigm of all of this is one of the practices that I consider the true icon of our time: the *selfie*. As we know, this is a practice which consists in occupying the foreground with one's own face while in the background one hints at that which they have supposedly gone to visit. (I say supposedly because the *selfie* places you squarely with your back to that you have gone to contemplate. Not to see, but to be seen there.) If a better social and political metaphor occurs to anyone, please tell me. The tourist is the personification of the culture of the "I like" as the only criterion of value. At times I have thought that if a Hegel wanted to write the phenomenology of the spirit of our time the title should be *Phenomenology of the "I like"*.

The tourist is the consumer of our time to the fullest possible extent. Perhaps that explains the growing emphasis on a tourism of wellbeing. This is not a wellbeing based on a personal process but on the reception of a service in which silence and calm are for sale as a luxury within the reach of the privileged few. Of course, Christmas and Holy Week no longer exist as such but as times for vacations. If someone asks you where you have gone for Christmas or for Holy Week, it is understood that they are not asking where you have taken part in the liturgical celebrations. The tourist lives in a transit without memory – unlike the traveler, the explorer and the pilgrim – and so has more photographs than memories. But let's not deceive ourselves. The greatest frustration is when things don't go according to plan because they had been expecting an imaginary fulfillment which they had not received. (Perhaps this should be incorporated into the list of reasons for why they say that September is one of the months with the most divorces.) Definitely, one of the ways that we have to define the tourist would be as the character who expects and requires the fullness of their time lying down, for which they have paid.

### *b) The Entrepreneur*

If there is a word that exists that in the last few years has acquired an emphatically positive connotation, that word is *entrepreneur*. As is often said, an entrepreneur is that because he/she is able to reinvent themselves many times. Reinventing oneself and entrepreneurship among us form the new face of the ideal person. So then, it is worth asking ourselves if some sanctimonious self-justifications by entrepreneurs is not just an attempt to convert a social problem into a personal problem, into a lack of capacity. With a brilliant sociological sleight of hand, we have ceased having unemployed people and gone to having people without entrepreneurial spirit who make no effort at reinventing themselves. Therefore, if

life is going badly, it has to be because I don't have the necessary attitude or competency. In brief, the myth of the entrepreneur who frequently and continually reinvents him/herself is nothing less than the latest avatar of the romantic myth of the genius, sifted by technology and business schools. Romantic! And going back further, one of the most picturesque characterizations that I have read about St. Ignatius was the one that presented him as a man... who reinvented himself (!!!) many times over the course of his life.

With so much excitement about entrepreneurs, sometimes it seems as if someone is dreaming of substituting a society based on class for a society of self-employed people. Because the myth of the entrepreneur transforms the dark side of society; it is now not exploitation but failure. As a counterpoint, success is the name that is given to the fullness of time. It is a view of the world in which the only question is about what threats and opportunities one perceives and, of course, that is all that is found. With a world view reduced to identifying the threats and opportunities that surround us, any sense of responsibility does not come from authority, obligation or community. Instead it comes from one's self as the cause of one's own success. Successes as well as failures are seen as a strictly personal matter. It is a world where the relationships that one establishes are only made in function of whether they are catalogued as a threat or an opportunity. Obviously, concrete entrepreneurs in many cases make decisive contributions to transform and better the life of society, but the entrepreneur as a character is only considered such to the extent that he/she covers up something which is implicit in the term. One always speaks of a successful entrepreneur, of an entrepreneur who is the principal cause of his/her own success, in a world where success is the highest expression of the fullness of time in life.

### *c) A de facto Pair: The Sportsperson-Coach*

At times, not even success is within our reach. Then we are left with only ourselves. From that is born the reference to two characters who function really as one. (The truth is, as I will explain, I have doubts about whether or not to reduce the two to the figure of the coach.)

Nietzsche warned us that health would become a substitute for religion. It should be said now that wellbeing has become a substitute for health., especially if we use as a reference the definition that some time ago was proposed at the XI Congress of Catalan Speaking Doctors and Biologists, i.e., a way of life that is lived with autonomy, solidarity and joy. Obviously, in this movement to wellbeing there are many positive dimensions, like the recovery of awareness of the body and taking care of it. For that reason, it's appropriate to insist again that the identification of characters in sociology (recreational or not) does not seek to criticize or praise them, but only to put forward those figures that help us to under-

stand ourselves and on the basis of which we build our values and identities. Thus, health is also the last bulwark of contemporary fragmentation and atomization. In the face of the incomprehensible complexity of the world, only the obsessive care for our health is within our own reach since nothing else is. The success with our own body is the last frontier of success because we have come to believe that to reach it, we can depend on ourselves alone. It is the only space left to me where I can be reconciled with myself.

With that in mind, recently a tattoo parlor publicized itself with a phrase that seems like a joke but is really one of the most paradigmatic examples of what we are trying to expose: “Personalize your body”. I am told to shape myself according to my own will in the last space available for me to do it. Not only should I discipline my body but this self-imposed discipline is the only one I should accept. It is a curious kind of discipline because it all depends on me, and in turn it is the only one that creates in me a sense of guilt. Sacrifices are only justified if you apply them to yourself. You cannot accept sacrifices that are produced by other people nor should you be willing to sacrifice yourself for them. The self-discipline of the body in the form of sports or diet is, paradoxically, the only sacrifice which generates guilt because gaining success here is the only thing that depends on us since we are competing against ourselves. Concretely, a diet is the Sisyphus experience of our times. The only difference is that these new Sisyphuses feel guilty when the rock rolls back down the hill because they are the ones who have imposed this punishment on themselves. If there is anything that guarantees any diet it is the guilt of not complying with it. In the promise of health as an example of wellbeing, I promise myself and I cause in myself the fullness of time which has its culmination not only if I reach it, but also when it is recognized by the way that others look at me.

If healthy wellbeing reaches its apotheosis in the personal trainer at the gym, its emotional complement is the coach. The background pattern is repeated in this character. The idea here is to optimize emotional resources and personal competence in order to gradually reveal a process tending to create a kind of “I” that is more authentic that unfolds in the development of some skills that permit one to reach one’s objectives. And because each of the characters has their own distinctive vocabulary, in a short time we have become accustomed to words like resiliency, empowerment, multiple or emotional intelligence, and in classes for enneagrams, mindfulness, skill building, etc. The truth is that it is a process that also implies a certain acceptance of one’s own reality, because one can never discount the possibility that when one goes in search of the truth about himself, in the end, sometimes, unfortunately he ends up finding it. But even in that case, he is fixed on the objective of obtaining the maximum benefit out of himself and the objectives that he has set up, cleaning up his projected goals and his interiorized frustrations. Here the fullness of time is based on an optimistic vision of human beings and their potential in which experiences like frustration and sadness, for example, are

seen as bad, though not clinically pathological, and have to be resolved by oneself (as a symptom, for example, today people do not say they are sad but depressed). There also exists a complementary sense of guilt for failing to fulfill the discipline of healthy wellbeing of the body. Illnesses of the organs are considered the result of emotional conflicts; which we have not learned to resolve well, and therefore we are guilty to one degree or another of suffering from them. Certainly, of course, one also has to develop the ability to ask for help, but curiously there is more talk about asking for it than giving it. It should come as no surprise that we go to a series of self-help books. By using this name we have already established a mental category. If we need help, it is better that we shape up by ourselves because if others have to give it to us, then we are fixed up. This is making a business out of conscience without being conscious of the business that we are conducting with it. Thus, in practice, we have gone from the famous verses that proclaim that everything remains to be done and everything is possible to everything depends on you and you will manage to deal with it. Consequently, thanks to these two characters, the fullness of time has mutated to the fullness of the “I”.

Definitely, the three characters mentioned thus far are identified by the fact that each one of them postulates that they are the greatest, the one ultimately responsible and the cause of the fullness of time (that is, of their time). By the same token, they are mainly to blame for their own failures at work, in dieting, in their emotional life and in their use of free time.

#### *d) The Volunteer*

Those people who might think that the above descriptions tend to be disqualifying or pejorative perhaps will be surprised to see that we have added to this list the volunteer, a character we usually see in a positive way with a mixture of praise and admiration. This is even more so if we take into account that, just as the majority of those in the previous groups have a component of self-discipline and find meaning in a kind of asceticism, sacrifice and self-inflicted suffering, the volunteer puts the focus on the suffering of others with which he/she supposedly justifies their own sacrifices. The volunteer responds to a social cause and not necessarily to a social project. At the most he/she has a desire for social change which they channel by concentrating on the cause that they have chosen. Certainly he/she believes that another world is possible. However, in general it is better not to ask them what that world is or how it is possible beyond a general declaration of values with which it is impossible not to agree. On the other hand, he/she is convinced that this other world will be possible to the extent that the cause with which they identify has fully achieved the goals it has proposed. The cause makes sense, has objectives and results. All the rest, as important as it might be, is too complex and difficult to understand and is beyond our reach.

Let's look at this from a different perspective. What do we say today to a young person who has the desire to contribute to a transformational change? We don't say anything about work. This is either because we no longer have vocations but professions (understood as putting one's own skill set at the services of goals that are different from one's own will), or because the work experience of the majority of young people is not that of transformation but rather of submission out of financial necessity. And it is even less likely that we will tell a young person with a desire to change the world that he/she should join a political party. In fact, we would try to dissuade them from doing so because of the risk that it could lead to the adulteration of the ideal or the loss of the desire to fight for it. (That is certainly something that confirms the cultural survival of the Franco regime where politics was something dirty and suspect.) So, what do we say to the young person? That he/she signs up as a volunteer. That is because volunteerism is presented as tangible idealism, the fullness of the cause ... and of the time dedicated to the cause. What do many people who are volunteers spontaneously say? Well, that it fills them up, of course. If you want to live the fullness of time (and of your time) get involved in a cause. In the end, in that same word is hidden the message: *volunteerism*. At the center is my will, what I want while I want it. One day we should explore the social, political and educational journey that has favored the substitution of the word *commitment with volunteering*.

## 2. LIVING IN THE PRESENT. WHERE ELSE SHOULD WE LIVE?

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I have reviewed these reference characters of our time not to judge them, applaud them or condemn them but only to point out that there is a background current according to which the fullness of time is not an object of hope but of effort and of human decisions, both personal and untransferable. The fullness of time does not just arrive out of the blue, but it depends on you and you determine it. It is not for everyone, but for you. Let's go back to the beginning. If St. Paul were to write to us what he wrote to the Galatians and the Ephesians, would we understand him? Would we know what he was talking about?

Let's now examine an expression which for the last several years has appeared symptomatically more and more in much of the advice given to confront daily life: "Live in the present." Sometimes it is proposed as a discovery, a worthy successor to the magic potion of Panoramix, that has crossed from the field of education into spirituality while passing through the areas of work and free time. Live in the present, moment by moment. On occasion this expression is proposed seasoned with a newly discovered point: our mind is always lost in the past (memories, nostalgia, hurts, joys, anxieties, relationships, etc.) or in the future (wishes, desires, hopes, fears, worries, dreams, plans, etc.). Living in the present is the great piece of advice proposed in all of the contemporary introductions to meditation, whether they are selling something of quality or selling smoke. The question that should be asked is why "living in the present" is the money that is given value in the market of language and with which to buy and sell advice, courses, retreats, seminars and similar things. All of us have had to take a crash course in terminol-

ogy and in short order we have had to learn to say curse words like *here-and-now*, *resilience* and *procrastination*. But center stage is taken by *mindfulness*, which is understood as complete attention, moment by moment, without judging. In the end, the thesis and the message are that, if there is fullness of time, it only occurs in the present moment, understood as that which each person is living.

Among the many possible recommendations, let's mention two that go in this direction:

“Let each person examine their thoughts and they will find them occupied with the past or the future. We almost never think about the present, and if we do, it is only to ask for light to guide the future. ... Thus, we will never live since we are always waiting to live and, always disposing ourselves to be happy, it is inevitable that we never will be.”

And the other:

“We worry more about living a lot than about living well. Although everyone has in their hands the ability to live well, no one can make the decision to live a lot. We eat up our lives looking for the means to live. Observe individuals. Observe the whole species. Everyone has their focus set on tomorrow. What bad is there in that, you might ask? A huge evil. One does not live. One proposes to live and living is left for later”

Perhaps today we would say that they are typical citations from a best-selling *coach*, but the first is from Pascal and the second from Seneca. Not to mention St. Augustine who in his *Confessions* maintained that we just live and we are in the present of the past, in the present of the present and the present of the future. But it is not worth continuing along this rough terrain because the question is not if certain propositions are more or less appropriate and are rooted in a certain cultural tradition. What is missing is to identify who connects with the spirit of the times and how he/she does it and changes the propositions into something new, and speaks of them as if they were. Or who takes advantage of them and models them.

## **2.1. A Look at Museums**

Let's continue doing a little recreational sociology. And let's go now to the museums. The monumental success that accompanies the exhibits of Vermeer and Flemish painting never ceases to surprise me. Beyond current fashion, this is the triumph of a kind of painting that only seeks to capture or grasp concrete moments, either chosen or constructed without any grandiosity, the same as those moments which immediately preceded or came after them. Again, as a surprising

confirmation of this, whenever a museum has a good section which is dedicated to impressionism and the artistic ambient surrounding it, that section is the one which draws the largest crowd of visitors. Therefore, going beyond any current fashion, we have to ask ourselves what is it that people look for in these exhibits and with what are they in tune? Among the many different responses to that question, we can venture one that has to do with the fact that impressionism does not paint power (political or religious), nor does it pretend to reproduce reality in any of its aspects, nor does it wish to be the expression of genius nor of the interior or emotional grandeur of sublimity, in any of its forms. Impressionism documents what is happening, the present experience as a result of the relationship between what is perceived and the one who perceives it, the present experience in the present. Culturally and personally, we can say that painting the present emerges before a discussion concerning living in the present. This also explains why the impressionists painted their themes incessantly (Monet – haystacks, the British Parliament building, the cathedral at Rouen, water lilies; Cezanne – the mountain of Sainte-Victoire) because every moment is susceptible to the fullness of time and therefore also the fullness of art. Time is always time lived here and now. So, what is important now is not so much the object as the light and the way you look at it. The painting of Monet has been defined as the ever-changing perception of reality. In this sense, his painting expresses perfectly the paradox of wanting to retain and fix permanently that which, in essence, is fleeting. He himself tells us, “For me, the theme has a secondary importance. I want to represent what is lived between the object and me.” This “between” is nothing less than the flow of time in the present instant, where all of the artistic fullness is produced.

By the same token, it is worth it asking yourself what is the relationship between this “discovery” of living in the present and the spirit of our time. It is a time in which it has already become common to refer to the situation of the world with the acronym VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous). It is a world which is apparently ungovernable and incomprehensible in its complexity. Certainly, it is a place where the characters that we have mentioned above find their ecosystem. Because to live in the present does not mean that there is “one” present that contains everyone, but rather a multitude of presents that interact without anything that binds them together. It should be no wonder that one speaks so much about strategies, goals and plans (and of desires, dreams and projects) and so little about hope because hope stops being plausible in a VUCA world. This does not mean that there might not exist situations which would make hope necessary or desirable. What happens is that its expression acquires a ghostly appearance in the VUCA fog.

In this context, the proclamation of living in the present (especially when this is purely rhetorical, not sustained by any substantial interior experience) is also a defense mechanism and a way to escape from the yearning for the fullness of time, adapted to the epoch in which we live. This would result as being incompre-

hensible to St. Paul because he would understand only with difficulty that it might be possible to speak of the fullness of time without hope. He said that one could hope against hope, but I doubt that hoping without hope would make any sense to him. The necessary complement to all this, let us repeat, is the colloquial and written success of an expression like “self-help” which paradoxically we have already deemed good and adequate. In any case, if it says anything it is the hopeless belief that you cannot expect any help during the trials of your lifetime other than that which you give to yourself. While you are living in the present, of course.

Let’s go back to the impressionists. In 1874 Monet had his first exhibition apart from the official shows. Claude Monet was born in 1840, during a convulsive decade, full of revolutions, in which the Communist Manifesto was published... and in which they began to sell paint tubes that would allow outdoor painting with freedom and without being disturbed. That is, the fact of painting the present and the whole artistic movement resulting from it are tied to the technology that made them possible (although it might be something as humble as placing the colors for painting in threaded glass bottles). There is no evaluative discussion linked to the experiences of every-day life that does correspond to the technological conditions that made them possible.

### 3. THE PRESENT WHICH IS (NOT) LIVED: SOCIAL NETWORKS

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Since we are talking about technology, let's jump ahead in time in the style of that movie that was titled *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Let's go on to ask ourselves how technology affects not just how to paint life, but how to live it. We will do it by taking advantage of the title of a book called (a bit apocalyptic to be sure) *What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains?* Let us put our focus on a component which is concrete and yet sufficiently symbolic: the social networks.

It is necessary to say that, strictly speaking, they are not social. They are private businesses dedicated to determined relational practices and which have gotten us to give them almost complete autonomy, forgetting that they are, above everything else, business products. We say that “the networks” make, say, react, boil – all as if they were entities that had their own life. The most important thing is that they are networks in a very different sense than the normal one. They are in effect nets because they are used for fishing. What is it that they fish? Our data and our attention. The first of these is the great political problem of our time that has not yet been sufficiently taken on as such. The second is one of the most relevant challenges to the structuring of our personal lives because it has a determinative impact on how we are (un)training ourselves to live the fullness of time and on the manner of living the present and situating ourselves in it.

#### 3.1. What do social networks fish?

To analyze the fishing of data would take us away from our focus. Right now, it is only important to highlight one fact: in exchange for a “free” service, they spy on us, on top of which we are happy and grateful that they do it. We are continuously

transferring our data for free so that they can process it. They return it to us in the form of stimuli or suggestions that we ourselves assume, and which frequently do, operate below the level of our consciousness. They decide what things we say, and sometimes directly what it is that we decide. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, in order to situate the election, St. Ignatius says: “I presuppose that in me there are three thoughts, that is, one that is properly mine which arises from my own freedom and desire, and others that come from outside of me, one that comes from the good spirit and the other from the evil one.” (SE 32). He knew nothing about algorithms nor their power at the hour of influencing one’s “own freedom and desire” and even of configuring it. Today algorithms are an essential ingredient of the Ignatian good and bad spirit. In the end, everything can be selectively personalized, from the offers and information which we accept to the discrimination from which we suffer. Our digital fingerprint constitutes our identity. It is not the one with which we self-identify but the one with which they identify us and from which they model, reinforce and encapsulate our supposed identity.

In the world that we are describing, technology allows for intelligence to be separated slowly from conscience, at least in the form that we have known them until now. The subjects or the bearers of both of these things were humans. Now we are transferring more and more of the intelligence and it is an open question whether the same thing can happen to conscience. Politics and ethics arrive late and reluctantly to the debate and they do not know how to begin it. Among other reasons, it is because now we don’t have an integrated vision of the process, nor of the world that we want, nor of a possible or probable one. Even being apocalyptic and saying that the world is continually getting worse or that it is headed toward some kind of disaster is pretentious because that relies on the supposition that we know something about where it will all end.

We have the best way to visualize this in the names of the political parties of recent creation. We have gone from parties whose names contained some proposal or backed a project and model of society (socialists, conservatives, liberals, republicans, social democrats, Christian democrats, etc.) to parties whose names seek to ask for help but don’t tell us anything about what they want or propose (Podemos [We Can], Ciudadanos [Citizens], Unidos para Avanzar [United for Moving Forward], Mas Madrid [More Madrid], En Marche! [In March!], Cinque Stelle [Five Stars], etc.). The insignificant irrelevance of this kind of name corresponds with the growing irrelevance of our vote. Voting was legitimized by the belief that it was one way to have a part in the decisions that affected us globally, as a country or as persons. Today those that make the great decisions which will affect us or define our future have not been voted in by anyone. The areas of investigation into artificial intelligence and biotechnology depend – for better or for worse – on corporations or centers of power which are foreign to any transparency or public accountability. They are the ones who affect and will affect our behavior and ourselves as human beings, including by the unforeseen and unwanted conse-

quences of the decisions which they have taken. So, the political names without identifiable content are suited perfectly to the current tendency toward authoritarian democracies in which there is democratically produced an eclipse of political liberalism.

### 3.2. Fishing for attention

The “networks” not only fish for our data, but also for our attention. They orient it and configure it in the context of a world that overwhelms us with complexity. So, “living in the present” can be very ambiguous and can cover by one expression many things at the same time: a flight from the world of VUCA, a real *carpe diem*, a protection against the unknown, substituting community with contacts (when, strictly speaking, one is only in contact with a keyboard), an induced life. Let us recall again Nietzsche: our writing instruments participate in the formation of our thoughts. This is exactly what happens, to a degree that Nietzsche could hardly imagine.

In order to understand what is in play in this new ecosystem, it is required that we remember that the opposite of a contemplative life is not an active life, but a scattered life. Networks are a symbol and the apotheosis of an era in which the true Hobbesian struggle of everyone against everyone else is the struggle to conquer our attention, although it is episodic and fragmentary. As a consequence, in our time to appeal to the fullness of time becomes ever more incomprehensible. This is caused by the increasing lack in the anthropological infrastructure which is required for it: the quality of our attention. Another possible definition of computers, tablets and mobile devices is that they are technologies of interruption and that they function to serve that purpose. Because not only do they provoke constant interruptions, but their true triumph is in achieving that one of our most constant activities is self-interruption. This is manifested, among other stupid remarks, in the self-deceptive fiction that we call multitasking. Multitasking does not exist. What exists is a constant jumping from one microtask to another, often at so accelerated and successive a pace that we confuse this succession with simultaneity, where the only constant is the dispersion of attention.

We are not sufficiently conscious of how all this models the patterns with which we place ourselves in time, from the logic of networking (which favors an attention span that jumps from one thing to another, incapable of maintaining a linear and successive process to the end), through the difficulty of living with waiting – for whatever – as waiting (without falling into the compulsive reaction of connecting on line), to the submission to the immediate, which frequently is confused with reality (in the end, we don’t need neuroscience in order to conclude that the compulsive use of networks activates mechanisms that are properties of addiction). Perhaps the necessity which is most appropriate for our times is not a diet low in calories but one low in stimulation. If it were not for our trivial and

anachronistic prejudices, it might be good to rebuild in our time the recommendation of so many wise traditions according to which fasting and abstinence is indispensable for personal health of body and soul.

### **3.3. Rebuilding the road to an alert way of looking**

All of this is not an indictment of social networks nor an elegant argument against technology. It is simply taking note that to render any consideration of the fullness of time intelligible takes us back to the previous question: the quality of lived time and the attention given to time. This is because such a reflection and consciousness not only require a mind and heart which are attentive, but also compassion and empathy. Therefore, it seems necessary to me to understand the intimate connection that exists between two parallel expressions, one from Pope Francis and the other from Fr. Adolfo Nicolas. The former has spoken and alerted us about the globalization of indifference and the latter about the globalization of superficiality. What should be added here is that they need and reinforce each other. For whatever the reasons might be, it is clear that this discussion finds me also in harmony with Nietzsche. Let's say that what I am doing is not denigrating technology but remembering what he said: "There are four tasks for which educators are required: looking, speaking, writing and thinking." (I would add to that listening, but right now I am not going to make the change.) Beyond the debate about educational reforms based on technology, the question is where does one learn to conjugate these five verbs in life? The problem is not with technology. The problem is to grow as a person through these five verbs and from that perspective to ask ourselves the questions about the impact of the conditions of today's world. For the last time let's rely on Nietzsche: learning to look is the skill needed to make spirituality possible. Activating and developing the capacity for attentive looking is a prior condition to every openness to the fullness of time (as a linguistic expression and as experience, as if there is any difference between the two). Attentive looking is what allows a transformation, over time, to a way of proceeding that goes beyond a self-centered life (indifference) and a scattered life (superficiality).

But in order to carry out this transformation, we have to undo the path given to us by T. S. Eliot:

"Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

This overview does not consist of offering Jeremiads about technology and social networks. The theme is about how we reestablish, both personally and col-

lectively, the progression information-knowledge-wisdom-living-Life to arrive at the end without stopping at any one of the intermediate points. And we will be able to do this only by responding with lucidity to the conditions of our own time, not railing against them from the nostalgic point of view of “It isn’t known very well that ...”

## 4. AND WHAT ABOUT IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY?

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I hope that I have not been apocalyptic. What I have tried to do is to underscore certain aspects that allow us to be conscious that today we cannot speak of the fullness of time by ignoring the fact that we live in a cultural atmosphere in which predominance is given to the feeling and belief that each person forges the fullness of time according to his/her own present (which is not in the framework of some shared present space). Paradoxically, this is done from within an atmosphere of pressure that converts all of us into smokers (active and passive), addicted to dispersion and distraction.

The organizers of the cycle that has given rise to this *Guides* asked me to explore the ties between my theme and Ignatian spirituality. Let's leave aside the fact that Ignatius would probably be the first person surprised by hearing talk of Ignatian spirituality, because I am interested in questioning why everyone – beginning with myself – usually speak more about the noun (spirituality) than the adjective (spiritual). I think that it makes more sense to talk about “spiritual” X (reading, life, action, conversation, etc.) than about “spirituality” as if this were some kind of entity with its own reality. Turning it into a noun is useful for classes, seminars and conferences (I often say that when life presents challenges, the university responds with departments) and it favors understanding spirituality as the application, always limited and imperfect, of what is thought to be known already from the beginning in a clear and distinct way. Personally, I much prefer the formulation that is found in the subtitle of a previous text in this collection (GUIDES#1) where it refers to *Horizons of Life (Living the Ignatian Way)*, because it deals with exploring ideas for living out the way to God. So, it would be necessary to approach the Ignatian tradition to see how by using it one can build a path to a

recognition and acceptance of the fullness of time. I believe that this path has at least three components that continually give feedback to each other: (1) ordering time according to attentive looking; (2) orienting oneself purposefully in time; and (3) living contemplatively within time.

#### 4.1. Ordering time according to attentive looking

If one were to read the *Spiritual Exercises* all at once (something which it is recommended not be done), one could come to the conclusion that there is an obsessive preoccupation with ordering time. And this ordering is almost always at the service of the attention given to what comes after each of the fragments of time that are established, along with its particular character and goal. It is as if all of the exercises were an interpretation in advance of the Nietzschean perception according to which learning to look is the skill preliminary to spirituality. Not in vain a study that compares the *Exercises* with Buddhist meditation and psychoanalysis is titled *Disciplines of Attention*. The paradox here lies in the fact that this obsession to organize the chronometric succession of time leads to the foundation of a religious order that frees its members from any organizing rules for the distribution of time. It is as if all of these rules in the *Exercises* were nothing more than a method for developing attentive looking and growing in freedom by using that. So, as a result of the various exercises the quality of time is now not defined by the clock but by a look.

It is because what is being dealt with is not spirituality but true life. Let's recall what is said at one of the key moments in the process of the *Exercises*: "... to ask for what I want, which here will be to ask for knowledge of the deceits of the evil leader and help to guard me from them; and also knowledge of the true life that is shown by the true supreme leader, and the grace to imitate him." (SE 139) Leaving to one side the insistence throughout the text on asking for grace and help, what is presupposed is that a change in the patterns which we have interiorized and which structure our way of being in the world cannot be simply the result of our own will. What interests me is that in this learning to look ("becoming aware") what is in play is true life and not simply spirituality. And that the "evil leader" is not opposed to God, but is "the enemy of human nature". The game that is being played consists of coming to live humanly. The condition to achieve that is played in a previous game: learning to look in order to "become aware" of how and with what I am living and where it comes from. Ordering time, then is not establishing an agenda, but rather educating one's look.

Here arises the fundamental importance that Ignatius ascribes to the *examen*, a small word that today only provokes misunderstandings and refers to a practice that I provisionally call "attentive looking". Given that Ignatius knew what was at stake for us, when acting as Superior General of the Society in certain circum-

stances he dispensed someone from prayer, but never from the *examen*. Today this is strictly countercultural because we are faced with a colossal challenge. We have to train our looking in a world where everything and everyone is competing to capture it, where trying to find the point “from where” we look is eclipsed by the point “toward where” we look. Today what is more relevant than ever is the parable of the man born blind, where Jesus asks him what appears to be obvious, “What do you want?” (What else could he want?) But the thing is that what he is dealing with above all is not the result, but to connect to the desire and activate it, “Lord, that I may see”. Our problem today is not blindness as such, but rather because in our heart seeing is not what we desire, nor our prayer, nor our expectation. Just to see in three dimensions: what do I think? what do I feel? what do I do? Ultimately, we want to see what motions disintegrate them or unify them.

Therefore, to live in the Ignatian way is to order time not as if it were an obsessive and normative goal with value in itself, but rather putting in order our looking in time. The challenge to which we are headed is that of the quality of our attention. Because a human life of quality without attentive looking is not possible. This goes beyond a look which is purely instrumental in order to facilitate, for example, better concentration at work or to better surf the avatars of life, and which is often the goal of “spirituality” or “meditation”. Attentive looking is not that which knows from the beginning what will be seen or what it has to see, but rather that which is disposed and works toward the goal that one’s own psychological, social and cultural patterns might not be the corset that chokes off internal knowledge of true life. Because attentive looking is a condition for the possibility of a human life with quality, where compassion, listening and availability have a fundamental presence.

## 4.2. Orienting oneself in time (purposefully)

That being said, we are talking about transforming a look, not turning ourselves into spectators. So, we can say that, in effect, we are dealing with living the present in the present but purposefully. Speaking in the language of Ignatius, we could say that there are two intertwined purposes, one more ordinary and one more structural.

The more ordinary one is symbolized by what Ignatius calls the *preparatory prayer*. “To ask God our Lord for the grace that all of our intentions, actions and works be ordered for the service and praise of His divine majesty” (SE 46). And in the *Exercises* it is necessary to do this at the beginning of each hour of prayer, which means five times a day. That is as if to say that it is a prayer which is possible at any moment of the day whenever we begin any activity. Because this is not just an attempt to be aware of what I am thinking, feeling and doing, as we have outlined in the previous section, but also to order it. This is now not in the sense

of organizing it, but in the sense of orienting it, of not losing the focus of what I desire and what moves me (both!). In a time of speeding up, of being scattered and of supposed multitasking this seems to be more necessary and yet more difficult than ever. Therefore, we are not dealing with living in a fantasy of longing for a time of peace and tranquility which are probably non-existent, but with always actively asking not to lose our focus – and the disposition not to disconnect ourselves from it – as the thread which guides us in the diverse situations, needs and demands of our lives. So then, the preparatory prayer symbolizes that which costs us the most, to convert into a lived habit that which often does not go beyond nostalgia for what we would like to be capable of doing.

I was saying that it is not possible to live in an Ignatian way without interiorizing two intertwined purposes, the one ordinary and the other structural. Because we are dealing with not losing the sense of purpose in our daily fragmentation without confusing it with a fragmentation of purposes. This requires that this way of living the present in the present be connected by a structuring purpose which is what in the *Exercises* is proposed as an election and is the keystone. This obliges us to open up the focus on time.

Because to the extent that an election is a vital structuring orientation, there is no election without a history and memory. This is a history and memory of one's own humanity and of humankind collectively. The election is projecting oneself in time in the context of one's own time, and doing it not as a simple act of will, but as a response to a call which allows you to live and understand what is your place in the world and, in a certain sense, what is your mission. Today we can hear everywhere talk of strategies, reactions, responses, tactics, priorities, objectives, etc., but not about election in the strict sense. That is because a VUCA world makes it difficult to understand the succession of events as a history with meaning. An election happens in the intersection of biography and history. Today we have substituted the biography with a CV. So, we are presented with and we live the flow of events without history or a sense of history. An election is produced at the intersection of memory and personal and social projects. And in the same way that the present is not the same as the current events, an election is not the same as strategies and objectives. For that reason, I have commented that there is a discussion about living the present that can be a self-deception, a defense mechanism and an escape. One's attention is not always focused on the present, moment by moment. But just as there cannot be either memory or hope without biography or history (which are the two dimensions of time that we most often lack at the present time), we confuse memory with memories and hope with projects. And it is only while in this confusion when we are able to limit ourselves to affirming that living the present is reduced to not being trapped or blocked by memories, or not blocked by a future which we do not control.

In a VUCA world the question is not simply that we can choose, but rather above all how we can choose (remembering that VUCA means “volatile, un-

certain, complex and ambiguous”). We have seen that without continuity in time (without history or biography) it is difficult for there to be elections in the Ignatian sense. But paradoxically, at the same time that it seems that a VUCA world makes an election more difficult, it also allows for its basis to be made more explicit. Because from the point of view of what is most proper to the *Exercises* – the growth in humanity in and from the following of Jesus – the election is not based directly on what to do, but rather from where we do it and decide to do it. Knowledge of true life is inseparable from the education not only of one’s looking but also, as a consequence, of one’s desire. The Ignatian writings are filled with binomial expressions such as “desiring and choosing”, “I want and desire” and so on. It is an important shift in perspective. The election is the condensation of a progressive transformation of desire and not the result of an increase in the use of the will, the force of the will or strategic planning. From that comes the crucial importance of discernment which presupposes a sustained attention in time to the movements that emerge by paying attention to what I think, what I feel and what I do.

At times so much is said about discernment as a process oriented to a decision that we forget that this process also presupposes sensitivity. Sensitivity is one of its essential components. Discernment is receptivity and activity, and the tie that binds them together is sensitivity. As a matter of fact, for Ignatius the verb *sentir* (to feel) is privileged, at times going before verbs that are more cognitive, emotional or active. He applies it to how one should live the sense of belonging to the Church; it appears in the Constitutions (Const. 1:62): “because one’s way of speaking may be of help to one’s feeling.” This last seems to be the reference in his letters where so many times he closes with that “always feel His holy will and comply with it entirely”, where feeling is the condition in order to comply with it. We bet so much on sensitivity that the famous “interior knowledge” will not take place whenever we reach an unknown depth, but rather when one’s sensitivity has been affected and transformed. Among other things, here there is no escape. Sensitivity does not take us back to theology or spirituality but to reality and it is from that that Ignatius does not want us to escape. So this is, after all, the Ignatian way of living the present as inseparable from discernment.

But precisely because of that, we are still dealing with the “I” or we run the risk of staying there. Certainly, it is an “I” that becomes less self-centered in function of one’s orientation in the following of Jesus, and becomes transformed to the extent that we interiorize the Pauline invitation to “have the same feelings that Christ had” (Phil 2:5). We can see it in the prayer in SE 167:

“The praise and glory of the Divine Majesty being equal, in order to imitate and to appear more like Christ our Lord, I want and choose poverty with Christ poor over riches, insults with Christ loaded with them over honors, and I desire to be taken for nothing and as crazy for Christ who was first taken as such over being respected as wise or prudent in this world.”

Here he is still speaking in the first person. The “I want”, “I choose” and “I desire” do not stand by themselves but are in function of the “imitate and appear”. For that reason, they are neither an absolute statement nor a narcissistic self-affirmation. Paradoxically, they are a willingness to be available that only arrives at the radical depths of desire to the degree that one arrives at superficiality, that is, to sensitivity, and affects it and transforms it. In that way one forms an orientation in time which in turn is both daily life (decisions and actions) and structuring (election).

Nevertheless, in the *Exercises* there is a very clear distinction between choice of life and reform of life. It seems obvious that we have to distinguish them. But to excessively differentiate them, or even more to separate them, seems to me to be a mistake, especially in the context that I have attempted to describe in my recreational sociology. This is based on two reasons. In the first place, because Ignatius practically associates the choice of life with the alternative choice of marriage and consecrated life, and more so to the extent that he characterizes them as immutable. Both the dichotomy and the immutability presuppose a social and cultural frame of reference, which is at the same time stable and shared, and which today stands out by its absence. By contrast, today the choice of life is played out in a greater diversity of coordinates. Moreover, sometimes it happens that a choice of life is not the Choice of life, but rather is woven into a few choices of life that appear in successive crossroads in which one finds him/herself. In any case, I recognize that this first consideration needs more explanation which I cannot give at present.

The second reason, on the other hand, seems to me to be less debatable and more relevant. I think that the quality and actualization of the choice of life are played out in the themes that Ignatius associates with the reform of life (and it is fair to say also in more than the ones he indicates). To sum up, the choice plays out and becomes real in the answer to two well-defined questions: to what do you dedicate your time and for what do you use your money? It is when faced with the election that basic temptations are made more explicit which, according to Ignatius, appear at the times of making decisions: greed, vain worldly honors and pride (temptations that are perfectly recognizable many times in the characters that I have mentioned above), temptations that are not finished once the choice is made, obviously. But it is just when he is talking about reform of life when Ignatius writes one of the sentences which over time has become a point of reference: “Let every person think that he will take advantage of all spiritual things to the extent that he leaves behind his self-love, desires and interests” [SE 189]. Concerning that sentence, I want to point out three points because it establishes with decisive emphasis the way to orient oneself in time.

- To leave behind one’s self-love, desire and interest appears as the key by which to interpret reform of life, and not an election, as might be expected, and as the tie-in to the third week of the *Exercises*. (By the same token this

phrase and all that is contained in it could also be considered as the key to the transition from the second to the third week.)

- The word “spiritual” is used as an adjective and not as a noun. We can understand here that it qualifies a type of things and differentiates them from other things. But also, all things might be classified as spiritual to the extent that you relate to them by leaving aside your self-love, desire and interest. Indeed, one of the great expressions to which Ignatius returns is “to find God in all things”, not just in all spiritual things. To tie it in with the theme with which I am concerned, just as Ecclesiastes tells us that there is a time for each thing and that each thing has its time, that to which we are invited is to live each one of the times in its particularity when it is given to us. Because to live according to the Ignatian way is not only to live one kind of time, or to give privilege to some or identify ourselves with some, or desire only those of one kind, but rather to live every one, to the extent that they are given to us, from the basic attitude of *letting go*.
- Finally, then, “letting go”. Letting go of one’s self-love, desire and interest does not mean suppressing them, eliminating them, or disdaining them, probably because trying to do that would not be healthy or healing. “Letting go” means not remaining enclosed in that bubble and bursting it so that it won’t be from inside it that we define our daily life and that we should transform with our attention and choices. Once a choice has happened, the reformation of life is not reduced to a simple episode of devotion which is reproduced annually, but something that should be changed into a conversion of life. I repeat, this is because that especially today the quality of a election turns on what Ignatius calls *the reformation of life and state*.

Therefore, to live in the Ignatian way is comprised of a way of living time and a way of situating yourself in it. It is ordering life from the point of view of attentive looking that is not limited to a succession of moments, but incorporates memory that ties them together and hope that sustains them. So, living the Ignatian way is also purposefully orienting yourself in time. It isn’t only attention, but also intention and inspiration, in mutual and constant nourishment. But be careful. What feeds into it is living contemplatively in time. Attention, intention and inspiration sculpt time, but they do it when you learn to live more contemplatively in time. Only then do attention, intention and inspiration begin to ask about the fullness of time and to speak about it.

### **4.3. To live contemplatively in time**

The route and process which is reflected in the *Contemplation for Attaining Love* is the Ignatian way of living contemplatively in time. In this Ignatian perspective, it is necessary for the active *I* (“I make my oblation” [SE 98]; “I desire and

choose” [SE 167] to be changed into a receptive and thankful *I*. Let’s remember the prayer that is in the center (and in the middle) of this contemplation.

“Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, everything I have and possess. You have given it to me; to you Lord, I return it all. Everything is yours. Dispose of it according to your will. Give me your love and grace and I am satisfied with that.” [SE 234]

It is a process/prayer because you cannot say it once and forever, but you progressively grow in the consciousness of what it says. It was expressed with great precision by Benedict XVI to the 35<sup>th</sup> General Congregation: “A prayer that always seems to me to be too elevated, almost to the point that I don’t dare to pray it, and which, nevertheless, we should always repeat.” In this “I don’t dare” we also find the nucleus of a certain inevitable intimate resistance that over time is made softer by contemplation. It is not the prayer of the “I” but of the “take”, where the “I” has definitely stopped being the protagonist. A “take” is not only an offering, but also a recognition that by you will never end up taking the definitive step by yourself.

Because “take” refers to memory, understanding and will. It is consciousness of the past, comprehension of the present and projection toward the future. Past, present and future. In this prayer is expressed the great surrender, the great freeing up. It is stopping the desire to be the master and controlling your own time, your own life. It is an acceptance that we do not have in our own hands the past, present and future. And moreover, not to want to or attempt to do so. The fullness of time is only possible when you no longer want “your” time to be yours, nor do you live in function of it. And only when you have arrived at this point is when you have handed over “all I have and possess”, because time is truly “all I have and possess”. Curiously, Ignatius is as correct as the characters from our epoch, although their responses and their scope are opposed to each other. The great question is how you identify, name and channel this longing to live the fullness of time.

But, for the characters of our time, the Ignatian proposition is not only countercultural but is anticultural. The first reason is obvious. The *Contemplation to Attain Love* is found at the end of the *Exercises*, not at the beginning. It is not a starting point but a destination (and of beginning over again). However, the more fundamental reason is that the Ignatian formula at first reading is scandalous because it seems to be fundamentally and exclusively a loss, really *the* loss. As a matter of fact, if the formula were only that someone takes from you your memory, understanding and will, Ignatius would not have done more than to describe precisely and concisely what consists in what we call today Alzheimer’s. The key to the “take” – and the reconciled and serene acceptance of the surrender of pretending to be the master of one’s own time – is found at the end. It is not in the “take” but in the lived recognition that the love and grace of God are enough.

For that reason, it is not fundamentally a loss, although it has moments of loss and pain. As a matter of fact, in this lived recognition of what it is that is “enough”, there is produced a fusion of Ignatius and Teresa, of “God alone is enough” (Teresa) and “give me your love and grace and that is enough for me”. This fusion shows us that God is gift – gift of His love and grace. And it is from this point that one lives contemplatively in time.

Living contemplatively in time is what gives quality to memory, attention, intention and inspiration. That is, time lived to the fullness of that time. It is because contemplation is not a desire to be outside of time but to convert it into offering and receiving a gift. It is a renunciation of dominating and controlling it. Therefore, living contemplatively in time nourishes:

- The quality of memory: acceptance, reconciliation and gratitude;
- The quality of attention: neither scattering nor self-affirmation but rather transformation of looking and sensitivity;
- The quality of intention: the follow-up which consists in reformulating a desire, fidelity in the election and discernment of decisions;
- The quality of inspiration: that more and more each time “that love that moves me and makes me choose a particular thing might come from above, from the love of God.” [SE 184]

## BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

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This route to the fullness of time lived in an Ignatian way, of course is not exclusively Ignatian. To the extent that it deals with “true life” we find in it – certainly in the Ignatian style – two of the constants that run through the history of humankind. To conclude this *Guides*, we can see them reflected in Dante and in the concentration and extermination camps.

The parts of the *Divine Comedy* of Dante (which can be read in many ways, including as a journey of initiation and therefore of transformation) can explain to us things about how to live time and in time. Curiously, the three parts end with the same word: *stars*. It is as if having a goal on the horizon might be what gives us the push and the energy necessary for us to set out and go beyond the reality in which we live enclosed. We cannot undertake a transformative journey on earth without a star to guide us and draw us on. And so, the *Inferno* ends by saying, “And we went out to contemplate anew the stars”. Because from hell -from all hell- you only get out if someone helps you and accompanies you to see the stars again. And from *Purgatory* one comes out “renewed, pure and ready to rise up to the stars.” Here there is no mention of seeing them anew and reconnecting with a certain goal of life, but of taking another step and being ready to go up to them. But at the end of *Paradise* (and of the *Divine Comedy*) it is not now a step forward in this growing dynamic, but a change of tone:

“Here, at the high point of my fantasy, energy was lacking, but my desire and my will were moved, as in turn a wheel is moved, by the love that moves the Sun and the other stars.”

Here, also, in some way, there is a surrender that includes desire, will and yearning because it culminates with the recognition and the revelation that it is love that moves everything, including the sun and the stars.

The risk of ending here would be falling into the trap of a certain comfortable lyricism, believing that we are talking about a kind of emotional double boiler. For that reason, we should never stop confronting our lyricisms with what happened in the concentration and extermination camps. In all of them of every kind. Everywhere and under whatever regime. Because the camps are also an expression of what humanity is and what it can become. Perhaps today we can go along spouting foolishness as what I myself have proffered about a VUCA world that we are not capable of understanding or of explaining. This is because we have not yet understood or explained the universe of concentration camps, which is not a kind of mistaken deviation, but is structurally within the origin of the world and in the origin of our epoch. The camps are not simply a misguided exception and it is not sufficient to deactivate this confrontation that we still have hanging over us with words like “craziness”, “hellish” or “Dantesque” which are not more than ways of saying that we don’t know what to say. Conrad has already told us that from a voyage to the heart of darkness one can only come back repeating obsessively “the horror, the horror”.

But now is not the moment to carry out this confrontation which is, on the other hand, beyond my scope. What I want to do in this conclusion in order to avoid the temptation to a certain regurgitated lyricism is to remember, with the immense respect necessary, that testimony from the camps tells us that, in the midst of the horror, there were those who also found mysticism, contemplation, happiness, communion, solidarity, love. For that reason, I want to conclude with some words from Joaquin Amat-Piniella, taken from the fictionalized testimony of his passage through Mauthausen:

“Both of them had spoken to him often about their faith in justice, but surely their courage when facing death was not born from this faith but from the interior peace that they had found, the same peace that Emilio was finding now. A peace that is neither passivity nor renunciation but an active moral state, like the state of grace. With this conquest that he has made the four and a half years of camp cannot be sterile, as the war will not be sterile if, scattered throughout the world, there are many other men who conquer also this interior peace. The great peace of the world only can be born on the day that each man feels within himself the small peace in his soul.”

Let us finish, then. The fullness of time happens when, each time in a more unified way, we capture the love that moves the sun and the stars, and that it is indeed love that moves the sun and the stars. And simultaneously, when each time in a more unified way we understand that the great peace of the world can only

be born on the day that each man feels within himself the small peace in his soul. Little by little, this love and this peace are converted into the motor of life itself.

It is from this point from where we should not lose the hope of understanding someday what St. Paul says when he announces the fullness of time.

“**Guides**”, with this verb Ignatius Loyola modestly expresses his great desire to help others. It is under this motto connoting service and simplicity that the Ignatian School of Spirituality (*Escuela Ignaciana de Espiritualidad - EIDES*) offers these series of materials.

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